

Title of meeting:	Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision meeting
Date of meeting:	23 March 2012
Subject:	Portsmouth History Centre
Report by:	Head of Cultural Services
Wards affected:	All
Key decision (over £250k):	No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the development of the Portsmouth History Centre since its opening in June 2011 and make recommendations for future improvements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **To relocate more frequently used archives to the Central Library first floor store. These works to be funded through existing budgets**
- 2.2 **To explore the relocation of the remaining archive to more accessible space to be determined in agreement with the National Archive Council. Options, feasibility and costings will be delivered as a future report and be informed by issues of security, safety, access and cataloguing requirements.**
- 2.3 **To develop an outreach programme within existing budgets to broaden the awareness and use of the History Centre by all ages, abilities and cultures. This will be delivered by existing staff or in partnership with existing outreach teams**
- 2.4 **To develop a conservation programme for archive and local history materials identifying priorities and funding within the existing budget.**
- 2.5 **To develop a collections acquisition and disposal policy jointly with Libraries and Museums for the benefit of the Portsmouth History Centre collections.**

3. Background

- 3.1** The Portsmouth History Centre is an amalgamation of the Library Service Local, Naval and Genealogical Collections and the Searchroom which delivers access to the City's unique Archive resource. This has been developed to provide a single point of contact for all enquiries and research by residents and visitors to increase access, improve security and collectively priorities conservation requirements.

The acceptance of the report of 20 January 2011 by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport authorised the creation of Portsmouth History Centre by bringing together the Library Service's local studies collection and the most frequently used archives from the Museum and Records Service.

That report gave the background and rationale for the move. In brief:

- The unsuitability of the existing Record Office archive store.
- The necessity to refurbish the Central Library after the water damage in 2010
- The budget pressures facing both services identified the creation of Portsmouth History Centre as a way of maximising all resources, while offering best value for money.

3.2 Development of the space

The first part of the project involved the design for the space to house the joint local studies and archive Searchroom collections and for the delivery of this joined up service. A design had already been drawn up for a viewing and research room for the Richard Lancelyn Green Arthur Conan Doyle Collection and this was now extended to include a secure space for the Library Service's Historical Collections, local, naval and family history. The Dickens collection already had its own designated space. During the move back to the Central Library staff worked on the collections making decisions on the material that could be displayed on open access and that which could be moved to the library store in the basement. This work was undertaken on the understanding that this would be the first phase of the project, and the developed facilities must also accommodate the Searchroom which would relocate later in the year

An enquiry counter and staff desk was incorporated into the design giving staff oversight of the collections and also the opportunity to greet potential users. Facilities for users and volunteers were included with large study tables being provided.

The library element of the History Centre opened with the rest of the Central Library on 31 January 2011.

3.3 Archive relocation

Planning for the move of the most frequently used archives was also underway. This is a valuable resource for the city:

- The large store at the back of the Central Library's second floor was cleared of library material.

- The existing wooden shelving was removed to make way for more suitable, metal archive racking which was installed along with equipment to control the temperature and humidity of the room during May 2011.
- The National Archives Council had viewed the room to assess its suitability to house public records and made recommendations for changes that would be required before it could be approved.
- Concern was raised about pipes running across the ceiling. As far as possible the racking was placed in such a way as to alleviate this and advice was sought from AMS for a more permanent solution.
- During a planned upgrade to the Central Library's heating system the pipes will be re-routed away from this area.
- A second concern was for the risk of fire posed by the proximity of the new archive store to the goods lift and plans are underway for this to be protected by a metal shutter.
- Staff from the Record Office identified the archives to be moved to the new location and these were brought in to the Central Library during May 2011.

The Portsmouth History Centre opened in June 2011 with the combined service of the Museum and Record Office and the Library Service.

3.4 Staffing

During the period before the opening of the History Centre both the Museum and Records Service and the Library Service were undergoing staffing restructure. It was identified that the Centre would require four full-time equivalent posts. Two posts would come from the Library Service and 1.5 from the Searchroom and a further 0.5 from the Culture budget. These staff were recruited from individuals identified as at risk in the staffing reviews. Appointments were confirmed in June and July 2011. A 90 day consultation process will conclude with Portsmouth History Centre staff on 6 March to agree a shared job profile to represent all areas of the work undertaken and skills required to deliver them.

3.5 Training

A considerable amount of training was required, and is still ongoing, as staff from each service had limited experience of the other areas of work. Staff from the Record Office have had to become familiar with the library resources and staff from the library service had to learn about the requirements for handling archives. History Centre staff have identified their training needs and a training program is being delivered.

3.6 Procedures

Both services had procedures for access to and use of their collections and these have been amalgamated to cover the requirements of both services. The most taxing of these has been the requirement to provide access to those documents still housed in Museum Road in as timely manner as possible. Staff take the requests and source the material in the Records Office situated in

Museum Road and the library van driver picks up and returns the documents. This is one of the least satisfactory elements of the service, particularly as both services currently have different closed days. The City Museum building is closed on Mondays and the Central Library on Fridays. Lack of experienced staff able to locate the necessary items at these times has led to delays in obtaining these resources which can be from one to five days. A considerable proportion of archive is still located at Museum Road and this is a considerable constraint and a pressure on transport costs.

People who use the Centre on a regular basis are aware of a potential time delay in the production of documents and are able to make their requests in good time. However, first time enquirers and those from outside Portsmouth who have not made contact in advance of their visit are disadvantaged by the delivery arrangements. Investigations are currently underway to explore the relocation of the remaining archive to more accessible locations.

3.7 Off-site requests

The senior archivist has done some analysis on the requests for documents stored offsite:

Between 6 October 2011 and 6 January 2012 32 members of the public asked to see 201 original documents stored off-site.

