

Public Minutes of a meeting of The National Archives' Board
Date of Meeting: 10 June 2025 at 11.10am
Location: The National Archives, Kew and Video Conference

THE	
NATIONAL	
ARCHIVES	

Present:

Andrew Wathey (AW - Chair) Chair of The National Archives' Board
Nigel Baker (NB) Non-executive Board Member
Sonia Cargan (SC) Non-executive Board Member
Lopa Patel (LP) Non-executive Board Member
Rommel Pereira (RP) Non-executive Board Member (from item 3 onwards via VC)
Emmajane Avery (EJA) Director of Public Engagement and Sector Leadership
Lucy Fletcher (LF) Director for Public Records Access and Government Services
Gemma Maclagan Ram (GMR) Research and Commercial Development Director
Andrea Metcalf (AM) Director of People, Inclusion and Change
Peter Mills (PM) Interim Director of Finance (Items 1-9)
Saul Nassé (SN) Chief Executive and Keeper
John Sheridan (JS) Digital Director

Also present:

Asha Bagayat (AB) Head of Governance (Minutes)
Claire Collard (CC) Head of Financial Planning, Performance and Analysis (Items 7-9)
Alex Forbes (AF) Head of Government Services, Strategy & Engagement (Item 10-11)
Service Access Owner (MoD Access) (Item 5)
Head of Strategic Insights (Item 3 via VC)
Helen Potter (HP) Head of Information Rights (Item 5)
Sam Whaley (SW) Head of Strategy

1. Welcome, Apologies for absence and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1. AW welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2. Apologies for lateness was received from RP and apologies for leaving early were received from PM – both owing to diary-clashes. There were no further apologies for absence.
- 1.3. There were no declarations of interest.

2. Chief Executive's Report

- 2.1. The Board received a report providing an update on the work and priorities of the Chief Executive and the activities of the Executive Team. As a supplementary item, the Board received a report on external equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) expenditure for approval and onward reporting and publication by the Government People Group (GPG).
- 2.2. SN provided an update on the Comprehensive Spending Review and that we had received notification from the HM Treasury Spending team on a flat cash settlement and success on our business case to replace legacy technology.

- 2.3. Opportunities to finance the business case on the Legal Data Stack were noted. This was followed by a discussion on prioritisation, resourcing and risk analysis of the project, with the Board receiving assurance of the value and benefits to Government and noting that we had received £500k from the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) to deliver the first phase. LF added that there was interest and support for the project from No.10 Downing Street from an economic growth perspective and that The National Archives was well networked with Government departments and had a credible reputation as a centre of excellence and expertise. The Board welcomed a further briefing on the project and partnership with DBT and other government departments.
- 2.4. There was a question around data sovereignty and assurances were provided that we use Cloud services as well as storing copies of records at Kew in the Tape Library, which the Board expressed an interest in visiting.
- 2.5. The Board also noted that we had a new Minister, Baroness Twycross; discussed the success of the MI5 exhibition and the feasibility of extending and touring it; and noted the Pay Remit and update on the Pay and Reward Project.
- 2.6. The Board received the external EDI expenditure report setting out expenditure of £10,109 for the period 2024-25. The report also included projected expenditure for 2025-26.
- 2.7. The Board:
- (i) Welcomed and noted the update;
 - (ii) Requested a further briefing on the Legal Data Stack project and partnerships with DBT and other government departments for oversight and assurance;
 - (iii) Requested to visit to the Tape Library at Kew; and
 - (iv) Agreed the EDI expenditure spend for 2024-25 for onward reporting and publication by the GPG.

Action by: AB/JS/AM

3. Strategy Review

- 3.1. The Board received a paper providing an update on the progress of the strategy review, setting out some of the key things that have been learned, how the thinking has developed and the shape and ambitions of the draft corporate strategy. A draft strategy was presented for the Board's comment, ahead of a final version being shared for the Board's endorsement at an online session next month, which will subsequently be submitted to ministers for approval.
- 3.2. SN introduced the item, setting out the framing of the corporate strategy, shared his insights from the process and outlined the four priorities articulated in the draft: renewing our technology; increase our profile; widen access and availability and lead for the future of arrives.
- 3.3. RP joined the meeting online half-way through the discussion.
- 3.4. AW invited each member to share their reflections and comments on the draft. Detailed notes were taken by the project team. Below is a summary of the points made, including some of

the challenges of delivering the proposed new corporate strategy once it was finalised and agreed by ministers:

