



Appendix 2

Archives and Historic Records Service

Report by the Reference Group:

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 Andy Smith (Chair)

April 2021

Place Scrutiny Committee

The report of the Archives and Historic Records Reference Group

Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
Reference Group Findings	4
Governance	4
The Keep Sustainability Plan (KSP)	4
Savings.....	5
Income Generation	5
Accessions and Collections Policy	5
Future Work	6
Promoting the Service.....	6
Online Offer and Website.....	7
Digital Records	7
Conclusions	7
Appendix:	8
Scope and terms of reference of the Reference Group	8
Reference Group Membership and project support.....	8
Reference Group meeting dates	8
Witnesses providing evidence.....	8
Evidence papers	8

Introduction

1. Through the Council's Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) budget setting process, the Place Scrutiny Committee became aware of proposed savings in the Archives and Records Service based at The Keep of £210,000 over the financial years 2019/201 to 2022/23. The Committee wanted to better understand the impact of the proposed savings on the services offered and whether they would negatively affect the Service's ability to provide a quality service and conserve the historic record. The Place Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a Reference Group at the meeting held on 18 September 2019 to examine how the savings would be implemented and whether the Service would be negatively affected.
2. Since the Place Committee agreed to examine this issue the Coronavirus pandemic and the national lockdowns have delayed the completion of the Reference Group's work.

Background

3. The Keep is a purpose-built archive in Falmer, completed in 2013 at a cost of approximately £15million. It is home to the East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Record Office (ESBHRO), the Royal Pavilion & Museums' (RPM) Local History Collections and the University of Sussex Special Collections. It provides for the permanent preservation of the current and future archival heritage and historical resources of the partners and is open to the public for people wishing to view archival material and attend talks and events.
4. The Keep operates as a partnership between East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) and the University of Sussex (UoS). The individual partners remain sovereign in terms of their own legal duties and responsibilities including the accession and storage of materials or collections. The partnership is governed by a Board comprising senior officers of the three partner organisations, and the Board is responsible for strategic decision-making for The Keep.
5. The partners have previously sought to deliver savings by reducing building-related costs and securing increased external income. In April 2019 the Keep Board endorsed the *Keep Sustainability Plan 2019/20 – 2021/22* (the KSP) which is a savings and income plan to ensure the financial sustainability of The Keep in the medium term. This is in the context of the increasing financial pressures on local government and the higher education sector. The driving principle behind the development of the KSP is to identify savings from the discretionary functions provided at The Keep by ESBHRO, ensuring that the partners can continue to discharge their statutory and legal responsibilities.

Reference Group Findings

Governance

6. The Reference Group examined the governance arrangements for The Keep to see how the partners and other stakeholders are involved with the changes being made to the service. Each of the three partners is represented on the Board which makes the strategic decisions regarding the management of The Keep. Day to day operational management of the Service is the responsibility of The Keep Management Team (KMT) which is comprised of staff from ESCC, University of Sussex and Brighton Royal Pavilion & Museums.

7. There is a Keep Collections Panel (KCP) which includes Archivists, the Conservator and a representative from The National Archives which keeps an overview of the archive collections and assesses and advises on new collections and accessions material. Each partner makes their own decisions relating to accessions but takes advice from KCP which represents all partners. The Keep Management Team also works with the Friends of The Keep Archives (FoTKA) and other partners to preserve the historic record. There is an active user group made up of FoTKA, researchers and representatives from Sussex Family History Group who provide input into the management of the Service from a lay and end user perspective.

8. The Reference Group found that there are sound and robust governance arrangements in place to manage the Service and the changes that are being made. The interests of all the partners and stakeholders have been represented in the change process.

The Keep Sustainability Plan (KSP)

9. The driving principle behind the development of the Keep Sustainability Plan (KSP) is to identify savings from the discretionary functions provided at The Keep by ESBHRO, ensuring that the partners can continue to discharge their statutory and legal responsibilities, and to provide a financially sustainable service into the future. This has been informed by a review of the partners objectives and duties.

