

National Archives – a proposed approach for sector-led improvement and development

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About the LGA

The Local Government Association (LGA) is here to support, promote and improve local government.

Local government is facing the most radical changes, as well as the most significant opportunities, in a decade.

We will fight local government's corner and support local authorities through challenging times by focusing on our top two priorities:

- representing and advocating for local government and making the case for greater devolution
- helping local authorities tackle their challenges and take advantage of new opportunities to deliver better value for money services.

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Introduction

1. This paper sets out a framework for a new sector-led improvement and development programme for local archives.
2. The LGA appreciates The National Archive (TNA) has only recently inherited wider responsibilities for the archive sector. As a result it is in the initial stages of consultation before creating a new business plan. This document aims to provide a useful tool to TNA in setting out LGA's initial thoughts on sector development and what TNA's role should be. In addition, this document suggests some first thoughts on how we can work in partnership to develop and modernise the archives sector.

Proposed approach

3. The proposed approach is driven by a desire for TNA and the LGA to develop a joint vision and improvement programme for local authority archive services. It realises the critical role local authorities play in providing a modern and thriving archives service, enabling TNA to develop a key strategic partnership.
4. **LGA and TNA to establish a new, forward-thinking national partnership and innovative joint improvement programme.** This is to create a modern, innovative and efficient archives service, underpinned by an ambitious self-improvement programme. **The LGA is to represent local authorities within TNA's decision-making structures**, such as TNA's Implementation Group and provide support and advice to the Archives Sector Development team.
5. **Encourage TNA and Arts Council England (ACE) to work closely together to have a single conversation.** This is in order to build a coherent cultural sector, sharing innovation and best practice between and within sectors. This will also enhance opportunities for the archives

sector to access funding and programmes provided by ACE, for example accessing Renaissance funding.

6. Support TNA's development with the sector of an **accreditation scheme as a key self-improvement tool** for the sector. TNA to work in partnership with local authorities and other sector providers to develop the accreditation scheme as a tool which will best support excellent service delivery. The LGA would welcome acting as a 'critical friend' in the development of the scheme.
7. **TNA to support local authorities to deliver their statutory duties** in relation to record management and promoting equality. The LGA will work with TNA to share good practice in effective records management. There is a real opportunity for **commercialisation of public sector record management services to provide additional income**. The LGA would encourage TNA to explore and promote appropriate entrepreneurial opportunities for the sector.
8. The LGA would welcome clarity from TNA on what they foresee their exact role to be and what **funding opportunities** they will be offering to local government to improve archive service delivery.
9. The LGA recognises the urgency and challenges facing the local archives sector and local authorities more generally. We would be committed to **working with TNA in exploring what support can be offered to local authorities in the immediate future** of 3-6 months before TNA's business plan for wider archive sector work is formalised and while local authority budgets are being finalised.

Context

10. It is fundamental any programme acknowledges the new policy context we are working in, namely that:
 - The Government has placed a greater emphasis on localism and the 'Big Society': the need for public services to engage volunteers and community groups and to be accountable to their local communities. We recognise the experience the archives sector brings to this.
 - The Government has also dismantled much of the top-down performance management regime imposed upon local authorities. Local government is taking collective responsibility for its own sector-led improvement, as set out in the LGA 'Freedom to lead' document.
 - Local authorities are faced with significant budget reductions but there is also less ring-fencing of funds received. In the community budget areas there is greater flexibility to pool central government spending and spend it on what matters most locally.
 - In addition, much of the old regional architecture, such as regional development agencies (RDAs), has been abolished and there is a greater emphasis on local and sub-regional collaboration to deliver better services and make cost savings.

- There is an ever-increasing appetite for accessing information digitally. Development has begun on the Government and private sector's partnership to provide broadband access to every home in UK by 2015, with 90 per cent of homes and businesses having access to super-fast broadband.
- Local authorities have a statutory duty for the management of public records. Both are important, especially in relation to modernisation and digitisation of archive services.
- TNA is facing significant budget pressures, coupled with wider responsibilities for the archive sector. Partnership working is vital to ensure sensible strategic decisions are made which maximise the effective distribution of limited resources.
- The ACE has taken over responsibility for museums and libraries from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). It is important that the archives sector maintains its profile alongside these two much larger sectors and continues the vital dialogue with the museums and library sectors.
- In November 2011, the LGA published 'Taking the lead: self-regulation and improvement in culture, tourism and sport'.
- TNA are represented on LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Improvement Project Group.

