

**WORCESTERSHIRE RECORD OFFICE:  
BEST VALUE REVIEW FINAL REPORT****Purpose of Report**

1. The Panel is asked to:
  - Consider whether it is satisfied with the final report of the Best Value Review of the Record Office
  - Consider what advice it would wish to offer the Executive Committee

**Summary of the Review****Main strengths and areas for improvement**

2. At its meeting on 4 October 2001, the Cultural and Community Services Panel was asked to consider the policy options for the future delivery of the service arising from the Best Value Review and to bring any recommendations it wished to the attention of the Panel. The Panel concluded that it was satisfied with the progress of the review and the appropriateness of the issues brought forward as part of the improvement plan for the Record Office. It did, however, ask that further attention be given to:

- (i) The lack of suitable storage facilities in the county
- (ii) Staffing difficulties including lack of staff and poor pay.
- (iii) Conservation of records - an essential but high cost service.

3. These views arose from discussion of the following areas of excellence, average standards and need for improvement:

*Areas of Excellence?*

- Public Services. The Record Office is a national leader in terms of use, has a good reputation and provides a customer focussed service, for both the public and the Council's officers. It has a generally open minded, committed staff with a will to succeed.
- Record Management. The County's own administrative records are managed cost effectively and with vision towards new formats.

*Average Areas?*

- Outreach [Public Relations], and communications are good, but vary dramatically from year to year according to demand. There is a need to reach a larger proportion and wider section of the community.
- Acquisition & storage. There is little pro-active collecting of records in danger of loss, extremely limited space for accruals, and precarious tenure of storage in Gloucester.



## Background Information

### *Areas where there is a need to improve?*

- Cataloguing. Existing catalogues are unstructured, and not readily adaptable for Internet/e-government access.
- Conservation facilities were lost to Herefordshire at re-organisation. There is no real strategy to replace them.

4. The most significant and urgent opportunity is to develop Heritage Lottery and other external sources of revenue funding, especially for *Cataloguing and Conservation* but with other areas of the Record Office in mind also. This will not succeed without pump-priming help from the County Council. A relatively modest initial investment should bring enormous gains. An example is given in the improvement plan.

5. The Record Office is the corporate memory of Worcestershire County Council and, as far as possible, of its citizens.

6. There are 6 key areas of primary activity. They are:

- (i) Acquisition and storage
- (ii) Cataloguing
- (iii) Conservation
- (iv) Public Services
- (v) Outreach
- (vi) Management of current County Council Records

7. Locations: at present, the Office is spread over four geographically very disparate sites:

- (i) County Hall Record Office
- (ii) Worcestershire Library and History Centre
- (iii) Gloucestershire Record Office
- (iv) County Hall Modern Records Unit

8. Usage and overall costs. CIPFA 2000-2001 shows:

- 13,664 personal visits were made to the search-rooms.
- 39,074 personal/phone/mail enquiries were dealt with altogether [internal figures used - phone enquiries are not recorded by CIPFA].
- Full-time equivalent staff numbered 21.9.
- Net revenue expenditure per 1000 population was £396,542. Worcestershire's is 6=9 with its Nearest Neighbour group and 15=35 with all English Counties.
- Costs per visitor/actual net revenue expenditure: Worcestershire is 8/9 of Nearest Neighbours and 30=35 of all English Counties.



## Consult

- Costs per visitor /net revenue expenditure per 1000 population Worcestershire is 7/9 of Nearest Neighbours and 21=/35 of all English Counties.

9. Income. In 2000-01 CIPFA ranked Worcestershire 2/35 of all English Counties for income per 1000 population and 8/35 for actual income. Of Nearest Neighbours it is 1/9 and 4/9 respectively. The office has a formal income target of 3% of gross revenue pa. In 2000 -2001, 5.6 % was achieved.

10. Charging Policy: At its meeting on 15 June 1999, the Cultural and Community Services Committee re-affirmed once again the policy of not charging for admission (15 June 1999), but asked that further possibilities for income charging be investigated. Income is constantly reviewed, and external [Lottery] funding appears the most promising substantial source. Only 2 English Counties make formal overall admission charges. A further two make some charges for access to limited genealogical material.