10. All partners are committed to maintaining a high quality, professional service at The Keep. The KSP will ensure that the partners can still deliver their statutory and legal duties, maintain a good degree of public access and deliver the required savings. The KSP has three parts, namely:

- Part 1 – This reviewed the role of Archivists and services to the public and was implemented in June 2019.
- Part 2 – commenced from March 2020 onwards and has examined the operating hours of the service and involved a public consultation on revised opening hours. A consultation has been undertaken with staff and the changes will be implemented from the beginning of April 2021.
- Part 3 – involves a review of external funding and income generating opportunities, including the use of The Keep building.

11. The Reference Group heard that there had been active engagement with all stakeholders and partners, including The National Archives, in developing the Keep Sustainability Plan and implementing the changes to the Service. Representatives from The National Archives have taken a lot of interest in the KSP and have asked challenging and probing questions. They have requested details of the restructure and are comfortable with the continuing service offer.

Savings

12. The Reference Group heard that the delivery of the savings target was realistic and would be predominately made up of savings from changes to staffing and opening hours. Some of the target would be achieved through income generation, although the ability to generate more income is limited. The work on the KSP has involved looking in detail at the way the public use the site and identifying smarter ways of working. The Keep Management Team are confident that the new structure is workable and still enables the provision of a high quality service.

13. The Reference Group noted that in their view further cuts to the service should be resisted at all costs as they would be likely to damage the archive and services provided by The Keep.

Income Generation

14. The Reference Group examined the main sources of income generation, which are listed below. The main sources of income are:

- The events programme – talks, workshops, events, visiting speakers.
- Reprographic and research services.
- Room and office space rental.
- Income from Family history research and records e.g. via Ancestry.

15. The Reference Group supports the work being undertaken to expand the sources of income, including longer term income from paid for on-line services and maximising the use of the non-public space within the building. Having seen the success of paid for webinars over the last year, the Reference Group suggests that it would be worth exploring the expansion of online events such as webinars, which can reach a wider audience and reduce the need to travel to The Keep.

16. The Keep does seek external funding through various organisations including the Sussex Family History Group and FoTKA. Individual funding applications are made to acquire material that is important to the collection. The Reference Group also heard that New Burdens funding is being used to support the work to incorporate hospital and prison records into the archive collection. Members of the Reference Group are also in favour of seeking endowments or legacies to fund the work of The Keep.

17. Overall, the Reference Group considers that all possible sources of income are being explored by the Team at the Keep in order to fund the ongoing work of the Service. The Reference Group and The Keep team agree there is value in developing areas of the collection relevant to people's interests and income generation opportunities, which complements the statutory record keeping responsibilities of ESBHRO.

Accessions and Collections Policy

18. The East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Records Office (ESBHRO) focusses on the statutory functions of two of the partners. Other organisations and partners such as the University of Sussex, FoTKA and the Sussex Family History Group primarily have an interest in the preservation of other records. The Reference Group examined the possible risk to accessions and the historic record by charging for cataloguing some collections (or parts of collections) that are offered to The Keep that are not assessed as being relevant to the collection, and the possibility that the Collections Policy may not adequately reflect the material that will be important in the future.

19. The Reference Group heard that accessions and the Collections Policy is led by professional Archivists. The Collections Policy has been written by Archivists with input by The National Archives. The Collections Policy, which has been updated, was approved by the Keep Collections Panel (KCP) and The National Archives. There is a section in the Collections Policy for future acquisitions and to identify any gaps in the collection. The archive is accredited by The National Archives and the accreditation is regularly assessed through an on-site inspection process. Consequently, the approach to the collection and the Collections Policy has the full backing of The National Archives.

20. The collections work is led by professional Archivists who have a lot of experience and knowledge of the collections at The Keep. They have led and embraced new ways of working which has included different ways to prioritise work and concentrate on material that is relevant to the collections. There is now more emphasis at the beginning of the collection process where new material is assessed in more detail to prioritise what is most relevant to the collections at The Keep. Previously the approach was often to take all the material and store it and then work through it as resources and time allowed.

21. ESBHRO is still taking in documents and other archive material. However, the assessment of new material offered to ESBHRO aims to tackle the expectations of organisations offering it, and ESBHRO may ask for a financial contribution towards storing and preserving material that is not assessed as being as important to the collection. The Reference Group notes the importance of the Collections Policy in keeping the collection relevant to future needs. A broad acquisitions policy is needed to ensure relevant material is assessed and collected even if funding is not immediately available for the processes necessary to make items available to the public. Scrutiny may wish to keep a watching brief over the Collections Policy regarding changes in the future.