As a result, the sector is experiencing a fast pace of change and there is a real urgency to the challenge facing local archive services. The LGA is acting now because councils will be taking decisions over the next few months that could curtail the sector's self-improvement capacity.

Key principles

11. The LGA is pleased TNA identifies that the provision of archive services varies significantly on a local scale in terms of size, budget, facilities and local profile. Therefore with TNA's support, local authorities are best placed to decide how to run their archive services providing the best service for their local community while achieving value for money.
12. LGA is broadly supportive of TNA's model for excellence for publicly-funded archive services as set out in 'Archives for 21st century' document. Local authorities are already running innovative models for their archive services, focused on finding local solutions to meet local needs – see case studies in Annex 1. We would welcome the support TNA can offer local authorities in developing and supporting such creative thinking through initiating projects, partnership working and sharing knowledge. TNA can also procure national deals for projects especially in digitalisation resources which would bring value for money to local authorities. However, it is important such resources meet the local needs of local authorities.
13. LGA are very supportive of TNA's idea of developing bigger and better services in partnership with other local authorities and the private and charitable sector in order to achieve efficiency and value for money. In

order for this to work it would need to be led by local need as there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model. LGA in partnership with MLA ran a Future Libraries Programme, which included looking at sharing backroom functions in delivering library services. It highlighted important issues to be aware of such as council's desire for their libraries to maintain their own identity and local look and feel, to the difficulties arising in decision making between two authorities of different political persuasions. The LGA would be happy to share the lessons learnt from the Future Libraries Programme and its successor, the Libraries Development Initiative, with TNA.

14. Strong political leadership is vital for local archive services to thrive. TNA and LGA will play an important role in ensuring local politicians and professional archive staff work in partnership to run resilient and efficient archive services.
15. We feel that TNA's new responsibilities create an exciting opportunity for local authorities to benefit even more from TNA's depth of knowledge and experience in this sector. With both local authorities and TNA experiencing funding cuts, the LGA feels TNA could add the most value by acting as a catalyst to maximising resources. This could be through sharing good practice, building influence across government, encouraging initiatives in the sector, and supporting local archive services to strengthen and develop. It could also include building upon TNA's existing work with local government, such as the current web archiving work. In times of austerity with differing opinions on spending priorities, TNA can play an important role on behalf of local authorities by advocating the public value of archives, such as underpinning democracy and learning.
16. Partnerships between archive services and libraries and museums offer opportunities to develop more innovative services. Therefore, it is essential that there is a joined-up conversation between TNA and ACE, whose remit now includes museums and libraries. This is especially so given that some local authorities make no distinction between their library and archive services. Furthermore, there are already some good practice and innovative models which have been born out of LGA and ACE's work on libraries which could be useful for developing archive services.
17. TNA can play a key role in improving and supporting service quality through a sector-led improvement scheme. With the wealth of knowledge and expertise TNA has in archive delivery it can recognise and promote excellence through sharing innovative ideas and best practice. We would support any useful tools TNA could equip local authorities with as part of a sector led improvement offer. TNA's archives accreditation scheme could be such a tool as councils could use it to monitor and benchmark their own performance, driving up service standards.

Next steps

18. The LGA would like at an early stage to begin a conversation with TNA to establish a new, forward-thinking national partnership and discuss the ideas outlined in this document in more detail.

