Joint Archives Board

5 November 2025

Joint Archives Service Budget Monitoring and Budget Setting 2026/27

For Decision

Cabinet Member:
Cllr R Hope, Customer, Culture and Community Engagement
Cllr Andy Martin, Customer, Communications and Culture, BCP Council

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:
J Mair, Director of Legal & Democratic

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Statutory Authority: Local Government Acts 1962 &1972; Public Records Act 1958; Freedom of Information Act 2000; Environmental Information Regulations 2004; Data Protection Act (GDPR) 2018.

Report status: Public Choose an item.

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words) The Joint Archives Service (JAS) has managed its budget prudently during the financial year 2025/26 after making an in-year reduction in spending as agreed at the February 2024 meeting of the Board. The principal costs of providing the service are those relating to maintaining the Dorset History Centre (DHC) building (business rates, energy, service contracts) and salaries. In order to operate the JAS at its current staffing level and to allow it to deliver the hoped-for major capital project an uplift of c. 5% from each council would be required. This is detailed below. The 2026/27 budget proposal is provided in Section 5.

Recommendations: The recommendations are that the Joint Archives Board:

1. Request the budget uplift from each council as detailed in paragraph 5.5 of the report noting the budgetary pressures on the service and the steps it has taken to manage its outgoings.
2. Agree to the JAS deploying the service reserve to match fund the Development Phase of the capital project, assuming the National Lottery Heritage Fund application is successful in March 2026.

Reason for Recommendation: Effective oversight of Joint Archives Service budget via the Joint Archives Board is required under the terms of the *Inter-Authority*

Agreement on Archives, 2022. The recommendation will be placed before the executives of both funding councils.

1. Background

1.1 At the last business meeting of the Joint Archives Board (5 February 2025), the Board agreed an uplift of approximately 3% for the financial year 2025/26. Over the past eleven years, eight budgets have been held at cash standstill. The current JAS budget stands at **£634,874**.

1.2 To maintain the service at its current capacity, an uplift of just under 5% is required. However, when adjusted for inflation using the Retail Prices Index (RPI), the cost of delivering the same service in 2025/26 would equate to **£948,655** — had annual inflationary uplifts been applied consistently over the past 11 years.

1.3 This means the service is operating with a budget that is approximately 33% lower in real terms, demonstrating a significant erosion of funding over time despite the service cost remaining broadly unchanged.

1.4 The budget apportionments for the two councils 2025/26 and 2026/27 are as detailed below:

	Joint Archives Service – budget apportionment				
	Population (ONS estimates 2024)	Percentage split 2026/27	Agreed Contribution 2025/26	Proposed increase 2026/27	**Proposed contribution 2026/27**
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council	407,194	51.11	£325,054	£15,907	**£340,961**
Dorset Council	389,557	48.89%	£309,820	£16,331	**£326,152**
Total	**796,751**	**100%**	**£634,874**	**£32,238**	**£667,113**

2. Value for Money and Service Capacity

2.1 It is difficult to say with precision where the JAS currently stands in terms of value for money relative to other archive services. Many variables operate in terms of above and below the line costs and a reliable set of comparable and reliable statistics does not exist. However, in previous years, the service has consistently demonstrated value for money across the South-West and Hampshire in terms of net expenditure per 1000 population. A full audit of the service's activities and costs undertaken in 2015 by South-West Audit

Partnership acknowledged that the service had worked hard to examine and reduce every area of spend on the one hand and to increase income generation wherever possible on the other (e.g. room hire, car parking, leasing space, online content, added value public services).

2.2 The JAS has worked hard to reduce its costs and has managed through a combination of electricity generation via solar PV panels and a shift to passive strongroom management to reduce its overall energy costs by around 65%. Additional solar arrays were fitted to the roof of DHC in 2022 funded through government renewable energy grants. The 15-year contract with Ancestry to provide digitised material on a pay-per-view basis has expired and a new contract is currently being negotiated. It is anticipated that this will be on more preferential terms to the service than the last one.

2.3 The JAS's staff establishment stands at 12.37 full time equivalent posts. The National Archives' July 2024 Accreditation feedback noted that "*There are recognised challenges, with no slack in the staffing".* The JAS has been operating at a relatively low staffing capacity for some years but has been able to appoint staff to externally funded project posts as well as generate large quantities of volunteer capacity.

