Culture & Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 19 June 2018

Edinburgh City Archives Consultation

Item number	8.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	
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Executive Summary

Edinburgh City Archives (ECA) is the corporate memory of the Council and major part of the civic memory of the city. Established in 1986 to acquire, preserve and make accessible the historical records of the Council and city, the service is seeking committee approval for a consultation exercise to understand changing public expectations and to identify opportunities to collaborate and innovate.

The results of this consultation will then inform a development plan that will provide a clear vision and strategic direction, which in turn will help realise the city archives' vast and exciting potential and ensure that ECA remains relevant, visible and fit for the ongoing challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Report

Edinburgh City Archives Consultation

1. Recommendations

1.1 Committee is asked to:

1.1.1 approve an ECA consultation with stakeholder groups to inform a development plan for the service; and

1.1.2 to note the intention to bring the archives development plan back to committee for approval.

2. Background

2.1 ECA is part of the Records and Archives Service within the Council's Information Governance Unit. It was established in 1986 to acquire, preserve, promote and make accessible the historical records of the Council and its predecessor bodies.

2.2 As the Council's corporate memory, ECA plays a critical role in supporting Council services and provides accountability and transparency around Council actions and decision making.

2.3 ECA is also a major part of the civic memory of Edinburgh and collects records of other organisations and individuals relating to the history and development of Scotland's capital city from the 12th century to the present day.

2.4 Following an extensive consultation exercise, the Council's Policy and Strategy Committee approved a five-year Business Recovery Plan for ECA on 24 February 2009 to stabilise and improve the service.

2.5 This plan was in response to concerns raised by various stakeholders and professional groups, which led to a 'Friendly Audit' carried out by the National Archives of Scotland and recommendations for improvement.

2.6 Progress against the Business Recovery Plan was reported to the Council's Culture and Sport Committee on 27 May 2014. There was significant improvement across all areas of the plan and, since this time, ECA has continued to develop within the Council's Strategy and Insight Division.

2.7 As part of this development, a new Council Archives Policy was agreed by Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 4 October 2016.

3. Main report

3.1 The 2014 Business Recovery Plan for ECA set out a vision for an archives service which was compliant with professional standards, open, accessible, and well used by Council services, Edinburgh citizens and visitors to the City.

3.2 While this has largely been achieved, ECA is now facing evolving challenges and pressures in light of legal, technological, cultural and organisational changes.

   3.2.1 The Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011, includes making 'proper arrangements' for its archival records, which are changing in light of developing professional best practice and technology. The Council's own Records Management Plan, approved by the regulator in July 2015, sets out an improvement objective around establishing digital preservation capabilities.

   3.2.2 At an operational level, the service increasingly must take in digital collections, which present major technological challenges in terms of preservation and future access. What has worked for paper, will not work for digital archives.

   3.2.3 In relation to users and potential users of the service, culturally there is a continuing shift in expectation that more content will be available online with instant and easy access to relevant information.

   3.2.4 While these developments are not unique to ECA, more local organisational challenges have also emerged, including the proposed closure of the Council's Murrayburn complex which currently houses the Council's archival records in environmentally controlled storage.

3.3 To ensure that ECA can respond positively to these challenges and issues, an archives development plan will be produced, with the aim to provide a clear vision and strategic direction for ECA. The plan will be ambitious and innovative to reflect Edinburgh's status as a UNESCO World Heritage City.

3.4 The plan will also incorporate the latest archival thinking and professional developments to help ECA achieve (through time) Archives Service Accreditation status – the professional UK standard for archives services.

3.5 However, it is critical that the development plan identifies, and is responsive to, the needs of its stakeholders. To achieve this, it is proposed that the service conducts a consultation with a wide range of individuals and groups to help shape the future direction and priorities of the service.

3.6 Given the importance of the development plan to the future direction of ECA, it is proposed that both the plan and consultation results are brought to committee for approval.

