



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration and Tourism

To the 16 September 2019 Scrutiny Performance Panel –

### West Glamorgan Archive Service

<b>Purpose:</b>	To brief/update the SIF Performance Panel on the work of the West Glamorgan Archive Service and its current position with regard to its premises.
<b>Content:</b>	A general overview of the joint Archive Service, explaining its governance, its statutory responsibilities, its outreach work and the nature and extent of the archive collections. There follow responses to two questions set by the panel relating to the current archives accommodation in Swansea Civic Centre.
<b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>	Consider the information provided and to forward views to the Cabinet Member via a letter from the Panel Convener
<b>Lead Councillor:</b>	Councillor Robert Francis-Davies, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration and Tourism
<b>Lead Officer &amp; Report Author:</b>	Tracey McNulty, Head of Cultural Services / Kim Collis, County Archivist Tel: 01792 636760 E-mail: kim.collis@swansea.gov.uk

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 West Glamorgan Archive Service is a joint service for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils and operates under the general oversight of a joint Archives Committee. While not in itself statutory, the service carries out certain statutory functions on behalf of both local authorities in relation to the preservation of their records. As a result of these responsibilities, the service is regulated and periodically inspected by Welsh Government and The National Archives Kew. The 2.5 miles of archives are held in a secure environmentally-controlled storage area and are made available for inspection and for research under the supervision of archive staff. The main body of the report rehearses in more detail the above broad statements about the service.

## **2. An overview of West Glamorgan Archive Service**

### **2a. Governance of the service**

- 2.1 West Glamorgan Archive Service (WGAS) came into existence as a separate entity in April 1992 following the withdrawal of West Glamorgan County Council from a joint service in which it was a partner with its fellow counties of Mid and South Glamorgan. In April 1996, following the reorganisation of local government in Wales, WGAS itself became a joint service between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils and at the same time incorporated the independent archive service run from 1974 onwards by Swansea City Council.
- 2.2 The formal governance of WGAS is through a joint archives committee consisting of equal numbers of elected representatives from each of its two parent authorities. A number of non-voting representatives of various bodies with an interest in archives and local history also attend the quarterly committee. The role of the Archives Committee is advisory and, to take effect, any of its recommendations have to be taken back to the respective parent authorities for approval by each full Council.
- 2.3 For all financial, practical and operational matters, the Archive Service performs as part of the Cultural Services department within Swansea Council, involving when appropriate (for example where there are implications for the service in Neath) the Head of Finance and Corporate Services of Neath Port Talbot Council. Since April 2018, the scope of the service has been the archives (i.e. historic records) alone, all responsibility for records and information management by the parent authorities now being part of their respective Legal Services functions.
- 2.4 The legislative framework for the Archive Service is one based on several Acts of Parliament (listed below), and the question of whether the service is statutory or non-statutory is a complicated one. In short, the shape of the archive service is not fixed by law, but the service carries out several statutory functions on behalf of each authority with regard to the preservation of their records. Furthermore, 1994 legislation set in place a system of consultation between Welsh Government (originally the Welsh Office) and the local authorities over any significant modification to their archive services, meaning there is a degree of statutory oversight which limits the service's ability to act as a free agent.
- 2.5 The archive collections which are part of the Council's own records are required to be preserved under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972; those from outside bodies which have been collected by the service are held under the permissive powers of the Local Government (Records) Act 1962; while there is a separate category of *public records* (records of UK Government) which are held under the Public Records Act 1958.
- 2.6 The Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, Section 60, requires each Welsh council to make and maintain a scheme for the preservation of the archives in their care, both those which they own and those which they have collected from third parties. The schemes, originally drawn up in 1996, have been periodically

updated to reflect the changes to the ways the authorities deliver the service. Each scheme can only be modified by agreement with Welsh Government, who may intervene in the case of a major change (for example, a decision by either local authority to end the joint agreement). The boundary between the Section 60 schemes and the Accreditation process, described below, has become blurred in recent years, since the latter process is also administered in Wales by Welsh Government.

- 2.7 In 2016, the Archive Service was awarded the Archives Accreditation Standard. Overseen by The National Archives in England, by Welsh and Scottish Government in the devolved nations and modelled closely on the similar accreditation process for museums, the standard is based on good governance, proper care of the collections and viable models for customer and public engagement. The award lasts for six years with an intermediate review after three years. At the time of writing, the service is waiting for the results of its first intermediate review.