2.4 The service is currently employing **2.2 fte project** staff whose work is fully externally funded in one case until July 2026 and the other March 2027. A further **£78,000** in external funding has been secured to work on two Dorset estate collections. This funding has been increased in size from the original donation as it benefitted from Gift Aid made possible by the funds passing through Dorset Archives Trust. Since 2010, the Joint Archives Service has acquired nearly **£1.040 million** in external grant aid to fund cataloguing, conservation and public engagement projects. Other funding applications are under consideration.

2.5 In addition to its revenue contribution, Dorset Council has to date met all capital and improvement costs associated with the DHC. Since 2010 this has amounted to more than **£1.8 million** with a significant recent investment in replacement soffits, fascias, guttering and repository roof. In recent years, the service has received £200,000 investment to create a largely passive repository preservation environment. The JAS benefits from the leasing of space within the DHC building to two other services. This currently contributes £42,000 per annum to the archive service budget. The depreciation cost on the value of the DHC building is in excess of £100,000 per year.

2.6 The JAS seeks to generate as much income as possible from providing 'added value' services to the public. Pricing for these services has been raised in line with inflation and/or Dorset Council expectations (see accompanying report). However, there is a limit to how much these services can yield.

2.7 As noted above, the two principal costs of providing the JAS are property and salary-related. Controllable budgets are minimal – e.g. the training budget for the whole service for the year is £400. It is therefore the case that any reduction in the core budget would necessarily have to result in a review of staffing.

3. Current year financial position

3.1 The current forecast for 2025/26 is for the JAS to have an underspend of circa £10k at year end. Any underspend will be added to the JAS reserve unless it is required by property to cover any overspends on utilities etc. The reasons for the underspend are detailed below.

3.2 The JAS has deleted 0.2 FTE capacity within the post of Community Engagement Officer due to the postholder requesting to reduce their hours. This has resulted in a £9,000 saving which has reduced the budget pressure in 2026/27.

3.3 Premises budgets are now managed via Assets and Regeneration and are not monitored or controlled by the JAS itself. In the event of an overspend a re-charge would be made to the JAS budget.

3.4 Any underspend or overspend at year will be added to, or deducted from, the reserve, as appropriate.

4. Budget Strategies of the Two Funding Councils

4.1 **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council:**

BCP Council continues to face challenging financial circumstances and is currently planning the actions necessary to meet its 2025/26 budget gap, in order to set a balanced budget. A range of savings and efficiencies are being identified to support this process, which will be confirmed in due course in line with normal budget setting timescales.

4.2 **Dorset Council: financial forecast for current year**

At the end of July, the Council is forecasting a £7.705 million overspend, representing 1.8% of the total budget requirement of £417.2 million.
This pressure - largely due to the rising cost of adults' and particularly children's social care placements and packages (£6.4m) and a delay in savings from the Our Future Council (OFC) transformation programme (£5m), partially offset by £3.5m in contingency releases.

5. Budget 2026/27

5.1 The draft budget for 2026/27 has been compiled assuming a pay award of 3.2%; general inflation 3.4% and utilities inflation of 7%. The draft budget is outlined below:

	Archives	Original Budget 2025/26	Draft Budget 2026/27	Movement	Notes
100001	Internal Charges (Expenditure)	£62,858	£50,168	£12,690	Decrease in Internal Charges including Legal Services
100011	Pay Related Costs	£486,110	£500,665	(£14,555)	Increase in Pay Costs
100012	Premises Related Costs	£172,906	£192,300	(£19,394)	Utility & Building Cost Increases
100013	Transport Related Costs	£1,194	£2,000	(£806)	Increase in Transport Costs
100014	Supplies and Services	£26,708	£24,600	£2,108	Reduction in Supplies & Services
100017	Third Party (Contracted Out) Payments	£0	£100	(£100)	Recycling Costs
100022	Reimbursements and Contributions	(£323,928)	(£339,666)	£15,738	Increase in both BCP and DC Contributions
100023	Fees and Charges	(£59,182)	(£42,700)	(£16,482)	Realistic Income Target - lowered
100024	Internal Charges (Income)	(£55,720)	(£58,020)	£2,300	Increase in Internal Income
	Total Net Budget	£310,946	£329,447	(£18,501)	

5.2 In order to maintain the service at its current capacity and avoid a potential staffing review, the two councils would be required to support an uplift of c.5%. The proposal to the Joint Archives Board (JAB) outlined below would represent an increase in contribution for each council:

BCP Council	£15,907
Dorset Council	£16,331

5.3 It is possible for the service to reduce the uplift request on the two councils. This is through the £9,000 staff budget saving referenced in 3.2 but also through anticipated increased income from the JAS's contract with Ancestry.co.uk which expired earlier in 2025. Due to uncertainties surrounding the use of content it has not been possible to sign a new agreement although this situation has very recently changed. The likelihood is that the income level from Ancestry will rise by c. £20,000 per annum so reducing the uplift request on both councils.