Background

Local Government's Archive Services

19. More than 130 local authorities provide archive services, local studies and local history libraries. The collections of unique records in their care document a community's identity. There are more than a million visits to local authority archives each year. Many books, magazines, plays, films, television, radio and websites rely on information from archives – much of it in the care of local authorities. Local authorities also have a legal responsibility to look after their records, charged by statute to 'make proper arrangements' for them.
20. Local authorities hold records of national and international importance. These include the official records that underpin democracy and the records of the lives of ordinary people, businesses and local life that add colour and texture to the official record. And it's not just paper and parchment. Most local authority collections contain photographs, maps, plans, prints, drawings, sound recordings, moving images, microfilm and digital records. Together these unique records provide sources of inspiration, enjoyment and learning.
21. Innovative projects, such as Hull History Centre and The Keep in East Sussex, are showing how imaginative archive services can contribute widely to the local community. This is through education, culture, health and social initiatives and they can become a high-profile point of civic pride and economic development.

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Appendix 1

Best practice and innovative case studies

22. In times of austerity, innovation is more important than ever. Local government has already demonstrated its commitment to TNA's goal of ensuring that services are secure, sustainable, resilient and innovative. Below are four case studies demonstrating local government's resourcefulness and innovation.

Case study: Durham County Record Office – utilising volunteers

Durham County Council's Record Office set up the Mining Durham's Hidden Depths project in October 2009. So far more than 100 volunteers have created 86,701 entries for an online index designed to "make County Durham's mining heritage more accessible to informal adult learners by exploiting a major archive collection of national and international significance." By the project's official end, in March 2010, more than 60,000 miner's names had already been indexed and new data made available online for people to access. A network of 106 volunteers with a wide range of ages and abilities trained in research and indexing techniques. Fifty of those people expressing an interest in continuing their voluntary work with Durham County Records Office.

Case study: Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies – digitalising and inspiring new audiences

At the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS), they have been encouraging secondary schools to use their resources, especially their archives and collections. To achieve this, they have taken advantage of the availability of virtual learning software in all schools in the county. Having been inspired by a demonstration of The National Archive's 'virtual classroom', CBS used the software as an innovative and inexpensive way of bringing their archives into the classroom. The virtual classroom sessions allowed pupils and archivists to interact and discuss documents and other items stored in the CBS archives. An item would be presented onscreen for the pupils to study, while other parts of the software allowed students to hear the archivist talk about it. Students could also type questions to the archivist. While this session has been trialled in one school, the hope is to spread it out to secondary schools throughout Buckinghamshire.

Case study: Somerset Heritage Centre – sharing services and a one stop access to resources including online.

Somerset Heritage Centre (SHC) opened in September 2010. It marked a new beginning for the county's heritage by combining on one site Somerset's archive, museum and local studies collections and making them available in a fully modern setting. The SHC is also home to the county's Records Management, Historic Environment and Registration Services, as well as to the long-established Somerset Archaeological Society. The SHC replaces 16 former premises, including the Somerset Record Office of 1958, but has been far more than a building project. It has allowed greater cost-effectiveness through shared services, including customer service, learning and outreach, and one-stop access to resources both onsite and online (a new website is about to be launched). Financial resilience has been strengthened through

agreements to supply archive and records management services to other organisations, and an audience development plan has shaped engagement with new and existing audiences as well as with volunteers. Since opening, nearly 60 volunteers have begun work on archive-related projects. Visitor numbers have also risen sharply. Together with the related project to create the Museum of Somerset (just opened), the new SHC expresses a belief that innovative delivery of archive and other heritage services has a very significant role to play in supporting local and national agendas at a time of great financial pressure.

Case study: Derbyshire Record Office – Artist-in-residence to engage new audiences

Derbyshire Record Office is merging with Matlock Local Studies Library to provide a one-stop-shop for local and family history research in the county. A major building project, costed at £4.2 million and entirely funded by Derbyshire County council, has begun at the Record Office to extend storage capacity and create exciting new public spaces for this purpose.

An artist-in-residence has been appointed for the duration of the building project to work with staff and the community, informing the interior design, enlivening the public space with art and raising the profile of the service. The artist will particularly work with people who haven't used the service before to encourage them to feel a sense of ownership and pride, and to create a welcoming environment that continues to attract new audiences to the service. Overall, the project will nurture a culture of creativity within the Record Office and local studies team that will give them the skills and confidence to continue to engage creatively with new audiences once the project has finished. The project has already received Archive Pace Setter status, which aims to encourage innovative projects within the archive sector and promote good practice in archives as part of wider workforce development and advocacy strategies.