### Summary of Consultation

11. A variety of nationally and locally organised consultations sought advice from users, non-users and donors/depositors of archives. Return rates varied from 86% (National survey) to 16 % (ethnic groups within non-user surveys).

12. There is a clear user profile: 75% are regular visitors, 76% are aged 45 plus, white and retired, but half-and-half gender split. 66% undertake family history research, although Life Long Learning lines are blurred because 67% say their interests have widened as a result.

### Main lessons learned from Consultation

13. Areas of excellence:

- Standards are high. Over 90% of customers feel the *level of service* to be "good or excellent" and the staff "friendly and helpful"
- Donors and depositors are substantially happy (76%) with the *terms* on which the Council *accepts* records and express an overall 81% satisfaction with the Record Office
- Three quarters of Friends said they *could find what they wanted* (although they might well need staff guidance). 95% of respondents to a national survey undertaken by the archive profession's national Public Services Quality Group (PSQG) felt the staff was knowledgeable.
- 65 % were happy with *opening hours*; [there has since been significant increase]



- At *Modern Records* resolution of queries was seen as varying from "efficient" to "excellent". Despite some inconveniences with *centralised* storage, there was no enthusiasm to disperse records back to pavilions. *Electronic records* are having an impact [paradoxically an increase in work].
- Staff SWOT analyses saw the *staff* as the Office's first main strength overall, *customer orientation* and customer satisfaction as its second, and the *records themselves* plus the *Friends/volunteers* as joint third. This clearly links with the external survey results.

#### 14. Average areas:

- 60% of users were clearly against *entrance charges* - many arguing that they already pay for the service in the Council Tax, and 75% are happy with current photocopy charges.
- There is some contribution to *tourism and the economy*. 81% come especially to visit the Record Office. 29% come from outside of Worcestershire, although only 1% stop overnight. 7% also take the opportunity to visit other places of interest, while 45% eat or shop locally. 13% use public transport. Government recognises this archive contribution to economic regeneration
- Ambivalence exists about *locations*. There is a split between those who prefer out of town (free) parking with good access to the motorway, and those who feel the town centre with its public transport facilities is better.

#### 15. Areas needing significant improvement.

- *Communication, promotion and access*.
- A large number of local people (86% in one survey) *don't use* the Office, and 45% of non-users hadn't *heard of it*. In reality the Office could not cope if they had.
- There was concern too that the work of the Modern Records Unit was not known widely enough in-house.
- The profile and marketing of the Office was identified as major weaknesses in staff SWOT analyses, (although conversely, its strong tradition of outreach was seen as strength). A quite different picture is painted in the "Comparison" section, but, nevertheless, the office clearly has a problem to address.

#### 16. *Finding Aids*

- While it is good that 75% of Friends could find (with help) what they want, a clear corollary is that 25% find it difficult to use the Office's finding aids. These simply list the content of boxes, with no attempt at putting related documents in

order, as is done at most other offices. The aim was to "get it done quick so the public can at least see something".

- With long-term hindsight and the advent of structured computer listing to allow Web access, this means almost the whole of the Office's lists are very unsatisfactory. Staff SWOT analyses raised concerns about standards and amounts of cataloguing achieved, while a Steering Group member, (formerly Secretary of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts), commented that "finding aids fail to meet the national systems and standards; ... there is a lot of catching up to do".
- The most damning returns however, are from Donors and Depositors:
  - 48% are unhappy with the detail and quality of lists produced, and,
  - a horrendous 67% are unhappy with the speed with which they are given full lists of records given or presented.
  - Despite aiming to reduce listing backlogs by 100 linear feet a year, backlogs of unlisted material continue to grow, - primarily as the result of public search-room pressures.

