

Minutes

Title: The National Archives User Forum
Date of Meeting: Thursday 20th August 2009, 12:30pm
Location: Talks Room

Attendees Staff
NC: Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive Officer
JJ: Jeff James, Director of Operations and Services (Chair)
OM: Oliver Morley, Director of Customer and Business Development
DP: Dave Priest, Document Co-ordination Manager
PD: Paul Davies, Head of Estates and Facilities
JM: Jackie Marfleet, Head of Advice and Records Knowledge
PWS: Paul Sturm, Quality Manager
JL: James Lawson, Public Services Development (secretary)
JA: Jill Allbrooke, Head of Enquiry Services
CM: Carole MacCormack, Programme Support Officer
II: Ian Ireland, Public Services Development (minutes)
EK: Esi Kpeglo, Human Resources Manager
EM: Emma Markiewicz, Friends and Volunteers Co-ordinator
PP: Paul Polaczek, Reader Adviser
SL: Sarah Leggett, Marketing Campaign Co-ordinator
LP: Louise Penman, Internal Communications Officer
JN: Jess Nelson, Internal Communications Manager

Readers:

Unfortunately the signing in sheet did not get around to all Users present. A count was taken during the meeting and 53 Users were counted.

Sally Neville, Kay Payne, Doreen Heywood, Joyce Hoad, John Court, Janet Macdonald, Ken Maxwell-Jones, P Eismark, Paul Blake, J Hailey, Helen Leiser, William Gordon, Peter Gallagher, John Seaman, James Young, John King, Hugh Compton, Richard Bateson, Barabara Harvey, David List, John Martin, Scott Reeve, Peter Thorsheim, Pat Badger, Ken Otter, A Burdett, R King, Judith Farrington, Gillian Hughes, Betty Thomson, Norma Gunaratne, Mike Winstanley, Tom Tulloch-Marshall, Sammy Tsang, Hazel Dakers, Nick Barratt

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| 1 | Welcome JJ welcomed the group to the meeting. | Action |
| 2 | Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising | |
| 2.1 | DP asked readers for feedback on the document Services figures | |

which are regularly produced for the forum. DP felt that the figures on document productions are generally thought to be useful, but that the statistics on documents held outside of TNA repositories are less so. It was generally agreed that this is the case. It was requested that figures detailing 'real failure rates' in document productions are made available. DP agreed to meet with Tom Gregan (TG) - Head of Document Services, to discuss and investigate this, but pointed out that figures on the average number of wrong productions per day are given in the document production figures. He pointed out that it is difficult to provide accurate stats on the number of documents that are delivered to the wrong locker, as there is not a reliable way to measure this. It was asked why the computer screens in the reading rooms occasionally say the document is ready to view but is not in the locker? DP said this was because the documents are scanned as ready to view when they arrive on the document counter and may take a short time to be placed into the pigeon holes. As we rely on the scanning points to generate statistics, it is not possible to produce figures based on the time the document is actually placed in the locker, but the discrepancy is negligible. It was asked if figures could be produced on overall availability of documents. DP agreed to discuss this with TG.

DP /
TG

- 2.2 It was asked why there is discrepancy in the cost of the Operations and Services directorate between the figures on savings by directorate (provided with the minutes of the last meeting) and the figure given in the presentation at the public meeting of 2nd July. JJ responded that there was recently an increase in the remit of the Directorate for which he is responsible which accounts for the increase in its running cost. The Operations and Services directorate now includes Estates and Collection Care. This is also reflected in a change in name of the directorate from Public Services to Operations and Services.

3 **Update on proposed changes to public services and operations at The National Archives- Jeff James**

- 3.1 JJ ran through a brief presentation detailing our proposals for car parking charges at The National Archives (*see separate document*) This was followed by questions and answers:

- 3.2 Q. How is the cost of operating car parking facilities calculated?
A. These are costs that were previously absorbed within our general operating costs, and have not been specifically brought out or ring fenced in the past. Unfortunately we are no longer in a financial position to do this. The cost includes proportional slices of our overall budget for Security, Maintenance and Repair of the estate, along with the direct costs for the control and administration of the car park. Proposals for charging for car parking are not intended as a revenue stream but to pay for a service which has, up until now, been subsidised by TNA.

