

## Minutes

Title: The National Archives User Forum  
Date of Meeting: Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009, 12:30pm  
Location: Talks Room

Attendees: Staff  
NC: Natalie Ceeney, Chief Executive  
JJ: Jeff James, Director of Operations and Services  
OM: Oliver Morley, Director of Customer and Business Development  
TG: Tom Gregan, Head of Document Services  
LO: Lee Oliver, Head of Public Services Development  
PD: Paul Davies, Head of Estates and Facilities  
DP: Dave Priest, Production Co-Ordination Manager  
PS: Paul Sturm, Quality Manager  
EK: Esi Kpeglo, HR Manager - Business Change  
CM: Carole MacCormack, Program Support Officer  
JL: James Lawson, Customer Intelligence Manager (secretary)  
II: Ian Ireland, Customer Intelligence Support (minutes)

Readers: John Court, Hazel Dakers, Nick Barratt, Susan Moore, Hazel Farran, Michael Armstrong, Jennifer Ward, Bob Rogers, Jeff Birch, Cliff Banatton, Andy Nicholson, Jill Liddington, Bob Whitreld, Clive Cheeseman, Ian Hay - Campbell, Bob O'Hara, John Seaman, Gilliam Keech, JJ Halley, Richard Bateson, Barbara Harvey, Hugh Compton, John King, June Bennett, Judith Mitchell, R Wilcock, Joyce Hoad, Doreen Heywood, P Eismark, Roger Lewry, D List, Bruce Dennis, Else Churchill, Janet Macdonald, Ken Maxwell – Jones, Peter Gallagher, A Mears, Austin H Butler, Scott Reeve, John Gallehawk, Celia Heritage, John Townsend, John Martin, Maria Phillips

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		Action
1	<b>Welcome</b> JJ welcomed the group to the meeting.	
2	<b>Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising</b> This item was postponed in order to make time for item 3, however a number of amendments to the previous meeting were suggested by a user outside of the meeting:	
2.1	3.8: Addition: It was requested that the figures are provided for how much The National Archives spend on digitisation. <i>We spent approximately £250K on digitisation last financial year.</i>	
2.2	3.17: Should read <i>Closing on a Monday would save approximately</i>	

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*£460K. Public Services staff would still be required to operate the switchboard function of the Contact Centre (but not the records advice function) and the Welcome Desk (which would be staffed by Security).*

- 2.3 3.27: *Should read Yes we do intend to remove the microfiche GRO indexes and it will save a small amount of money (approximately £15 – £20K) as a result of the 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. Responsibility for this lies with the General Register Office. Fiche sets of BMD indexes are available at Greater Manchester County Record Office, Birmingham Central Library, Bridgend Reference and Information Library, Plymouth Central Library and City of Westminster Archives Centre. Additionally we understand that the General Register Office are seeking to identify another central London for the fiche which we will be returning. Further details and updates can be found at: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/Familyhistoryandresearch/DG\\_175464](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/Familyhistoryandresearch/DG_175464)*

- 2.4 Question omitted from the minutes: *Q: Are you worried about potential problems with swine flu expected in the autumn, needing perhaps to close down the building as has happened in the past due to deficiencies in the air conditioning system? A: No*  
Post meeting note: The National Archives formed a Pandemic Flu Planning Team in April 2009 with members drawn from the Major Incident Team (MIT). The team formulated an immediate response plan followed by a more detailed Flu Pandemic Action Plan. The plan details escalation and response measures to maintain TNA priority services in a number of scenarios, but based mainly on increasing levels of staff absence.  
This team has continued to monitor the developing situation and respond to government issued advice and guidance. Regular staff updates have been issued and the incidence of the virus amongst staff has been tracked by Human Resources staff. To date the numbers of staff affected remains very low.  
The immediate response plan includes measures such as the government publicity posters displayed in a number of areas within the Kew building. A supply of hand sanitising gel dispensers have also been procured and are held on site to be deployed when required. An additional cleaning regime for hard surfaces, particular in toilet and kitchen areas has been implemented and can be scaled up if required. Further information and guidance can be found at: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG\\_177814](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177814) and: <https://www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/>

- 3 Final plans for changes to The National Archives' operations and public services**  
**JJ gave a presentation (see separate document)**

3.1 Q. In the presentation JJ said that The National Archives will be making a saving of 10% per year, did he mean to say this?