#### **What the review will do about them**

- Apply critical techniques to acquisition
- Improve public knowledge of the service
- Develop new records management areas
- Improve cataloguing standards
- Seek to solve accommodation problems
- Address staff and structure issues
- Work towards establishing a conservation capability

## **COMPARISONS**

#### **Summary of Comparisons:**

17. The archive profession is fortunate in that all record offices have been "banded" in national Mapping *Projects* in 1997/98 and 2000. These were commissioned by the Public Record Office (and partners) with the specific aim of establishing national, regional and local strengths and weaknesses. The results link closely with information and feedback from Worcestershire's own Consultation exercises. Detailed service questionnaires were distributed to nearest neighbour and other specifically targeted authorities. A 100% response was obtained.

#### **Main lessons learned from Comparisons:**

18. Areas of excellence:



- Worcestershire is *very well used*. It ranks 4/35 nationally and 1/9 among Nearest Neighbours in terms of Personal Visitors per thousand population,
- *External relations*. Worcestershire is 1/14 of regional record offices- although much depends on external demand and an office's ability to respond from year to year. CIPFA shows that in 2000-01 the Office rated 1/35 nationally for exhibitions undertaken. Diametrically, the previous year it was 30/35, (although among Nearest Neighbours it rated 3/9). Further evidence of this dichotomy is to be seen under "areas for improvement" below.
- All 9 Nearest Neighbour offices have translated leaflets into appropriate *foreign languages* and all work independently and with local or regional colleges/universities to provide *evening classes*. Worcestershire is the only office to have active *Oral History and Memory Recall* Projects. Both the latter are of social inclusion significance.
- At the time of survey, *opening hours* were below average( 26/35 nationally). Dramatic change since April 2001 has raised Worcestershire to 6/35.
- Document *production time* targets are the same (half-hour maximum) in all Nearest Neighbour offices. 96.5% of PSQG respondents felt that to be "good to excellent" in Worcestershire, and even more importantly, 98% felt the *quality of advice* the office gave fell into the same category.
- There are no measures available at present to rate the overall *quality of an office's archive* holdings, but in terms of *quantity of records held*, Worcestershire rates 10/35 nationally [ 5/35 if Modern records are included].
- *Modern Records* clearly are important in Worcestershire [it lies 4/35 in terms of extent of holdings, and 3/35 for items issued to departments]. Only 6/35 claim to provide a full Filing Registry which gives significant added value to Worcestershire's service provision in relation to most of its comparators.

#### 19. Average areas:

- *External relations: Access*. The Mapping projects generally rated city centre sites such as St Helen's and the History Centre higher than out of town sites such as County Hall.
- *Finance*: Worcestershire is slightly above average for Net Revenue Expenditure per Thousand Population. It is 18/35 of all English Counties (15/35 2000/01) and 4/9 Nearest Neighbours. The Library and History Centre building is likely to increase per 1000 spend in future years.
- *Staff*: Worcestershire is 4/9 of Nearest neighbours and 12/35 of all English Counties. This includes Modern Records staff.



- *Storage facilities:* The facilities at Gloucester meet British Standards. County Hall does not fully meet the BS because significant changes to fire protection systems have been required since its construction. Space at Gloucester is held only on a year on year lease [although there is an understanding that a minimum of three year's tenancy is likely to be available].
- Interestingly, Worcestershire receives a below average number of *Postal Enquiries* 25/35. This may be due to higher numbers of phone or e-mail enquiries, or (unlikely), better use of the web-site, but is more likely to be due to attitude. The office has a clear policy to advise users as fully as possible what potentially useful records are held, but not to do their research for them.

## 20. Areas needing significant improvement:

- *Acquisition:* For many years Worcestershire deliberately has had a strictly reactive acquisition policy, i.e. waiting for material to be brought to it. Detailed Service Questionnaires show most offices have *pro-active* policies [even if in selected areas of interest only]. This is a serious omission, resulting in the potential loss of valuable archive material and potentially ill balanced collections.
- Worcestershire is also shown to be lacking in *Selection Criteria*, resulting perhaps in unnecessary acceptance and retention of new material, - with storage space consequences.
- Updating the existing County Council Modern Records *Retention and Destruction Schedule* and its application to *electronic records* is an extremely urgent priority, although well in hand.
- The 1999/2000 CIPFA returns show the Office was reasonably well off [7/35] for vacant *archival storage space*, but the closure of St Helen's will almost certainly place Worcestershire at or near 35/35 in future years. It will also reflect a poor score because of the very high proportion recently stored at a considerable distance.
- *Finding Aids:* the Mapping Project (10/14 regionally), shows cataloguing compares badly [confirming the views of consultees.
- *Outreach and education.* When linked with the substantial public unawareness of the service [see Consultation above], it is hardly surprising that - despite what appears to the staff, considerable efforts at undertaking talks and lectures - Worcestershire rates bottom regionally [ 8/8] and near bottom 30/35 nationally. Conversely, in 2000-01 it was above average at 14/35. Demand fluctuates wildly.
- *Education/Life Long Learning.* Only 10 of 35 English counties have staff dedicated to this area. Worcestershire is among those who have none.