- 3.3 Q. I live in Brentford, The National Archives does not seem well served for public transport.
A. We realise that some people have difficulty in coming to Kew and some journeys take longer than others. We are not stopping people from driving here, however as a government department we are expected to follow government guidelines on encouraging a reduction in emissions.
- 3.4 Q. Did The National Archives get the method for calculating parking costs from government guidelines?
A. They are based on our own costs, for example the proportion of the overall cost for CCTV coverage. The cost of providing the car park comes out of our overall operating budget. We can no longer sustain this.
- 3.5 Q. How then, if it is taken out of the operational budget does it cost so much?
A. The reality is that it does cost The National Archives money to provide a car parking facility. If we did not have a car park, we would not incur these costs.
- 3.6 Q. I'm unclear whether these are proposals or decisions. I have written to my MP who has assured me that they are proposals and that final decisions have not been made?
A. (Natalie Ceeney) We have a funding allocation and have to set parameters accordingly. We know that the allocation will not go up for the next 3 years and we therefore have to absorb 3 years worth of inflation. As a result, we have no choice but to make a 10% saving over 3 years in order to continue to operate. The proposals for how these savings are made are still proposals; however we have considered them extremely carefully and believe that they are the right thing to do. Much of the feedback we have received has been opposition to making the savings rather than constructive suggestions for alternatives to the proposals on how they are made.
- 3.7 Q. It seems that a disproportionately high percentage of savings come from public services?
A. This is not true, we have tried everything we can before looking at reductions in public services and the proposed proportion of savings in the public service area is lower than the proportion of savings in most other areas. Unfortunately, the fact that public services are the area where we spend the most money means that a significant amount of the savings comes from this area.
- 3.8 Q. How much is The National Archives spending on digitisation?
A. The National Archives does a little of our own digitisation but most of the digitisation is funded by external companies through Licensed Internet Associateships, whereby commercial organisations pay for digitisation (as well as related indexing,

conservation etc..) and charge users for downloading the records. Overall we profit from digitisation and the profit is invested in public services.

- 3.9 Q. What happens to the £3:50 download fee from DocumentsOnline?
A. DocumentsOnline is the exception to the above whereby TNA pays for digitisation ourselves and charges £3.50 per download directly. The money goes back into further digitisation projects.
- 3.10 Q. Have you taken into account that if there is a change in government, there may be further cuts in public services? Would it be better to wait to see if there are further cuts?
A. Yes we have taken this into account and it's very scary as many of our costs are fixed, such as the cost of the building. That is why we are making these decisions now; so that we can emerge as a stronger organisation. For example if we waited until next year we would not be able to afford a redundancy exercise. We are certain that we will not receive any more than flat cash.
- 3.11 Q. Have you been able to talk to the opposition about what they plan to do?
A. We would not be allowed to discuss with the opposition what their plans would be for public spending in the future.
- 3.12 Q. Why have you not chosen to make a 3% saving each year for three years?
A. (Jeff James) In addition to the reasons stated above, we feel that it would be more detrimental for both users and staff to make a 3% saving each year. Making a 10% saving all at once will put The National Archives in a better position.
- 3.13 Q. Have you considered the potential for commercial gain from the TNA site?
A. We need to look radically at what we do with the Kew site as it is currently costing us a great deal of money, and will cost a great deal more in the future for us to ensure that the building conforms to new standards on CO₂ emissions. Oliver Morley (Director of Customer and Business Development) is currently leading on a project called TNA 2020 to look at the future of the site, how much it would cost to ensure that we conform to the standards, and what the alternative options may be, including potential income generation from the site.
- 3.14 Q. Can you explain why you withdrew your planning application to Richmond Council for new cooling towers?
A. (Paul Davies) Yes, we planned to spend £3m on replacements for the current cooling towers which would have a life of approximately 20 – 25 years. My professional advice, sought by the management board, was that the purchase of the new towers could

be deferred and we could undertake remedial action while alternatives are considered as part of the TNA 2020 project. The target for reduction of CO2 emissions is 2020, so there is time to resort to the original plan of replacing the cooling towers if necessary.

3.15 Q. Any competent organisation would have a contingency plan for such a cost saving exercise; can you tell us what yours is and when the deadline for proposing alternatives is?

A. (Natalie Ceeney) We are open to alternatives and willing to listen. What we have done is look at options and put forward what we consider to be the proposal that allows us to continue to function most effectively and in line with our strategic objectives. (JJ) We will be coming back at the September User Forum (24 September) with our detailed plans, these will be implemented from January 2010.

3.16 Q. What are the benefits of having school children coming into The National Archives?

A. (Jeff James) We have an excellent and award winning education service which is linked to the national curriculum and which we feel delivers much value in bringing history to life for school children. We decided not to make direct cuts in this area, although some money has been saved, for example in the management of vacant posts in the department.