## **2b. The archive collections and how they are stored**

- 2.8 The Archive Service collects documents and related material (photographs, sound recordings etc) relating to the history of the former county of West Glamorgan. About one quarter of the material we hold is derived from our two parent local authorities and their predecessors. A second quarter of the whole consists of public records as mentioned above in para 2.5. Most of the public records we hold on licence from The National Archives are the records of the local magistrates courts in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. In order to license the local deposit of public records, the storage areas are designated by The National Archives Kew as a Place of Deposit (PoD) and are periodically inspected by that body.
- 2.9 Approximately one half of the collections held by the service are donated or deposited by outside bodies such as landed estates, solicitors, churches and chapels, individuals and local businesses. These are records we have collected under the permissive legislation of the Local Government (Records) Act 1962. The majority of these are considered to be held on deposit, although nowadays the service encourages individuals to gift items to the archives rather than loan them. This clears up questions about the status of the items when the depositor dies if we have no knowledge of, or contact with, the next of kin.
- 2.10 When last measured in 2015, the archive collections occupied a total of 2.5 miles of shelving (3,766 linear metres) or 603m<sup>3</sup> expressed as a volume. This volume is in line with other local authority archive holdings, indicating that the service has neither been too eager to take in material of dubious archival value nor has failed to collect material that it should have done. We are not alone in England and Wales in having a university within our local authority area that also collects archives relating to the local area. This has the benefit of providing an alternative repository for material we are unable to take in, but the disadvantage of occasional disputes over our respective collecting policies.
- 2.11 The archive collections contain a number of 'high value' items, some of which are exceptional for a local authority archive. Worthy of note is the Neath Abbey

Ironworks collection, which was purchased from the owner in 2013 after a number of years deposited on loan here. The uniqueness of the 8,000 engineering drawings in this collection, as evidence of south Wales' major part in the British Industrial Revolution, was recognised by their enrolment in 2014 on the UK register of the UNESCO Memory of the World programme. This is an honour bestowed on only five archive collections in Wales, all of which apart from this one being held by the National Library of Wales.

- 2.12 One of the questions posed by the Scrutiny Panel is whether the existing archive accommodation is sustainable if the Council decides to retain the Civic Centre. The archive storage areas are currently almost at full capacity and while an extra storage room (not equipped to archival standards) has been allocated to help deal with this problem by storing Council minutes, this shortage of space does have a consequence on the service's ability to take in major accessions. Two examples of this are:
- The service has for some time been in negotiation with the magistrates' court service over a further significant deposit of court records. We are obliged by our status as a PoD to take in these records but are having to conduct work of consolidating the existing space in order to be in a position to fit them in our storage area. As a result these negotiations have stretched over several years.
  - Several years ago, the service was approached by Inco to take in the historic records of the Mond Nickel Works in Clydach. We were unable to accept them, not because of their lack of historical value but because of their bulk. Hence we diverted the donor to approach Swansea University Archives (known as the Richard Burton Archives) who were grateful to receive them in our stead.
- 2.13 The archives are held in a temperature and humidity controlled environment, the storage area is on 24-hour security and with four hours' fire resistance. Such storage conditions are regulated by British and international standards. Being quite old in design (1982), the archive strongrooms were built to a specification in line with the then standard BS5454. Such requirements, if applied to a modern storage area, would require adherence to the European Standard EN 16893 as adopted by and incorporated into British Standard BS4971:2017. To try to encapsulate the standard in one sentence, 'An unsuitable storage environment is one of the commonest causes of damage to archives'.
- 2.14 Following a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund submitted in 2000, sponsored jointly by the Archive Service and the Neath Antiquarian Society with match funding supplied by Neath Port Talbot Council, the Neath Mechanics Institute in Church Place Neath was converted to house the archive collections of the Neath Antiquarian Society (NAS), which are now managed and made publicly available for the first time by the Archive Service with help from a rota of NAS volunteers (the collections themselves remain the property of the NAS). It is a sobering thought that several years later their former home, the Gwyn Hall in Neath, was engulfed by fire and reduced to a shell.