## Challenge

- *Conservation*: is the most serious deficiency of the Record Office. Only one other of the 35 English counties has no Conservation capability. Both clearly fail national Government Policy on Archives and the Standards of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. It is also the only one of its 9 Nearest Neighbours not to have undertaken a Conservation survey/assessment of holdings, although brief notes on the condition of archives are made at the time of cataloguing.
- Minor palliatives are that a Disaster Plan is complete and up to date, a very small amount of encapsulation and re-boxing work is undertaken, some binding and a little archive conservation is out-sourced, [see Challenge/Competition].
- Informal discussions with Heritage Lottery Fund have given very clear indications that no capital funding would be likely if Worcestershire continues with no Conservation capability.

### What the Review will do about them

- Attempt to reduce incoming and existing holdings by operating strict acquisition criteria
- Improve outreach activity
- Plan to build a Conservation capability.

### Should the service be discontinued, in whole or in part?

No.

21. Record Services are partly statutory ["official" records, - various Acts], and partly permissive ["deposited historic" records, - Local Govt Records Act 1962]. It must be noted though, that in respect of the latter, DETR Guidance 1999 on S224 of the Local Government Act 1972, includes within the statutory provision. records given to or placed on loan with a principal authority. The Lord Chancellor is currently supporting plans to extend statutory cover to all parts of archive services in order to clarify the issue.

22. "We believe that the making of adequate arrangements for the preservation of its records is an inescapable duty of the Government of a civilised state". [Committee on Departmental Records:Report.Cmd.9163 (1954), p.6.].

23. The Record Office has already been the subject of various Member challenges over the years. Since 1976 significant reductions or closures have been proposed or implemented on 10 separate occasions. This has always aroused considerable articulate public and media support and comment in favour of the Office.

### Why is the service maintained?



- To provide a fair and impartial record of society.
- Because the County Council needs to:
  - have legally admissible evidence of its actions
  - fulfil its growing statutory obligations in data and information management
  - know what it has done before (ie have precedent available)
  - have enough information for officers to do their work efficiently
  - ensure electronic and manual information is managed cost effectively - particularly to help electronic systems avoid overload breakdown, and that manual records are disposed of or stored as cheaply as possible
  - provide effective back cover for its e-government strategy which can only be as effective as its backup information and structures allow
- Because records embody basic human needs for personal and local identity. This encourages:
  - mental stimulation and development of learning and analytical skills in both Life Long Learning and Social Inclusion contexts
  - an understanding of self and of individual and corporate place in society
  - personal healing and wholeness. Family History, Oral History and Memory Recall projects ( undertaken in collaboration with Social Services) are all particularly relevant
- Because it is demonstrably what many citizens want. Apart from public support mentioned above, demand grows inexorably. Worcestershire is 5/9 of nearest neighbours for through the door customers, having slipped from 1/7 in 1991, having a 25% growth rate over the period (6/7). Growth rates have varied between 21 and 184%, much depending on the circumstances of individual offices
- Because it is in the County Council's own Public Relations interest. Along with other areas of Cultural Services the Record Office is overtly and frequently looked to by Members for a supply of "Good News" stories. It has certainly worked hard at providing them.

**Should the service continue to be delivered to the level it is currently provided?**

Yes.

24 It is necessary if recently regained national approvals are to be retained. When restoring their approval in August 2001, The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts made it clear informally that they expect Worcestershire to develop and implement a clear long-term strategy for Record Services.