3.17 Q. How much money would you save from closing on a Monday, and where would the savings come from?

A. (Jeff James) Closing on a Monday would save approximately £0.5 Million, mainly through staff savings of approximately 10% in each of the public facing departments (Advice and Records Knowledge, Document Services and Security).

3.18 Q. Do you feel it is fair that that the lowest charge for car parking is £5 for a whole day?

A. We had to make sure that the proposed charging scheme would be easy to administer. A more complicated scheme would result in further administrative costs, which would have to be reflected in the charges. Most people who use the car park use it for large portions of the day.

3.19 Q. Why have you decided to remove the librarians?

A. We have not removed the librarians; we have integrated them into other enquiries points around the reading room. If a member of staff cannot help a user we have librarians on call that can come up and offer their specialist advice. This was discussed at a number of User Forums last year and we have made it clear that we do not intend to go back on this decision.

3.20 Q. As you propose to close on Mondays, have you considered extending the opening hours and document ordering times on other

days?

A. Yes, this has been suggested as a response to the proposals and has been considered. A decision has not been made regarding extending opening or document ordering hours yet, but this will form part of the detailed plans to be announced at the forum on 24 September. It is worth noting that there are a number of other activities undertaken by Document Services staff during the period when document ordering is closed. It is not intended that the savings will effect document production (delivery) times.

3.21 Q. You have stated that one of your strategic objectives is to drive the shift to online, yet at the same time you say you intend to invest more staff time in to cataloguing?

A. Yes, most cataloguing activity feeds in to the online catalogue, so there is no contradiction here.

3.22 Q. How can there be an increase in cataloguing activity when you are reducing the number of staff.

A. The reduction in staff is lower than the reduction in opening hours, so staff will have more time for cataloguing.

3.23 Q. Have you considered regular users with regard to the car parking charges?

A. Yes, we have calculated that approximately 19% of our users visit frequently enough to benefit from the proposed season ticket.

3.24 Q. Can you raise income from other areas in addition to the money you get from the government?

A. Yes, we already do this and intend to get better at it. Oliver Morley who was recently recruited as Director of Customer and Business Development has overall responsibility for this area. The majority of income that we generate will be redirected into public services.

3.25 Q. What are the details of the proposed changes to staffing?

A. Unfortunately there is a limit to what we are allowed to say about this as we are consulting with the Trade Unions. We are currently in the process of placing those staff who were displaced.

3.26 Q. How do the trade unions feel about the situation? Are they happy?

A. The unions are, as a principal, opposed to redundancies, (even if as we hope, these are voluntary redundancies), so they are unlikely to be happy. However, there has been a series of constructive meetings between management and the unions.

3.27 Q. I have heard that you intend to remove the GRO indexes in order to save money, is this true?

A. Yes we do intend to remove the GRO indexes and it will save a small amount of money as a result of a reduction in the required

maintenance of microfiche viewing and printing equipment. However the main reason for this is that they are not our records and it is not our obligation to provide access to them.

3.28 Q. Will TNA have to pay for the retrospective amending of the search fields for WO 363 and WO 364 (First World War soldiers service records)?

A. Yes TNA will have to pay a modest and reasonable fee for this work, which will consist of adding regiment details to the metadata and fixing the issue of the 'landing page', so that the first page displayed is the first page of the record. However we feel that the cost is worth it in terms of the benefit to our users. It is not intended that next of kin metadata is added.

4 Any other business

4.1 It was requested that the following clarification is supplied with regard to item 4 from the minutes of the last meeting: Unveiling of plaque to commemorate Prisoner of War camp.

"In 1929, the government built a large, rambling, one storey building where the Ministry of Labour kept unemployment and pension records.

With the advent of World War II, the documents were moved and the building was occupied by American troops preparing maps for the Normandy landings. They were succeeded by Italian Prisoners of War who helped to clear London's bomb sites while awaiting repatriation and they were briefly followed by German Prisoners of War.

Celebrations will commence with the unveiling of a plaque at 5:45, followed illustrated talk by local historians Christopher May and David Blomfield. You are then invited to join us for a reception and a chance to talk to the speakers. Copies of their book *Kew at War* will be on sale at the reception."

Please note that if you are interested in attending, you need to contact Emma Markiewicz, Friends Manager (email: e.markiewicz@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

4.2 It was requested that a response is provided by TNA to an article printed in Aviation News magazine regarding Data Protection. JL to investigate and report back at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be on Thursday the 24th September in the Talks Room- All are welcome