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Final plans for changes at The National Archives

Jeff James

24 September 2009

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Why are we making changes?

- The National Archives has to make 10% savings in running costs to balance our budget for the next three years, because we are not getting an increase in our funding from Treasury. If we do nothing, we will not be able to pay our bills. We need to make the changes this financial year.
- The National Archives faces cost pressures due to:
  - the need to save today's digital information for tomorrow's historians
  - increased energy costs, particularly for the older Q1 building
  - more offsite storage, as the Kew repositories are full.
- The National Archives has taken a strategic approach and identified efficiencies that will put the organisation in a stronger financial position to see it through the challenging economic conditions.
- Most of the savings are 'back-office' – 80% of savings do not impact public services.

Our funding from Treasury has stayed fairly static over the last few years, and is predicted to remain static over the next few years. We can no longer carry forward unused funds from one year to the next.

We are a government-funded body and have an operating budget of about £42 million a year. In addition, we earn around £2 million from our commercial activities, mainly licensing the sale of digitised images. Our budget has been under a number of cost pressures which are increasing.

There is a strong need to ensure the survival of digital records for future history. This is currently costing about £2 million a year.

Additionally we have increasing costs for storage. The Kew site is now full and every year we are having to acquire more offsite storage in the salt mine in Cheshire.

The older of the two buildings at Kew requires a lot of investment to maintain, due to its age.

Because of these pressures we are in danger of exceeding our budget in two years' time. Crucially, as our running costs come closer to our overall budget, we will have less money to spend on capital items – for example, replacing damaged or failing equipment and keeping our IT resources up-to-date.

We cannot run our finances imprudently and we need to achieve a cost saving of 10% of our budget if we are to have sufficient money to meet our running costs and undertake appropriate investments and replacements of obsolete plant and equipment.

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Impact on staff

- We have engaged in detailed consultations with Trade Unions on the impact on staff of the changes.
- The placement process to match staff with the new roles is under way.
- The voluntary redundancy process has started, and will finish by March 2010.
- We anticipate 35 staff taking voluntary redundancy.
- **We made no proposals to reduce the number or status of expert advisers**, however there have been considerable queries about this, due to inaccurate and misleading information being circulated.
- Although the total number of staff in The National Archives is decreasing, the number of senior records expert posts is being increased.

The re-organisation of our teams to reduce management overheads required a process that is known in the civil service as ‘displacement’ and ‘placement’. This is a process by which all those staff in roles that are no longer required are identified, and then placed into new roles in the structure or found roles in the wider civil service.

This process is intended to avoid the need for compulsory redundancy.

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A full and frank consultation

- There were more than 27,500 views of the dedicated web pages, plus well-attended meetings at Kew, at the Institute of Historical Research, and at Oxford University, and meetings with the Royal Historical Society, the Historical Association, and the Society of Genealogists.
- We received 157 letters and emails, directly or via MPs, which contained:
  - 60 objections to reducing opening hours, of which 3 specified a personal impact
  - 33 objections to car park charges
  - 19 in favour of car park charges
  - 23 objections to other proposals
  - 11 non-specific general objections
  - 53 requests for clarification or explanation
  - 8 in favour in general
  - 3 in favour of Monday closure

The e-petition on the Number 10 website had 1,040 signatories by 12 September 2009. This is a similar number to the petition to review policing at the bulldog bash motorcycle rally.

Every email and letter we received up to 12 September was replied to.

We updated our questions and answers web page regularly to reflect the questions we were being asked.

The proposals were discussed at specially convened open meetings at Kew, as well as at our monthly open user forum meetings.

We also met with representatives of user bodies, such as the Society of Genealogists, the Royal Historical Society, and the Friends of The National Archives.

We received a set of counter-proposals on 21 September, which unfortunately would not have enabled us to make the savings we need to make. A detailed response has been sent to the proposer.