25. The loss of approvals means:
- many types of records can't be kept within Worcestershire
  - there will be no future Government Grant Aid for purchases. Indeed the Council would be liable to repay funds received in respect of acquisitions to date.
  - the Record Office would become ineligible for Lottery funding.

26. If it is not maintained to current levels, it will be even more difficult to achieve British Standards for Access to Archives expected to be published in (2002?)

27. Staffing numbers do need to be increased (see Summary "must do" priorities). In 1976 there were 173 enquiries per FTE, in 1991 1,037 enquiries per FTE and in 2001, 3,045 enquiries per FTE:

- Responding to "up-front" demand has been the over-riding feature of work in past years. It is impossible to direct time to essential background work when customers are standing at enquiry desks; the phone is ringing or emails demanding answers.
- This immediate demand has only been dealt with by severely restricting cataloguing, communications/ outreach programmes, publications, educational and conservation activity.

28. Worcestershire's problems are exacerbated by an inability to recruit - due to:

- a nation-wide shortage of professional occasioned by a plethora of Heritage Lottery Fund scheme jobs across the country
- Worcestershire's poor pay rates. The Society of Archivists monthly Journal won't carry Worcestershire's advertisements because of the rates offered, and they have been the cause of considerable national controversy within professional circles through 2001. The cost of raising rates to national minimum standards is approximately £11,000pa.

29. All is not doom. Many things are possible and the demonstrable willingness and commitment of staff is an enormous bonus. Nevertheless, unless fundamental changes in staff numbers, training and operational structure are implemented (see Summary), the Office will not be able to rise to the challenges it currently faces.

**Should the service continue to be delivered in the same way in which it is currently provided?**

Certainly not.

30. This is an exciting time for all Record Offices. Recognition of their value for both cultural and legal purposes has become widespread due to:

- the recent establishment of dramatically improved or new national guidance and policies such as the Royal Commission's "Standards for Repositories 1997" and the first ever Government Policy on Archives 1999.
- Record Offices being targeted by Re-source (formerly the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) for significant development. The Chairman of Re-source has said, "archives need to be brought out of the shade and be given a specific hand to help it fulfil its potential. Hence the fact that, alone among the three sectors [of Museum, Libraries and Archives] we are devising a sector-specific strategy for archives, to help level the playing field". Re-source intends to
  - undertake an urgent "root and branch" review of archives in the UK which it sees as the main growth area in its domain.
  - promote Accessibility incessantly.
  - institute a further report setting out the place of archives in the learning world.

31. Worcestershire has this year created huge interest in the Record Office by successfully completing Phase 1 of the Worcestershire Library and History Centre. The Project also offers an enormous opportunity to build on joint working within Cultural Services as a whole.

32. These are exciting times too for the Modern Records Unit which must:

- quickly adapt its from its traditional manual role to include electronic records
- corporately drive and promote legislative issues relating to information
- ensure the heritage value of the Council's own records is evaluated and retained.

33. In this light, it is absolutely clear the Record Office must:

- Improve *Accessibility* to as wide a cross section of the community as possible. Better communications, a higher public relations profile, devolved service points, remote Internet access and the maintenance of at least existing customer care standards are all essentials. Above all, computerised cataloguing and re-cataloguing of previous lists must be the prime target.
- Develop *Education* resources. The Record Office has few resources but many contacts, particularly with Higher Education. Teaching aids plus direct contact through Life

Long Learning must be developed.

- Put an end to its dismal failure to provide a *Conservation* capability.
- While recognising the political needs and financial difficulties of the Council, have at least *some respite from the long-term fear of closure, or reduction*. This is not just a staff recruitment or morale issue, but also prejudices the views of potential partners who become most unwilling to place records in the Office's care.
- Change tack to urgently access external revenue and capital funding. This can only be done with Council pump priming. The urgency is endorsed by the fact that Heritage Lottery Funding is currently reviewing its long-term funding strategy and that major opportunity may only be available for the next few years.

