

Joint Archives Board

4 February 2026

Budget 2026/27 and Service Development Plan Update Report

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

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words) This report provides an update to the Joint Archives Board following its meeting on 5 November 2025. At that meeting a recommended budget for 2026/27 was endorsed by members. The purpose of this meeting is to confirm that recommendation. In addition, the report will update the Board on service development plan activity since the last meeting. Of key significance was the bid submission to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in November. The outcome of this application will have a major bearing on the future strategic direction taken by the service.

Recommendations: The recommendations are that the Joint Archives Board:

1. Confirms the 2026/27 budget recommendation to the two funding councils from the 5 November meeting of the Joint Archives Board.
2. Notes the service updates within the body of the report and the progress made with particular projects and workstreams.

Reason for Recommendations: 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 recommendations will be placed before the executives of both funding councils.

1. Service Budget 2026/27

- 1.1 The Joint Archives Service budget settlement for 2026/27 was recommended at the last meeting of the Joint Archives Board on 5 November 2025. The table below provides information on the population split and the corresponding apportionment of costs between the two funding councils together with the recommended uplift for 2026/27:

Joint Archives Service – budget apportionment					
	Population (ONS estimates 2024)	Percentage split 2026/27	Agreed Contribution 2025/26	Proposed increase in contribution 2026/27	Proposed total contribution 2026/27
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council	407,194	51.11	£325,054	£7,439	£332,439
Dorset Council	389,557	48.89%	£309,820	£7,116	£316,963
Total	796,751	100%	£634,874	£14,555	£649,402

- 1.2 The additional funding (£14,555) provided by the two councils represents an uplift of 2.29%. To maintain the service at its current capacity however, an uplift of just under 5% is required.
- 1.3 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. 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. The property maintenance element of the budget (repairs and maintenance, rates and energy) is forecast to overspend significantly by the close of the financial year meaning that the service reserve which had been allocated towards Lottery match-funding will be much reduced on what had been anticipated.
- 1.4 In order to maintain the service's current capacity, the budget shortfall for 2026/27 will be met by a small staff salary saving and an anticipated uplift in income from Ancestry.co.uk. due to the signing of a new agreement. The latter has the additional benefit of being able to provide free access to

Ancestry in both Dorset and BCP Council library services representing a combined saving to the authorities of around **£20,000** per annum.

2. Service Development Plan - update

- 2.1 The current Service Development Plan for the JAS is due to expire in 2026. A successor Plan will be written in mid-2026 in advance of the next JAB meeting to ensure that it can be reviewed by staff, stakeholders and partners.

3. Bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund

- 3.1 The JAS has submitted its capital bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for funding to support the enlargement and improvement of Dorset History Centre. The application met the 12 November deadline and the Lottery's London and South Committee will meet to make its decision on 5 March. The outcome will clearly have a major bearing on the JAS's future work plan and commitments. A positive decision will see the service embark on an 18-month development phase project to design the 'delivery' phase of the project which would follow a successful second stage application. The delivery phase would last for around 3 years, completing in mid-2031.
- 3.2 If NLHF declines to fund the project then the JAS will need to review its options in consultation with both councils and evaluate the best course of action to allow it to meet the looming demand for additional physical archive storage accommodation.

4. Ancestry

- 4.1 Discussions with Ancestry.co.uk about the renewal of the agreement with the JAS have advanced well. The service has written out to all of Dorset's parishes (over 300) to seek permission for additional digitisation of relevant records to take place. At the time of writing over 66% had responded positively. It is hoped that other record sets will also be digitised so increasing the volume of content online. It is likely that Ancestry will be on-site at DHC to digitise records later in 2026.
- 4.2 The anticipated increase in income will help the service meet its budget requirements for 2026/27. The project will also provide a meaningfully larger quantity of genealogical material for the worldwide audiences who access it as well as free access to residents of Dorset and BCP council areas via their respective library networks.

5. William Barnes project

- 5.1 Work on the project to catalogue the archive of Dorset dialect poet William Barnes is progressing well. Project archivist Ruth Burton has sorted and ordered the collection in readiness for the catalogue to be created before the project's projected end date of August 2026. In addition, a small reference group of Barnes experts has been formed to assist with the analysis and

description of parts of the collection. DHC is working closely with the William Barnes Society on this project.

6. Sylvia Townsend Warner archive project fundraiser

- 6.1 DHC holds the archive of Sylvia Townsend Warner, a well-known 20th century writer who lived in Dorset with her partner Valentine Ackland. Warner published novels, poetry and was a prolific correspondent. The recent unveiling of a statue of the writer in Dorchester together with her growing literary reputation has prompted the JAS to seek to raise the funds to catalogue the archive – something that would take an archivist around 12 months to achieve. With the active support of Dorset Archives Trust the service intends to try and raise the requisite funds (£48,000) through a combination of crowdsourcing and grant applications.

7. Bournemouth Jewish records

- 7.1 Following the successful transfer of 70 boxes of Hebrew and Reform congregational records to DHC at the end of 2025, DHC is keen to build on its work with Bournemouth's Jewish community. Having taken advice from archive projects successfully delivered in Liverpool and Sheffield the service is keen to expand the scope of collecting where possible to include organisational, business and cultural archives that help to tell the story of the town's Jewish residents. Once a fuller appreciation of the potential archival resource is known, an approach will be made to the Rothschild Hanadiv Foundation for potential funding.

8. Wessex Water

- 8.1 Work on this large archive funded by the company itself approaches the half-way mark with completion at the end of March 2027. It consists of several hundred boxes and over 1000 maps. Records relate not only to Wessex Water but to many associated organisations such as Bournemouth Gas and Water, the Environment Agency and the National Rivers Authority. The records also cast light on other aspects of life – for example the effects of bombing on Weymouth and Portland during WW2 and its effect on the water supply.

9. Collections Weeks 2025

- 9.1 In late November and early December the JAS closed for two weeks in order to undertake its annual collections-focused work. Staff supported by a large body of volunteers worked on a wide range of tasks for which it is normally very difficult to find time during the standard working week. Achievements included the re-housing of over 500 boxes of legal records, the accessioning of a range of new material and the auditing of collections. The full report on the fortnight and its outcomes can be found here:
<https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/dorset-history-centre-blog/2025/12/12/collections-fortnight-2025-what-did-we-do/>

10. New material

10.1 Since the last meeting of the Board, the JAS has received several significant new deposits of material. These include:

- The records of Poole Harbour Commissioners – the more than 50 ‘day books’ recording every ship entering the port dating from 1838.
- An autobiographical manuscript by Bridport apothecary and notable Dr Giles Roberts, 1799 – purchased at auction with support from the Friends of the Nations’ Libraries.
- A collection of over 1000 glass plate negatives deposited post-digitisation by Sherborne Museum (late 19th-early 20th century).

11. Conclusion

11.1 This report concludes the period of the JAS’s 2021-2026 Service Development Plan. The next meeting of the Joint Archives Board will be presented with a new Plan which will scope out the next 5 years of the service’s priority activity. The challenge to provide additional archive accommodation remains. The decision in March on the application to NLHF will heavily influence the service and its trajectory in the coming years.

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

None.

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 Director of Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)