## 2c. Usage and outreach work of the service

- 2.15 The nature of archives and how they are used for research means that any archive facility does not have as large a footfall as comparable venues which are more set up for casual drop-in visitors, such as a library, art gallery or a museum. In contrast the 'dwell time' of visitors to an archive is usually considerably longer than that of visitors to these other venues, visits lasting a full day from opening to closing times being a common occurrence. There are alternative methods of evaluating physical visits, for example by comparing use of our service with that of archives in the rest of the UK; by monitoring trends in usage over longer time periods than one year; and by analysing the qualitative results of customer surveys. Each of these methods is treated in turn in the following paragraphs.
- 2.16 Every year, archive services across the UK submit data to CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) which is analysed for the purposes of a national report. Access to this report is restricted to local authorities who subscribe to CIPFA and, since the Council has recently ended its subscription, we are no longer able to access these figures. However, up till recent years the service typically came in at around 15<sup>th</sup> across the UK for the number of individual physical visits to the archives unconnected with any group visit. By this measure we ranked alongside Leicestershire and Derbyshire and way ahead of any other Welsh local authority archive by a margin of around 50% (Gwynedd being second placed in Wales). This popularity can be ascribed in turn to the quality, helpfulness and informality of the service we provide, the existence of a branch office in Neath which boosts our figures, and our convenient city centre location in Swansea with its regular bus services.
- 2.17 When in 2007/8 the previously rather forbidding County Hall became the public space of the Civic Centre, our user figures increased dramatically almost overnight. Taken over the timespan of a decade, it is clear that our user visits peaked in 2010/11 and then entered a period of steep decline, one which has now levelled off and to some extent recovered a little. The decline from the peak in usage can be ascribed to two synchronous developments in 2010: the end of Saturday opening, and the publication online of one of our most used family history resource, the parish registers. The latter development continued in 2015 when the service signed a major contract with the family history website Ancestry placing all our name-rich records online. The *quid pro quo* is that we now have a modest income stream through royalties.
- 2.18 The service participates in regular qualitative surveys of its customers through a national scheme which allows the service to benchmark its data against similar sized repositories and across time periods. This is now entitled the Archives and Records Association's Survey of Visitors to UK Archives. The table below represents the results of the last such survey undertaken, in 2018. As will be seen, our local users value the service they receive (as do users nationally), giving consistently high scores which at a local level are higher than the already-high national average. The only low score is an issue around the opening hours at the Neath branch which were reduced in 2017 to two days a week and which still cause some disquiet amongst users.

Percentage of correspondents who rated the service as 'very good' or 'fairly good', 'very satisfactory' or 'satisfactory' (the top two of five possible responses)	Swansea score	Neath score*	UK average
Quality of the reception area and welcome on arrival	100%	100%	96%
Attitude of staff	100%	100%	98%
Availability of staff	98%	100%	96%
Quality and appropriateness of the advice received from staff	99%	100%	97%
Opening hours	100%	58%	89%
Ease of access to use the service	100%	88%	96%
Appearance and upkeep of the building	94%	100%	95%
Physical access to the building	96%	88%	96%
Onsite computer facilities	100%	100%	96%
Online catalogue	100%	83%	84%
Document ordering	100%	100%	95%
Seating	100%	100%	98%
Copy services	95%	100%	89%
Overall mark out of 10 for your experience today	9.7	9.5	9.3

2.19 To recompense for the decline in individual visitors, the service has introduced (and in some cases continued) a number of outreach initiatives to engage new audiences, as follows:

- In 2010, the service introduced a service to schools, initially for primary schools at KS2 level but soon extending to secondary schools at KS3.
- The service has used social media to encourage family historians to break away from online research and meet up on our premises as a social group, in particular through our support for and contact with the Tr4ce genealogy group.
- The service actively participates in special events throughout the year, including family history and book fairs and other local history events. While most of the visitors to these events have only a casual interest and are unlikely to follow up their contact with a visit, these events raise the profile of the service and it is important for the service to be seen at local and regional events promoting history and family history.
- Since 2012, we have developed a series of portable exhibitions that can be used in schools and community centres. The themes we have chosen are ones which reflect our social responsibility as a public authority: they tackle issues such as race and gender equality in the context of our local history (such as the suffragist movement in south Wales). This contributes to corporate objectives and compliance with the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015: it has also led to the service becoming a major beneficiary of funding from Welsh Government agency MALD under its 'Changing Cultures' funding scheme.
- We have published books, our latest publication being a study of the post-war rebuilding of Swansea's blitzed town centre.