Extrapolated over a year, this suggests that about 800 documents stored off-site will be requested by users of PHC, at a rate of about 15 per week.

3.8 Security

Both doors to the document store are locked at all times and are accessed only by staff. The public area of the History Centre is separated from the main library areas by means of a glass screen with the staff desk between the two areas of the floor. Two staff are timetabled on the desk for the majority of the library opening times. The book stock is secured by an electronic security system and the whole area is covered by CCTV which can be monitored from the staff desk.

Users are asked to provide identification and their details are recorded in a visitor's book. The study tables have been placed in such a way that documents are in full view of staff at all times. Lockers are provided for users as they are forbidden to bring large bags into the Centre. People are also required to use only pencils for taking notes to avoid damage to documents. Material delivered to and from Museum Road is recorded and signed for.

A recent concern has been the shortage of lockers which has resulted in customers taking bags and personal possessions into the Centre. Some additional lockers have now been relocated from the City Museum and the situation will continue to be monitored.

It should further be noted that the Portsmouth History Centre and Central library storage have not yet been approved as a place of deposit by the National Archives Council.

3.9 Management

The development of the Portsmouth History Centre is overseen by a steering group consisting of the Library Services manager, The Museums and Records Service Manager, The Assistant Library services manager and the senior Archivist. This group meets on a monthly basis to review the progress of the centre.

3.10 Publicity and promotion

The History Centre aims to build on the excellent Community Archives project developed for the Dickens Bi-centenary to widen access to the other archive and Historical collections. The aim is to increase the number of people using the centre and also to increase awareness across the city of the resources available. Further work is required to build a national and international reputation amongst interested parties. To this end a number of actions are or will be implemented:

- A weekly family history drop in session in the library IT suite regularly attracts between 9 and eleven people. The number is limited by the number of computers available.
- A monthly reminiscence session on different topics relating to local history starting to attract repeat visitors.
- Attendance at family history fairs
- Tours for school and other groups
- Development of friends group support and engagement mechanism for the Portsmouth History Centre. This will include engagement with the existing Museum Friends Groups which may be able to deliver this role.
- Development of guides to resources
- Development of History Centre web pages
- Development of an outreach programme potentially working with both Museum and Library Outreach workers.

3.11 Performance

The PHC has become increasingly popular and well used since opening at a joint space. This can be seen from the rising number of enquiries broken down below by visits, telephone enquiries, letters and email. Feedback from users have indicated an appreciation for the joint offer which has brought together resources previously split between the City Museum and Central Library. Researchers have been appreciative of the space and facilities on offer including access to the Third Floor Cafe. While initial concerns were expressed that some of the Library materials were no longer on open access, enquirers

have been made aware that the resources are still held in various storage areas in the Central library and are available on request.

Summary	Visitors	Tel	Letters	Email
Jun-11	649	55	4	46
Jul-11	677	193	19	70
Aug-11	818	232	6	66
Sep-11	699	180	9	79
Oct-11	757	205	18	103
Nov-11	766	200	11	78
Dec-11	482	131	6	71
Jan-12	762	194	7	82
Total	5610	1390	80	595

Achieving full access

Currently full access to all materials is limited by cataloguing backlogs in both the Archive and Local Collections area. Items not fully recorded are invisible from the point of view of any enquiry. An assessment of priorities and development of a joint work plan is required. This priority will inform decisions regarding storage requirements, in terms of providing access to un-catalogued items for the teams that will deliver this work. A further report will be brought to make recommendations for storage and future works priorities.

The Museums & Records team are currently working up a bid for external funding based on using teams of volunteers. This is based on a model used by Suffolk Archives and encouraged by National Archives.

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1** It would benefit users of the centre if more regularly used archives were available on site. Arrangements will be made for the re-housing of the library material currently held in the second floor store.
- 4.2** An outreach programme will raise awareness of the resources of the centre and increase usage of the archives and local studies collections.
- 4.3** A conservation programme will preserve fragile, valuable items for the future. This work is paid for from existing budgets.
- 4.4** The development of the stock and collection policy will identify the core stock to be collected to keep the collections up to date. Provision for this already exists in the allocation of the bookfund.

5. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 5.1** A preliminary EIA has been completed for this report

6. Head of Legal Services' comments

- 6.1** Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 the local authority has a duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, and in fulfilling this duty should have particular regard to ensuring that facilities are available to meet the general needs of users in accessing materials. The recommendations set out above would seem to support these obligations.
- 6.2** Under Part 2, Section 3, of the City Council's constitution the Portfolio holder for Culture, Leisure and Sport has the authority to approve the recommendations set out in this report.

7. Head of Finance's comments

The recommendations contained in this report will be met from existing cash limits with the exception of paragraph 2.2.

A future report will provide detailed costings for the suggested relocation of the remaining archive.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Head of Cultural Services

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Report to the Cabinet member for Culture, Leisure and Sport 20 January 2011 on the Relocation of the searchroom	http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/cls20110120r4.pdf
<i>Archive Storage Issues</i> (Culture & Leisure Executive, 20 September 2007)	

<p><i>Options for the transfer of archive collections to other Record Offices and for the creation of additional storage space (Culture & Leisure Executive, 8 Nov 2007).</i></p>	
<p><i>Additional archive storage (Culture & Leisure Executive, 3 July 2008)</i></p>	
<p><i>Joint Museum Storage Project with Southampton (Culture & Leisure Executive, 5 November 2009)</i></p>	
<p><i>Central Library Developments (Culture, Leisure & Sport Executive, 16 September 2010)</i></p>	

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by Cabinet member for Culture, Leisure and Sport on 23 March 2012

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Signed by:
Cabinet member for Culture, Leisure and Sport