5.4 An additional benefit is that Ancestry is offering free Library edition subscriptions to both Dorset and BCP Library Services. This amounts to a c. £20,000 saving on the current cost (£10,000 per library service).

5.5 Following discussion between the two councils, they have agreed to fund the salary-related element of the uplift requirement – this being:

Dorset Council	£7,116
BCP Council	£7,439

5.6 It is the above sums (respectively) that the Board is asked to recommend approval of to both executives.

6. Reserves

6.1 The reserve movements for the prior year and current balances are shown in Appendix 1.

6.2 The general reserve stands at £56k (previously £59k). An underspend at closedown was transferred to the reserve from Archives General totalling £6.8k increasing the reserve to £66k, but an overspend on the Property side of £9.9k had to be removed from the reserve reducing it to £56k. Despite the return of funds to both partner councils as previously agreed, the reserve is higher than the £50k that both councils previously agreed on.

6.2 The reserve is held by DC but is jointly owned by both Dorset Council and BCP Council, with ownership being in accordance with the population percentages set out earlier. The JAB previously agreed to retain £50,000 within its reserve with any additional funds being apportioned and returned to the two funding councils.

6.3 It is requested of the Board that the service reserve be made accessible to match fund the Development Stage of the capital project assuming the NLHF approve the application decision in March 2026. A total of £60,000 match funding is required for this stage of the project, some of which the JAS can raise itself.

6.5 The Donations reserve and Projects are ringfenced for specific purposes.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The JAS works to provide excellent value for money, generates significant income and delivers high quality work and projects. Along with all other council services, the JAS faces an uncertain budgetary future.

7.2 A definitive decision on the service’s budget position for 2026/27 is required. If the application to NLHF is successful then the £5 million capital project will dominate the forthcoming years and staff will be fully committed to delivering it. There are clear opportunities to improve the JAS and DHC through external funding but these are contingent upon having a stable core of professional staff to manage and lead the service. The JAS will continue to strive to provide excellent value for money combined with high quality service for the funding councils, the public and the collections it manages.

Appendix 1
Joint Archives Service Reserves at 31 March 2025

	General	Repairs & Maintenance	Donations	Projects	Total
Balance brought forward 31/03/2024					
Uncommitted	£59,259				£59,259
Committed			£43,498	£37,278	£80,776
Movement in Year					
Revenue Surplus 2024/25	£6,869		£141		
Revenue Deficits 2024/25	-£9,978			-£15,652	
Donations Received					
Reserve Balance	**£56,150**	**£0**	**£43,639**	**£21,626**	**£121,414**
Less Commitments					
Donations (ring-fenced)			-£43,639		
Projects				-£21,626	
Repairs & Maintenance					
Capital Projects					
Uncommitted Reserves	**£56,150**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£56,150**

1. Alternative options considered

There is no alternative model for delivering archive services currently under consideration.

2. Legal considerations

None

3. Financial implications

All activities described in this report are covered by either the JAS revenue budget, reserve or an externally-sourced grant.

4. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

DHC has significantly improved its energy performance through a major project to reduce consumption whilst ensuring the maintenance of high-quality environmental controls. This, combined with the generation of solar energy through PV panels on roof elevations has rendered the building highly energy-efficient.

5. Well-being and health implications

The JAS contributes to wellbeing outcomes for both councils and improving the quality of life for residents of BCP and Dorset Council areas and attracting visitors to the county lie at the heart of its work.

6. 6. Other implications

None

7. 7. Risk implications

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium
Residual Risk: Medium (due to pressure on archive accommodation).

8. 8. Equalities

The JAS has completed a full EQIA. Areas for further consideration include working with younger people and with black and ethnic minority groups and religious minorities. Improved digital provision will also assist in providing greater access to collections for people living at some distance from Dorchester.

9. 9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Joint Archives Service reserves at 31 March 2025

10. 10. Background papers

None

11. Report sign-off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)