- It was bold and demonstrated confidence in who we are.
- The pillars were clear and understandable.
- The technology priority was strong, but the others needed a little more work to make them tighter and punchy.
- The inclusion of the priority 'lead for the future of archives' was welcomed.
- The articulation of seeking legislative change to address some of our challenges was welcomed.
- We had a strong profile within Government which was missing.
- The word 'audience' was stronger than 'profile'.
- Work was required on audience insights and gaining an understanding of our multiple audiences and their requirements, including how we can use AI and technology to reach audiences.
- The profile priority managed to strike a balance between the in-person experience with physical documents and digital opportunities.
- It could be more aligned with the National Heritage Act 1983 which speaks about public good through interactions with heritage.
- To become the 'Archive of the State' will require remediation, mass change and transformation, including solving issues, such as sensitivity reviews and complexities around access to records, via AI and technology.
- The current draft was internally facing for ministers and funders rather than externally/public focused.
- 'People' was missing and could be added as a fifth priority, including researchers and our international work.
- The detailed plan will need to address skills and our readiness to deliver the strategy.

3.5. There was a further discussion around navigating legislative change and the Board noted our past activities in this area; constraints of the Public Records Act and challenges of the FOIA; and how comparable national archives navigate the issues.

3.6. The Board:

- (i) Received and commented on the draft strategy;
- (ii) Noted that the project team will take the feedback onboard;
- (iii) Noted that a special Board meeting had been scheduled for Friday 27 June to receive and endorse the final draft of the corporate strategy for onward submission to ministers in early July;
- (iv) Agreed that once ministers had approved the strategy, a more public facing document will be produced and published on the website; and
- (v) Welcomed a strategic discussion on navigating legislative change at a future date.

Action by: SW/AB

4. Update on Parliamentary Archives Project

4.1. The Board received a paper providing an update on the Parliamentary Archives project. The update included the signing of the partnership agreement, physical document moves, and

preparations for public access and service arrangements. Whilst issues were being addressed, particularly in relation to collections metadata migration and integration with our catalogue, the timeframe for public access was still uncertain.

4.2. The discussion focused on collection knowledge transfer and the risks and opportunities around this. Assurances were provided that new processes were being created, and decisions were being made on how to catalogue the collection to run the service, which included the option of gradually widening access to allow us time to learn.

4.3. There was a question around Board oversight of the project plan and noted that internal project governance was still being developed. The Board commissioned the Finance and Performance Committee to have detailed oversight of the project plan for public access and service arrangements.

4.4. The Board:

- (i) Received and noted the update;
- (ii) Commissioned the Finance and Performance Committee to have detailed oversight of the project plan for public access and service arrangements and to provide assurance to it; and
- (iii) Welcomed regular updates on the overall project at each meeting until a point the service was up and running and part of business as usual.

Action by: LF/AB

5. Ministry of Defence (MoD) Service Records: Service Transformation Project

5.1. The Board received a detailed report on the service transformation project of the MOD Access Service, which has seen a significant investment and change in approach to provide a compliant service while continuing to tackle the sizeable backlog of Freedom of Information (Fol) requests. The update included the plan, risks and mitigations for aspects of the service.

5.2. Lines of questioning related to the high demand of the service, management of the backlog, service complaints and the relationship with and practice recommendations of the Information Commissioner. Responses and assurances were provided.

5.3. The Board:

- (i) Welcomed and noted the update;
- (ii) Discussed the framing, risks and opportunities; and
- (iii) Endorsed management's approach and next steps.

6. Fees Order 2025-26

6.1. The Board was presented with the 2025-26 proposed Fees Order for endorsement and onward submission to ministers for approval. This included a proposed overheads recovery rate, which was subject to agreement by the HMT. The paper also noted that further work was underway on scenario modelling the potential impact (both financial and operational) of the different announcement timing options and on the Fees Order communication plan.

6.2. There was a discussion on the communications plan and announcement timings, including past practice here and elsewhere. The Board welcomed sight of the modelling work to be able to advise fully on the timing of announcement.

6.3. The Board:

- (i) Endorsed the Fees Order 2025-26 for onward approval by HMT and ministers;
- (ii) Requested a paper on the communications plan, including management's recommendation on the timing of the announcement at its next meeting; and
- (iii) Noted that the Fees Order will be reviewed annually.