Consultation surveys

3.7 The consultation itself is intended to be as wide ranging as possible and focuses on four key stakeholder groups.

3.8 Each stakeholder group will be presented with a series of relevant questions in an accessible and easy to answer survey format with explanatory text.

3.9 Archive Survey of Individuals

3.9.1 This survey is interested in how individuals would like to interact with the city's archives.

3.9.2 It will cover residents, visitors to the city, frequent users of the service, and individuals who have likely not used the service at all (e.g. working parents, children and young people, minorities).

3.9.3 This information will be key to developing appropriate strategies to reach new audiences and the most effective ways the service can engage with people.

3.10 Archive Survey of Community Groups

3.10.1 Archives can have a powerful effect upon communities - helping them maintain a sense of identity and history.

3.10.2 Some communities maintain their own archives, while others entrust them to institutions to preserve and provide access to them.

3.10.3 This survey is concerned with understanding what relationship community groups would like to have with ECA, and what records they would expect ECA to collect and preserve about them.

3.11 Archives Institutions Survey

3.11.1 Edinburgh is fortunate to have over 40 institutional archive services within its boundaries. These include services with a national, academic, artistic, commercial, medical and religious focus.

3.11.2 Each institution has collections relevant to the city and, collectively, represent the documentary heritage of the nation's capital.

3.11.3 In a challenging financial climate, this survey provides an opportunity to explore more collaborative ways of working, as well as clarity around respective collections policies.

3.12 Archive Depositor Survey

3.12.1 The archival records under the care of ECA cover every facet of life in the city, whether political, social, religious, economic or scientific.

3.12.2 However, as the 'civic memory' of the city, ECA needs to constantly add to its collections if it is to continue to reflect the city, not simply as it was, but as it is now and in the future

3.12.3 This survey asks Edinburgh based organisations (religious and political, charitable, educational, industry, retail and technological) about what records they are creating, and to consider what records they would deposit in an archive, if they do not do so already.

3.13   While the surveys are primarily online, they will also be made available in a hardcopy format as required. Links to the current draft questions for each survey are provided under the appendices section of this report.

3.14   Subject to approval, the consultation will run from August to October and will be supported by a detailed communications plan to ensure maximum coverage and uptake.

4.   Measures of success

4.1   Measures of success will be:

4.1.1   A wide and extensive response to each of our surveys by the relevant stakeholder groups.

4.1.2   An archive development plan that meets the needs of the service's stakeholders and sets out clear priorities and objectives for the next five years.

5.   Financial impact

5.1   There are no financial impacts arising from this report.

6.   Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1   A high performing archives service will help to ensure compliance with element 6 of the Council's Records Management Plan – a statutory requirement under the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011.

6.2   The Council's Archives Policy, agreed by the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 4 October 2016 commits the Council to developing an archive development plan.

7.   Equalities impact

7.1   There are no equalities impacts arising from this report.

8.   Sustainability impact

8.1   There are no sustainability impacts arising from this report.

9. Consultation and engagement

9.1 The proposed consultation will be the most extensive and wide-reaching undertaken by the service, ensuring significant levels of engagement with stakeholders.

9.2 The service has worked with colleagues in Strategy & Insight and Communications and tested draft questions with small samples of the relevant stakeholder groups. Further engagement will be sought with Community Councils, Neighbourhood Partnerships, the Chamber of Commerce and professional archive networks in order promote the relevant surveys to their own stakeholders

10. Background reading/external references

10.1 Archives for the 21st Century, The National Archives (2009, 2010)

10.2 Business Recovery Plan, Culture and Sport Committee, 27 May 2014

10.3 Council Archives Policy, Corporate Strategy and Policy Committee, 4 October 2016

10.4 Draft proposed surveys

10.4.1 Archive User Survey

10.4.2 Community Groups Survey

10.4.3 Archive Institutions Survey

10.4.4 Archive Depositor Survey

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11. Appendices

None.