- 2.20 This concludes the overview of the service. Further information about the service's activities is contained in an annual report which is published online at [www.swansea.gov.uk/article/8510/Annual-Report-of-the-County-Archivist](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/8510/Annual-Report-of-the-County-Archivist)

I now turn to the two specific questions asked by the Panel in advance of the meeting.

#### **2d. What are the plans for the future accommodation for archives?**

- 2.21 The Council has been considering the disposal of the Civic Centre as part of its city centre regeneration scheme for some time, information which has been in the public domain since late 2014 and is well-known by our user community. A date of late 2023/early 2024 is now the informal working target for the vacation of the Civic Centre, a move which for reasons of the required storage space makes the archives out of scope for the proposed Public Services Hub which it is envisaged will replace the civic offices.
- 2.22 A task for the Council is to find suitable alternative accommodation for the archive collections storage area to the standards described above in para 2.13, and this is one which has been assigned to Corporate Property Services. While the public archives area needs no further specification than other Council public facilities, the storage standards for the archives are quite exacting and do not exist in the current Council property portfolio. It is a given that there are major limitations on the Council both with regard to capital and revenue expenditure.
- 2.23 Previous investigation of the potential for regional and partnership working (beyond the joint arrangement with NPT) has shown there is little appetite for a regional solution, discussions on this having failed to achieve a clear vision of where we were trying to get to. With regard to cross-sectoral working and co-location of services within the Council, there are synergies between the work of the Archives and other facilities which will also need to be relocated away from the Public Services Hub. No decisions have yet been made by the Council on any of the possibilities for relocation and co-location, which is currently at the stage of an options appraisal.
- 2.24 On a practical level, since 2014, the service has been boxing all volumes and loose material and applying barcode stickers to all boxes. This method of stock control was used by Gwent Archives in its move from Cwmbran to Ebbw Vale a decade ago to ensure that all material was accounted for during the process. Such stock control will be particularly important if no solution has been found for the archives by the time the Council wishes to vacate the Civic Centre, since a temporary solution may need to be found if no permanent solution has been found, or suitable building modifications made in time.
- 2.25 In such an event, there may need to be a 'double move' in which the most viable temporary solution would be to transfer the archives to the Glamorgan Archives in Cardiff. This was the solution used recently by Carmarthenshire County Council for its archives, and by this Council during the refurbishment and extension of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery. An informal approach to Glamorgan Archives has established that there is sufficient short-term

temporary space for all of the West Glamorgan Archive Service collections there. The rental costs are estimated at between £40-55K per annum including a £2 fee for every document retrieval (in this scenario, it would be possible to continue to provide public access to the archive collections).

- 2.26 A second temporary solution for the collections should they not have found a home by 2024 would involve putting them into commercial archive storage (for example [Deep Store](#) which is based in a disused salt mine in Cheshire). Such a solution would not provide public access to the collections which would be stored below ground in large packing crates. Costs are not currently known as no approach has been made to the company.

## **2e. Is the existing accommodation sustainable if we retain the Civic Centre?**

- 2.27 This was the second question posed by the Panel. This is not seen to be a likely scenario for the Council as it currently stands, but (as outlined above in para 2.12) this would not provide a solution to the long-term needs of the service beyond, say, the next 5 or 10 years (unless a portion of the collection was housed elsewhere).

## **3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary**

- 3.1 West Glamorgan Archive Service is a joint service provided for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils operating through facilities in Swansea and in Neath. It is one of the busiest services in Wales with a high customer satisfaction rating and has gained awards both for its good governance (Accreditation) and for holding a collection of national importance (UNESCO Memory of the World programme).
- 3.2 The archive storage areas currently in Swansea Civic Centre holding 2.5 miles of shelving are approaching full capacity, at the same time the Council is proceeding with plans to move out and dispose of the building. The requirement for change may be seen on balance as an opportunity rather than a challenge, but one which depends on good planning within a restricted timeframe.

## **4. Legal implications**

- 4.1 There are no legal implications for this report, which constitutes an overview of the existing situation with regard to the Archive Service and makes no recommendations.

## **5. Financial implications**

- 5.1 There are no current financial implications for this report, which constitutes an overview of the existing situation with regard to the Archive Service and makes no recommendations.

***Glossary of terms: Please add glossary of terms if you are using acronyms***

MALD	Museums Archives and Libraries Division, Welsh Government
NAS	Neath Antiquarian Society
PoD	Place of Deposit
WGAS	West Glamorgan Archive Service

**Background papers**

None

**Appendices:**

None