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Myths and the facts

× '£1.42m, or 34%, of the savings to come from Operations and Services Directorate, hitting public services disproportionately'	✓ The O&S budget includes all our estates costs. Out of over £4m savings, £900k come from Public Services, and only around £500k of these savings are 'customer facing'
× '12 redundancies in the specialist Advice and Records Knowledge department'	✓ We are losing admin posts in ARK, not specialists. We are increasing the number of specialists by one.
× 'Reduction of record development duties, e.g. cataloguing'	✓ We are freeing up more of our experts to focus on being experts , which includes cataloguing.
× 'The Chief Executive misled the public over the introduction of car parking fees'	✓ We considered parking charges openly in 2006 and dropped it due to consultation. Financial pressures mean that we have reintroduced the plan.
× 'Removing microfilm from reading rooms is pushing people towards priced pay-per-view'	✓ Access to originals will always be free in our reading rooms. And we have recently extended free access to seven pilot hubs across the UK.

During the consultation period some of our proposals were misunderstood, which led to the circulation of inaccurate and misleading information. These slides contain quotes from letters and emails that we have received, along with a response.

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Myths and the facts (continued)

× 'Money saved by closing to the public on Mondays will be used to fund free access to the 1911 census at seven regional centres'	✓ The total cost of the 1911 hubs was £70k in this financial year (which means that it cannot be carried forward). It built so much interest in family history that it made more money than it cost.
× 'The chief executive took a big pay rise of £20k last year'	✓ She was awarded a standard senior civil service pay rise of 3.25%.
× 'The chief executive's salary has risen by 50% since she was appointed 4 years ago'	✓ The chief executive's salary has risen each year according to the senior civil service pay system. Her total base pay rise over this period has been 12.8% or an average of 2.4% per annum.
× 'The National Archives is clearly dead!'	✓ We gave access to more documents on site and online than any other national archive globally last year, and will continue to do so.

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Opening hours

- **We proposed:**
  - to close all on site public services (reading rooms) on Mondays.
- **We received the following suggestions:**
  - extend hours on other days
  - extend document ordering
  - open for six shorter days, or six days with lower staff support levels
  - open on Mondays but without any staff support.
- **As a result of this feedback we modified our plans, and we will:**
  - move to a five-day week
  - open at 9:00 on Wednesday and Saturday as well as our other open days
  - start Document Ordering at 9:00 every day, instead of 9:30
  - extend Document Ordering to 17:00 on Tuesday & Thursday, instead of 16:45
  - extend Saturday document ordering to 16:15, instead of 15:15
  - no longer close for stocktaking in December.

  This means our hours will reduce by 13%, and document ordering hours by 6%

We will still have the most document production hours per week of any comparable institution.

We looked at limited opening on Mondays and Wednesday evenings, but both proved to be too expensive.

It costs significant amounts to staff the reading rooms for six days a week. Our studies show that very few researchers come for the full six days each week. We allow free and almost completely unrestricted use of digital cameras, so many researchers use us intensively for a few days at a time, taking digital images to study elsewhere.

Many overseas researchers use our facilities intensely for short periods, but also use other research facilities at the same time.

Although we know that moving to a five-day week will inconvenience some of our visitors, we believe that this will be preferable to the alternative, which would be to lower service quality across a six-day week. For example, we are not proposing to cut the numbers of documents delivered, or delivery times, or make fewer staff available to answer queries or support research enquiries. We know from working closely with researchers over many years that quality of service needs to be preserved, and that this needs to be given priority over quantity measures.

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Car parking

- **We proposed:**
  - to charge for using the visitors' car park, to recover the running costs.

- **We received the following suggestions and comments:**
  - concessions for regular users
  - further concessions for volunteers
  - ensure that annual ticket-holders can find a space to park.

- **As a result of this feedback we modified our plans, and we will:**
  - introduce car parking charges
  - allocate a limited number of free tickets to regular volunteers on key projects (which will reduce income by £10k)
  - make annual tickets available, charge depending on vehicle emissions (£75, £200, £350)
  - limit the number of day tickets issued to minimise annual ticket holders not finding a space.