A. (JJ) Apologies, to clarify, the 10% saving is recurrent rather than cumulative.

3.2 Q. I represent a group of concerned stakeholders and would like to applaud The National Archives for the work it has done until now. However I am concerned about the direction you are going in, particularly with regard to the emphasis on Information Management which seems to take us away from what I consider to be the core function of The National Archives: to provide expert advice on the records. In particular I am concerned that a number of the changes to be made to your public services will have a negative impact on the research and academic communities. For example you will be reducing opening hours and the number of public service staff. The rationale behind this is that the current economic climate along with challenges such as rising energy, staff, digitisation and storage costs require these cuts to be made in order for you to continue functioning. However, in recent years there has been an increase in staff salaries of £40K and upwards. This seems to imply that the priorities of The National Archives are moving away from providing records expertise.

A. (NC) The remit of The National Archives has increased greatly since the days of the Public Records Office. Since 2003, we have grown to include the responsibilities of the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) and the Office for Public Sector Information (OPSI). This has given us a great deal more influence, enabling us to guarantee the survival of today's information for tomorrow's history by having a strong influence over information from its point of creation onwards.

I believe that an archive is as much about the present and the future as it is about the past, because if we don't think about today's and tomorrow's information, we won't have records for tomorrow, which could create a black hole in history. The mergers we have done have allowed us to have far more influence over this, rather than only really having an influence once records are transferred to us (generally 30 years after creation) as was the case previously. We are now able to ensure that significant historical records are preserved, keeping abreast of changes in information technology and culture which has become increasingly important in today's fast moving and increasingly digital world.

We have no regrets about this and we can't go back; if we tried to go back to just being the PRO we would be financially far worse off, as we received the full funding required when merging with the HMC and OPSI and, because there are always duplications

between organisations, we made back office efficiencies as a result of the mergers, which means a higher proportion of our income goes directly to service delivery.

It is a myth that there has been an increase in senior staff in recent years (in fact the number of people on the management board has reduced significantly since I was appointed in 2005). It is true that I have changed the composition of the Board, which I have done not by creating new posts, but by making the structure clearer, and changing the relative importance of different roles. For example, when I joined there was a director for 'Finance and Human Resources', which has now been split into 2 separate directorates as HR and Finance are completely different functions, requiring quite different skills. However there were always 2 senior members of staff responsible for the 2 different functions – what I have done is make the Head of HR a more senior role, sitting on the Board, to emphasise the importance we give to good people management. The only new senior post that I have created is Director of Customer and Business Development (Oliver Morley), which in itself is an upgrade to an existing post. A key part of this post is to oversee our commercial activity and ensure that we meet our new income targets. This post will more than pay for itself.

3.3 Q. Why did it take three years of flat budgets for The National Archives to realise cuts needed to be made? Why did you go on appointing Directors at the expense of valuable archival staff?

A. (NC) Every year, because of inflationary rises, and new demands, our costs go up. We have been operating up until now under a spending agreement from Treasury which was flat, but which we could live within as we were, at the time, allowed to carry money forward from one year to another. We are now nearing the end of that three year agreement, which we've lived within. However, the challenge is not today's funding, but what we can see coming in the next few years. With no funding rises due, that means we need to absorb our own inflation, which means, in real terms, making savings.

We have not 'appointed Directors at the expense of archival staff'. As I have already explained, we have not increased the size of the Management Board at TNA at all, or increased the number of senior posts – in fact, the size of the Management Board has significantly decreased over the past four years.