22. The Reference Group is assured that ESBHRO is still taking all material that is assessed as being important to the archive. Consequently, the archive is protected against losing material that would be valuable to the historic record. The Reference Group notes the difficulty that exists in accurately predicting what material will be important in the future and Collections Policy will need to reflect this.

Future Work

23. The Reference Group investigated a number of areas of future work that will be important to the Service. These include digital services, whether they are paid for services such as events or accessing the collection online, the storage of digital records as they become more common, and promoting the services that are offered.

Promoting the Service

24. The Keep Management Team is working on a 5 year Strategy on how to take the whole entity of The Keep partnership forward, which reflects the different partner's needs. This will cover promoting the Service, widening the demographic of those using the Service and keeping the Service sustainable.

25. The Reference Group believes that what the Team is doing to promote the Service is needed in order to raise the profile of the good work that is taking place. Many people may not realise the important work that The Keep undertakes. The way The Keep is operated is a good example of an innovative joint working model between a range of different partners and should be commended. Scrutiny may wish to continue to be involved with the Service as it continues to develop. Maintaining the relevance of the Service to people's current and future interests, and keeping up with new technology, will be key to promoting it further, widening the use of the Service and sustaining income. The use of social media will play an important part in promoting the Service to a wider audience and to stimulate interest in the collection (e.g. posting an interesting historic picture can generate a lot of interest compared with more conventional publicity methods).

Online Offer and Website

26. The Team have updated the web site and have been looking at ways to answer some of the more routine enquiries online. A number of help sheets have been produced to help less academic researchers. The collection has a really good online catalogue, but people need some training to get the best out of it. The partners have been doing blogs on how to use the catalogue and an introduction on how to use the catalogues and do keyword searches is available on the website. The Keep now has a new online system that allows the Team to put digitalised images online and charge for them.

27. The Reference Group views maintaining a good online offer as critically important as many people now seek to access to information this way, especially after the Covid19 restrictions. It also offers opportunities to increase income through the delivery of webinars and other online events.

Digital Records

28. The Reference Group explored the provisions that are being made for digital and online record storage and the changes in storage formats and the ability to access the information on them (e.g. floppy discs, tapes, memory sticks, cloud storage etc.). The Reference Group heard that the ESBHRO is developing a Digital Preservation Strategy and is accepting digital records. The Keep has arrangements in place to access various storage media. However, there are a lot of challenges in this area, for example where you have multiple versions of the same document. The Team is also working with the Digital Preservation Group which incorporates University of Brighton, University of Sussex, Royal Pavilion Museums and Brighton & Hove City Council.

29. The Reference Group considered that it would be beneficial to keep a watching brief on the development of digital archives as it is likely that more digital material will need to be stored in the future, together with having the technology to access or retrieve it from different media.

Conclusions

30. Overall, the Reference Group is assured that the changes made through the implementation of The Keep Sustainability Plan will not impact on the historic record, with the KSP and Collections Policy supported by The National Archives. The savings made will leave a sustainable service which will still be able to provide high quality services. However, in the future further savings will not be possible without damaging the Service, as all avenues for reducing costs and increasing income have been explored. Scrutiny should maintain some involvement with the Service as it works to develop and implement the 5 year Strategy, and regarding any future changes to the Collections Policy.

Appendix:

Scope and terms of reference of the Reference Group

The Reference Group was established to consider the following:

- a) Manually numbered list of the lines of enquiry.

Add any note re the scope of the review.

Reference Group Membership and project support

Reference Group Members: Councillors Andy Smith (Chair) and John Barnes.

The Project Manager was Martin Jenks with additional support provided by Simon Bailey

Ceris Howard provided ongoing support to the Reference Group.

Reference Group meeting dates

15 December 2020

24 March 2021

Witnesses providing evidence

The Board would like to thank all the witnesses who provided evidence in person:

ESCC officers

Nick Skelton, Assistant Director Communities

Ceris Howard, Team Manager Archive Services & The Keep

Evidence papers

Item	Date considered
The Keep Sustainability Plan 2019/20 – 2021/22 (KSP). Briefing Note.	15 December 2020
East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Records Office (ESBHRO) Collections Policy. October 2020.	24 March 2021
Archive Services Accreditation Scheme (Leaflet). The National Archives.	24 March 2021

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