Our estimated running cost per year for the visitors car park is £89k.

We estimate our income from the charges will be £88k (reduced due to extra concession to volunteers).

It remains our intention that the charges are linked to recovering the running costs, and we will review the costs and charges annually.

The daily cost to park will be £5.

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Removal of microfilm and microfiche

- **We proposed:**
  - to remove selected film and fiche from open reading room access, where there is an online alternative
  - to return the Birth, Marriage & Death (BMD) index fiche to the General Register Office (GRO).
- **We received the following suggestions and comments:**
  - use vacated space for quiet area or library
  - have film printer in Document Reading Room
  - concern over indexing accuracy of online alternatives.
- **Following this feedback this is what we are going to do:**
  - film and fiche will be removed in phases but continue to be available on demand
  - no fiche/ film removed until our records experts approve digital alternative's quality
  - relocate one film printer to Document Reading Room
  - space will be repurposed later in 2010
  - continue to work with commercial partners to improve indexing accuracy
  - BMD fiche will be returned to GRO.

The General Register Office (GRO) is a separate government department. It is seeking alternative hosts for the BMD fiche.

This proposal is part of a longer-term programme that has been running for several years, to remove microfilm and microfiche from open access where there is a suitable alternative.

We included it in our publicity on changes, as the films concerned are the largest collections to be identified for removal.

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Streamline record copying

- **We proposed:**
  - to launch a new online record copying request service, replacing Digital Express and the estimating service, to make the customer ordering experience easier and more joined-up.
- **We received the following suggestions:**
  - none.
- **Following this feedback this is what we are going to do:**
  - the new system will be launched soon.

The new online system will present the price for copying most records, in real time. Customers will be able to amend their request, and see the difference in price for different types of copying, before paying online. The system will also direct those requests that cannot be fulfilled by record copying, to the search service.

The new system eliminates the current ten-day wait for an estimate to be produced and sent.

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Make expert records advice available when it is really needed

- **We proposed:**
  - to cease the expert records advice service on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, when there is very limited demand, and deploy the expert staff at busier times of the day.
- **We received the following suggestions:**
  - keep expert staff in the Map Room.
- **As a result of this feedback we changed our plans, and we will:**
  - keep the same number of expert staff in the Map Room, maintaining the high quality advice service there for all the hours we are open.

The Research Enquiries Desk in the Open Reading Room will close at 17:00.

Staff will remain available to support reading room services until 19:00.

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Other suggestions we received

In addition, we received other suggestions. These included:

- **Charge for readers tickets**
- **Charge for lockers, cameras, electricity, etc**
- **Charge overseas visitors**
- **Charge for downloading documents at Kew**

These suggestions were not taken up as they are not in keeping with our public duty, are potentially discriminatory, and would generate little revenue.

- **Cut the post of an executive director**
- **Cut the post of a non-executive director**

The only director post added in the last three years has been that of Director of Business Development. The director in question has, with his team, increased revenue by 23% in a recession year. Losing this role would cost The National Archives up to £0.5m per year in lost income.

The non-executives are here to provide improved scrutiny and governance, so we do not believe that the saving of £12k per year would justify the loss of this benefit.

Last year we did reduce the number of non-executive directors from five to four. We believe we have the right number and calibre of non-executives to support us.

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What happens next

- **We will now commence the detailed planning and implementation of the changes:**
  - Monday closures will start on 4 January 2010
  - New opening and document production hours from 5 January 2010
  - Car park charges to be introduced in April 2010
  - Removal of film and fiche will be in phases starting in early 2010
  - New record copying system to go live by the end of 2009.

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Future investment

- Our plans are a difficult, but pragmatic, way to ensure that we can maintain a world-class level of service.
- We will invest savings by further developing catalogue enhancements and digitisation to support research.
- We will ensure the continuity of the public record, by investing in the capture and preservation of government information that is now created digitally.
- These savings will put us in a stronger financial position to see us through the challenging economic conditions.

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