3.4 Q. Why have you had so many Finance Directors? Is this a sign of poor financial management?

A. (NC) When I was appointed, the Finance Director at the time had already resigned, in response to a government instruction that we needed a qualified accountant in post. She was replaced by

another full time Finance Director who was TNA's first qualified Finance Director. Erika, our FD, left in January 2009. Since then we have had interim Directors as we have not been able to appoint a full time Director who we feel fits the role and meets our standards. We will continue looking until we find someone who is ambitious, motivated and able to do the job to a high standard. Finding someone for the salary that we are able to pay is difficult as Finance Directors are paid a lot more in the private sector.

3.5 Q. What are your plans regarding your publications arm, and what will be the knock on effects to the bookshop?

A. (OM) We have been clear throughout the last few months that the publications arm is losing money, and that we should not be using taxpayer's money to subsidise loss making discretionary activities. However, this reflects the general trend throughout the publishing industry – it is really hard to run a profitable publishing arm, particularly when operating on a small scale. We are looking quite seriously at reducing the number of books we publish to bring it back to profitability; however on the whole publications by members of staff tend to be popular and profitable, so there is unlikely to be a reduction in this type of publication. There should be no knock on effect on the bookshop, which sells a lot of books, and not just in-house publications.

3.6 Q. Why doesn't The National Archives have an independent Chairman of the Board?

A. (NC) This is the way that all government departments work, not a decision made by The National Archives. Under Civil Service rules, government departments and agencies have a single Accounting Officer rather than a CEO and separate chair. We do have a strong Board, with non exec Directors, to provide scrutiny. However, in many respects this accountability and governance is provided by us being accountable to ministers – they provide the ultimate leadership and direction for our services.

3.7 Q. Regarding car park charges, I am glad that you have made concessions for volunteers; however I still have a number of concerns. You have said from the outset that one of your reasons for charging is to encourage the public to reduce emissions, however you have not implemented a charge for coach parking, why is this? In addition you have said that you don't see charging as a revenue stream but as a cost recovery exercise, however your projected income is higher than the costs you have calculated. I am also concerned about how you calculated the costs.

A. (JJ) In the past, the running costs of the car park have always been absorbed in to the general running costs of the site. We are no longer in a position to subsidise car parking in this way. The

running costs have been calculated as accurately as possible. As we do not maintain the car park as a separate activity, it has been necessary to estimate portions of larger costs (security, maintenance and upkeep) that can reasonably be attributed to the running of the car park. The projected income from charging is slightly higher than the costs. The difference was £8K per year but following our decision to make a concession to volunteers is now £1K per year. However please remember that these are projections. We will closely monitor both the costs of running the car park and the income from charging.

3.8 Q. With regard to senior subject specialists, you have said that you are increasing the number from 10-11, however it appears that there are 2 discreet roles at this grade; Principal Records Specialists and Senior Records Specialists. This gives the impression that a number of the staff you refer to as specialists will have largely administrative / management roles and that there will be a reduction in the amount of time those specialists are focused on records related and public facing activities.

3.9 A. (JJ) Our intention in restructuring the subject teams is to achieve a flatter and less bureaucratic management structure. Whereas before, a number of managers would have managed just 2 or 3 staff, the Principal Records Specialist will now manage the whole subject team. This enables other members of the team (Senior Records Specialists and Records Specialists) more time to focus on records related and public facing activities, as well as providing opportunities for career progression and staff development. It also puts Records Specialists at the very heart of service delivery and development.

3.10 Q. What has happened to the Research and Collections Development department?

A. (NC) The function of this department was to build links with the academic sector, and to work across other departments and organisations to develop collection strategies. The department has gone but not the function. Essentially what we have done is to remove management and administrative costs, and to integrate the staff doing the key work in with other teams in The National Archives.

