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Title of meeting: Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Subject: Archives Digitisation

Date of meeting: 20 July 2018

Report by: Director of Culture and City Development

Wards affected: All All

1. Requested by

1.1 Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

2. Purpose

- 2.1 To update the cabinet member on the progress of the contract with Findmypast to provide a service to digitise, index and host, on an internationally available website, a range of documents stored in the City's archive.
- 2.2 The contract will ensure free access to the digitised documents for Portsmouth residents in their local libraries.

3. Information Requested

Background to the project

- 3.1 Portsmouth Library and Archive service holds thousands of documents and records that were currently available only to those users visiting Portsmouth History Centre and who had identified that the service held them. There is currently no online public catalogue to identify resources although this is currently being addressed with a move of the CALM Archive catalogue to Spydus, the system used to manage the library stock. The documents hold data on thousands of individuals with a connection to Portsmouth that are of great interest, particularly to family historians, both locally and internationally. Enquiries for research on these collections are received from all over the world.
- 3.2 The project identified the following aims:
- The need to widen access to this material both locally and worldwide and thus increase the use of the collections.
 - The need to maintain the security of the original documents.
 - The need to save wear and tear on the documents by limiting the amount of handling they get.

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- The requirement to generate income for the service.

3.3 The Library and Archive management team identified the following issues:

- That this project was not feasible using existing staff and volunteer capacity as such a project would take many years.
- The requirements for the material to be transcribed and indexed, as many of the early documents are in handwriting users, would find it difficult to read, and was again beyond the capacity of the service.
- The large server capacity required to host the documents, transcripts and images would put a strain on PCC IT systems and incur costs.
- The requirement to market the documents to the widest possible audience.
- The requirement to generate income.

3.3.1 The Archivists and the Portsmouth History Centre team investigated the solutions used by other archive services and identified that the majority had engaged with one of the two major family history website suppliers, Findmypast and Ancestry. Both companies are interested in adding new data sets to their websites.**3.4** The team then drew up a list of requirements for potential contractors with the following key objectives:

- To facilitate the digitisation of documents from Portsmouth City Archive, both those owned by the Authority and those deposited with Portsmouth Library and Archive Service where permission has been given for the project.
- To provide transcripts and indexes to the documents appropriate to their content.
- To provide free access to the users and staff of Portsmouth Library and Archive Service via the staff and public computers in all Portsmouth libraries.
- For digitised records to be hosted on an internationally available website with an appropriate search facility to enhance digital access and search options for customers.
- The contractor to supply copies of the digitised records for permanent retention by PCC.
- For the Authority (Portsmouth Library and Archive Service) to be paid royalties by the supplier for each use of the document images.

3.5 **Initial list of collections to be digitised:**

- Anglican, Roman Catholic, Non-conformist baptism, marriage and burial registers
- Rate books for Portsmouth and Portsea
- Electoral registers
- War exemption registers and correspondence
- Staff records for the Police.

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- Workhouse Creed registers (admission and discharge registers)
- Crew lists
- Pre 1900 medical records from St James Hospital
- Quarter Sessions papers

- Trade directories
- Court of sessions calendars
- Cemetery registers

The last two categories were added after the start of the project

3.6 A procurement exercise was undertaken to select a partner based on a detailed specification drawn up by the Library and Archive Service, with the assistance of the procurement department. As a result of this exercise Findmypast was selected as the contractor who could fulfil all the requirements of the specification.

3.7 Work to date

3.7.1 Permission was obtained, prior to the procurement exercise, from the Anglican, Roman Catholic and non-conformist churches for their material to be part of the project.

3.7.2 The work started in January 2017 at Southsea Library Archive store to scan the parish registers dated before 1916 as these are the records most in demand by family history researchers and likely to see the most use. The initial cut-off date complies with the closure periods for archives holding sensitive personal data but registers have been scanned to 1926 with the publication of the later dates postponed until the 100 year closure has finished.

3.7.3 FamilySearch, working as a subcontractor for Findmypast, supplied a member of staff and the equipment to undertake the scanning process. The people undertaking the scanning process have many years' experience of the scanning process and are well trained in handling historic documents. A few months into the project FamilySearch supplied a second member of staff to work at the Central library in order to speed up the process of scanning other collections in the contract.

3.7.4 The scans are checked by FamilySearch at their head office in Salt Lake City before forwarding to Findmypast who send images to their transcribing and indexing team in India for the transcription and indexing which is a lengthy process. The transcripts and indexes are returned to Findmypast for quality control before they are published on the website.

3.8 The first tranche of records, the parish records for churches in the Portsmouth Anglican Diocese, The Roman Catholic diocese and the non-conformist churches from their earliest records to 1916, were posted on the Findmypast website in October 2017. Both Portsmouth City Council and Findmypast publicised the availability locally and internationally on the Findmypast website and in the press.

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- 3.8.1 The statistics for the use of the website in Portsmouth have shown a marked increase in use in the first few months. Also published on the same date were the records for the workhouse. In all over 1,300,000 records were published in October 2017.
- 3.8.2 Findmypast were keen to make the War Exemption records, detailing men applying for exemption from military service in the First World War, available for Armistice Day and these were published in November 2017.
- 3.8.3 Work has been continuing to scan the crew lists of Portsmouth registered vessels for the 19th Century, rate books for both Portsmouth and Portsea and the quarter sessions papers of court records of the 17th and 18th Centuries. The pre 1918 electoral rolls and the cemeteries registers have now also been scanned.

3.9 Schedule for the publication of the remaining data sets

Parish registers	October 2017
Workhouse records	October 2017
War exemption records	November 2017
Crew lists	June 2018
Rate books	September 2018
Quarter sessions	July 2018
Electoral rolls	September 2018
Cemetery registers	TBC
Hospital records	TBC
Court calendars	TBC
Trade directories	TBC

3.10 Number of scanned images and transcribed records as of 30th June 2018

Scanned images: 489,050	Still to be added: Court calendars Directories
Transcribed records: 1,190,972	Still to be added: Quarter sessions Electoral registers Cemetery registers Hospital records Court Calendars Directories

3.11 Financial arrangements

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The work to digitise, index and host the records has been undertaken at no cost to Portsmouth City Council. Portsmouth city council will receive royalties from Findmypast for the use of Portsmouth records on their website.

3.12 Next steps

A review of the work to date will be undertaken at the end of the scanning process, likely to be the end of June 2018. PCC will work with Findmypast on a marketing campaign when the data sets are added to the host website to increase the use both locally and internationally.

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Signed by
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture and City Development

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Appendices: **None**

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