Action by: PM/GMR/LF/AB

7. Corporate Performance Items

Provisional Budgetary Outturn 2024-25 (Year End Account)

- 7.1. The Board received a summary of the provisional budgetary outturn for 2024-5 (subject to audit adjustments), which showed an underspend against the HMT control totals. This was a reduction on what had previously been reported via the last management accounts.
- 7.2. A lessons learned exercise had been undertaken with a view to reducing the 2025-26 underspend. The report had been presented to the Finance and Performance Committee, who had endorsed the actions.
- 7.3. The Board welcomed the report and agreed that management accounts should be shared with it for oversight and assurance, once they had been seen by the Finance and Performance Committee.

Q4 Business Priorities Performance 2024-25

- 7.4. Following presentation to the Finance and Performance Committee, the Board received a report on business priorities 2024-25 (Quarter 4) performance for review and endorsement. The summary ratings will be reported in the Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25.
- 7.5. The Board welcomed the update and asked that where business priorities have been partially completed these be explained in the narrative within the Annual Report and Accounts.

Business Priorities 2025-26

- 7.6. The Board was presented with draft business priorities and outputs provided by each Director for their respective areas. Following review by the Finance and Performance Committee, 7 business priorities were being proposed for 2025-26, which the Board was invited to review and endorse.
- 7.7. The Board welcomed the paper and agreed that a rolling three-year plan for the delivery of business priorities will need to be developed linked to the budget and new corporate strategy.
- 7.8. The Board:

- (i) Endorsed the provisional Budgetary Outturn 2024-25 report and the mitigations set out in the paper;
- (ii) Agreed that monthly and quarterly management accounts be shared with it following review by the Finance and Performance Committee;
- (iii) Reviewed and endorsed the Q4 business priority ratings and asked that partially completed items be explained in the narrative; and
- (iv) Reviewed and agreed the business priorities for 2025-26; noting that SMART metrics for each will be developed throughout 2025-26.

Action by: PM/CC

8. Corporate Risk Register

- 8.1. The Board received the updated Corporate Risk Register and was invited to discuss the corporate risks and proposed mitigations by management.
- 8.2. Following receipt of the Internal Audit report on Financial Controls (Payroll) and the draft report on Risk Management, where the actions were still being agreed, RP reported on the Audit and Risk Committee's (ARC) recommendation for Board to have greater oversight of risk management and reexamine the Risk Appetite Matrix.
- 8.3. SC noted insights from another organisations on risk management which PM welcomed and agreed to pick up with her out-of-committee.
- 8.4. The Board:
 - (i) Reviewed the Corporate Risk Register;
 - (ii) Endorsed the mitigating actions on enduring red/amber risks;
 - (iii) Noted that AW, RP, PM and SN would consider ARC's recommendation regarding Board oversight of risk management.

Action by: PM

9. 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts

- 9.1. The Board received the latest draft of the Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 for review and approval and for onward submission to ministers for sign off. The update including outstanding work.
- 9.2. PM provided an update on the assessment relating to Going Concern and Heritage Assets.
- 9.3. The Board:
 - (i) Welcomed and reviewed the latest draft of the Annual Report and Accounts;
 - (ii) Agreed with the assessment of Going Concern and Heritage Assets and asked that the reports be shared with them out-of-committee;
 - (iii) Noted that the final typeset designed version will be circulated to the ARC and then onwards to Board for write round approval, once the Audit Completion Report has been received;
 - (iv) Received assurance that production was on-track;
 - (v) Subject to comments received by the end of the week, agreed to submit the latest version to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for sign off of the narrative and noting of the accounts; and

(vi) Thanked the Project Team for their work.

Action by: PM/AB

9.4 At this point PM left the meeting.

10. State of Government Record Keeping and Challenges around Digital

- 10.1. The Board was presented with a paper setting out the findings of the annual survey of government departments, which provided a credible view on the health of public records.
- 10.2. To summarise the results, as in previous years, the 2025 survey showed that departments were holding a growing backlog of legacy digital records and were still unable to appraise, select, review and transfer meaningful volumes to The National Archives. In contrast, they had a good grip on paper records.
- 10.3. The paper went on to set out the challenges, opportunities and next steps, which the Board was invited to discuss. These included our ambitions and engagement with government, and the articulation of this in the new corporate strategy; as well as wider considerations around our place in government and the profile and impact of the Keeper (for example, in relation to the National Data Library and our work on data valuation and commercialisation).
- 10.4. During the discussion, the Board's ambition of becoming the 'Archive of the State' was reiterated. This included possibilities of collecting digital records from public bodies which fall outside the Public Records Act, such as NHS, Police, ONS and MI6 and making them accessible.
- 10.5. The Keeper's profile and the profile of The National Archives were noted as separate and there were opportunities to engage the Keeper's supervisory responsibilities to raise compliance; as well as increased coordination around the development of 'whole government' approaches to managing digital records.
- 10.6. The Board:
- (i) Welcomed the update;
 - (ii) Endorsed the ambitions set out in para 13 of the report and the articulation of them within the new Corporate Strategy; and
 - (iii) Noted that a detailed progress update would be brought to Board in the New Year.