3.11 Q. With the opening hours having been reviewed and reduced, would it now be possible to review the availability of key 'behind the scenes' functions such as IT who currently don't cover the helpdesk after 5 o'clock on late opening days, and Collection Care who are unavailable on Saturdays?

A. (JJ) While we appreciate and take on board that ideally these services would be available throughout our public opening hours,

unfortunately it is unlikely that we will be able to make these changes due to the very limited budget that we are having to work within. However, we will review this if the financial situation changes.

3.12 Q. Have you looked into the possibility of volunteers manning Collection Care on Saturdays?

A. (JJ) We have not, but we will take this away and look into it.

3.13 Q. I don't think that you are spending money wisely. You are £3 million in deficit as you have a mandatory commitment to replace the chillers by 2015.

A. (NC) This is simply not true. We have no deficit. Every year we receive a capital budget and Paul Davies, our recently recruited Head of Estates and Facilities is currently writing a spending plan for the next decade. (PD) There is no requirement for us to replace the chillers by 2015. Under European Regulations, we must stop using reclaimed R22 (the gas used in the coolers) by 2015.

3.14 Q. I feel that the users have not been properly consulted as the decisions for the changes at The National Archives were already made.

A. (JJ) We have been upfront throughout the consultation process that we have no choice but to make savings of 10%. We have consulted openly and made a number of concessions, as outlined in my presentation, based on the feedback we received on our original plans.

3.15 Q. Has The National Archives thought about reducing or stopping the number of free public talks that are currently being held in order to save money?

A. (JJ) You raise an interesting point and we need to strike a balance regarding how we use our staff time. The talks are, on the whole, valued highly by our users and also meet our objective of delivering information on a 'one to many' basis. It is also worth noting that the talks are podcasted around the world so receive a much larger audience than those in the room. The talks are also subsidised by the Friends of The National Archives.

3.16 Q. Can the users be provided with the new structure of The National Archives with names etc?

A. (JJ) Yes we will provide an organisational chart once the placement process has finished (around December).

3.17 Q. The advertisement for a new Finance Director is a damning

indictment of The National Archives current and past financial management.

A. (NC) I stand by the advertisement – as previously stated I am extremely keen that we recruit a dynamic, motivated and ambitious Finance Director. However this does not mean to say that our finance accountancy is weak; we have strong financial accounts. Last financial year we came within £100k of our budget of £55m, with a clear bill of health from our auditors, which is not easy. I am confident that our finances are well managed. What we are looking for is an innovative Financial Director who can add value.

- 3.18 Q. I would like to thank you for taking the time to consult with users on these changes, it is clear that you have listened and taken on board some of our ideas. However, I feel that there have been faults in the way that you have carried out this consultation process, in particular I feel that it would have been beneficial for you to speak to key stake holder groups prior to opening the consultation to the public in general. Moving forward it is likely that we will see cuts to public spending in the near future, and I ask that you take on board my comments if it is necessary to hold another similar consultation exercise.

A. (NC / JJ) We take on board your comments regarding the way we have conducted this consultation exercise and giving key groups an opportunity to be involved at an earlier stage. Senior management have already had discussions on 'lessons learned' and will continue to do so. It is our aim to consult with our users fairly, openly and effectively. Unfortunately there are sometimes factors which meant we were not able to be as open as we would have liked. For example sensitivities around the redundancy exercise, employment law and union involvement meant that some specific information could not be disclosed.

#### **4 Any other Business**

- 4.1 The gentleman who wrote the article in Aviation News, referred to in the minutes of the last meeting, came to the forum to express his concerns regarding the closure of records which contain individuals names, such as card indexes, under Data Protection. NC assured him that we have an extremely competent team of experts in Data Protection legislation, who are more than capable of arguing the case for keeping documents open where appropriate.

Please note that all minutes and presentations are available at our website at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/events/readers.htm>

**The next meeting will be on Thursday the 15<sup>th</sup> of October in the Talks Room- All are welcome**