Action by: LF/AB

11. Update on Accessioning Inquiry Records

- 11.1. One of our corporate priorities is to take custody of the digital records of at least three public inquiries in 2025-26. The Board received a paper providing an update on progress made to transfer and accession inquiry records. The paper also set out our priorities for 2025-26, including the further development of our offer to inquiries.
- 11.2. The discussion centred around the need for consistent and sustained investment, technological development and our learning from each inquiry. There was a further discussion on the impact of the records upon staff and trauma and archival practice, well as information rights challenges and mitigations.

11.3. The Board welcomed a workshop with experts on the inquiry landscape – covering risks, challenges and opportunities, workflow planning and projections, user demand and engagement with the records and perspectives from an Inquiry.

11.4. The Board:

- (i) Welcomed the update and asked to be kept regularly updated on the wider programme of activity;
- (ii) Agreed to hold a workshop on the inquiry landscape, which included the perspectives and experiences from an inquiry; and
- (iii) Commissioned the Finance and Performance Committee to scrutinise the business priority around inquiries and review risk management and provide onwards assurance to it.

Action by: LF/AB

12. Update from Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

12.1. RP provided an overview on the ARC's performance and areas of review during 2024-25, this included the draft Annual ARC Chair's Report 2024-25 for Board's information and assurance.

12.2. As minuted under para 8.2 above, RP summarised the reviews of Internal Audit and their overall moderate opinion. He highlighted the work of the Committee in scrutinising and challenging the corporate risk register, noting areas of good risk management and where it can be strengthened, such as cyber risks through third-parties.

12.3. The Board welcomed the update and thanked RP and the Committee for their work.

13. Update from Finance and Performance Committee

13.1. LP provided a verbal update on the 6 May meeting of the Finance and Performance Committee and noted there had been a good discussion on the corporate performance dashboard and that further metrics were being developed.

13.2. The Committee had also reviewed its Terms of Reference, and these were presented to the Board for approval and agreement to publish on the website.

13.3. The Board:

- (i) Received and noted the verbal update; and
- (ii) Subject to minor corrections, approved the updated Terms of Reference and agreed for their publication on the website.

Action by: AB

14. Non-Executive Board Member Verbal Updates

14.1. Non-executive Board Members (NEBMs) each provided a verbal update on their recent activity, including insights from other organisations.

14.2. RP noted attending the DCMS ARC Chair's meeting and shared insights in relation to the year-end accounts and auditing and learnings from a tabletop exercise on cyber-attacks.

14.3. NB noted induction meetings with fellow ARC members and attending his first ARC meeting and attending an evening reception at The National Gallery with the DCMS Secretary of State,

Lisa Nandy, setting out the vision for the Museums Sector. He also noted a potential digital project at another organisation, which may have opportunities for wider collaboration.

14.4. LP noted attending the GovTech Summit, where the use of AI in government was a key topic. She also noted meeting colleagues in the digital archiving team, a catch up with SN and attending a TNA webinar on the Strategic Research Fund.

14.5. SC noted attending the Corporate Induction and meeting new starters and having discussions with AM around people risks, metrics and performance measures.

14.6. AW noted attending an event hosted by The National Archives Trust, meeting Baroness Twycross along with SN and attending a meeting with the Chair and CEO of The British Library, also with SN. He noted he would be attending DCDC next month.

14.7. All NEBMs noted attending the launch of the M15 and the Happy and Glorious exhibitions.

15. Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions

15.1. Subject to a minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2025 were approved as a correct record.

15.2. The Board reviewed and agreed the Actions Log.

15.3. The Board reviewed and noted the Board Commissions to Sub-committees Log.

16. Any Other Business

Forward Agenda

16.1. The Board received and noted the Forward Agenda.

Reflections from the meeting

16.2. The Board noted the quality of discussions.

Items for information

16.3. There were no items for information.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 16:18.