34. Staff increases proposed in the Summary would:

- go a long way towards addressing the above
- help convince the Royal Commission that Worcestershire has a clear commitment and Strategy for its records service

## Compete

### **What public/private partnerships could be created?**

35. Existing partnerships with depositors and donors, the Diocese, Higher Education, local historical societies, the academic text publishing Worcestershire Historical Society and the Friends will be continued and strengthened where possible.

36. Proposed new partnerships:

- *Modern Records*. Partnership may be possible with external providers such as waste disposal operators, data warehouse, and Information specialists. Joint working with other Public bodies may also be possible.
- The Regional *Archives Council* has already brought partnership success in making some catalogues of records available on line as part of a regional/national "Access to Archives" project. Similar on-line/ digitisation projects are proposed.



- Agreement with the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* is currently being explored to enable Worcestershire Record Office users to avail themselves [at modest cost], of the huge international genealogical resources the latter have available.

37. The most important area of future partnership is undoubtedly in sourcing *Lottery and other charitable funding*.

- The County Council intends to make a submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable Phase 2 of the Worcestershire Library and History Centre to be built to its full potential.
- However, HLF have said informally that a successful Phase 2 capital bid will depend heavily on the submission of earlier revenue bids of up to £100,000 each for archival cataloguing and retro-cataloguing.
- The County Council will not be able to improve without the related necessary staff pump priming

**Could the service be transferred or externalised to another provider?**

38. *Every English county council* directly provides an archive service. There is no known commercial provider of a similar service.

39. *British Standard Storage* used at the Gloucestershire Record Office is rented at highly advantageous rates. Should notice to quit be given in the near future, and/or when the Record Office runs out of space for new archive accruals (likely in about 6 - 9 months), other external BS storage will be needed. The nearest known is near Bristol. It is expensive.

40. Outsourcing was seen as a likely outcome for the *Modern Records* Unit, but subsequent evidence did not support it. In addition to local authorities, seven commercial firms were specifically and successfully targeted. Full details are available, although some were obtained in strict confidence. The in-house service was clearly Best Value because:

- it is on-site and can provide an immediate response to Directorates' needs,
- its actual storage and retrieval costs were less [with the exception of one self-storage facility at a 36 mile round trip from County Hall],
- it provides considerable related management services which outside contractors did not, in particular the direct answering of queries on behalf of service units, retention and destruction scheduling, and appraisal and review.

41. Consultation with users made it clear that there is no great enthusiasm for de-centralising records to pavilions. Moreover, in future there may be an opportunity for income generation from outside the County Council.

42. *Trusts.* Work done on the Library Best Value review has demonstrated that trusts are not viable, and the same general principles apply to the provision of core record services by this means. Trust status for archives was first considered nationally and formally by the County Council in 1986. Nationally, work is going on which will ensure the possibility is kept under review.

**What market testing of all or part of the service has been undertaken?**

43. *Storage and Modern Records* services were investigated in detail (see above).

44. *Conservation: Bookbinding* (including the binding of the formal set of County Council and Committee Minutes) has always been out-sourced. It is highly unlikely that the County Council could ever be competitive for binding. Costs are regularly reviewed, although because of the individual nature of many books, it is not easy to provide standardised specifications for comparison work.

45. *Conservation: Archives.* Actual tenders were invited for the external conservation of 7 large maps. 5 record office conservation units and 5 commercial conservators were approached. Only two record offices and one commercial conservator were able/prepared to tender. One record office was almost exactly the same price as the commercial concern, the other record office gave a price 75% lower, which was accepted. It was highly unlikely to have been fully costed, and there is little likelihood that it has resources to accept commissions on a regular basis. The exercise exposed real problems in finding local authority or commercial concerns with the facilities, resources or will to undertake volume conservation work. Further problems arise in that the Office lacks expertise to write specifications.

46. *Cataloguing;* Six consultants were approached with 3 useful responses. One was approximately twice, the other approximately three times Worcestershire's in-house salary rate. There are no known cataloguers available locally. The third was not interested. A "supply pool" exists at Birmingham Reference Library, which it might be possible to link with. None would have appropriate security/storage, thus work must of necessity be done on site in Worcester. All would therefore require travelling and subsistence to some degree.

Birmingham's experience is that Pool work is satisfactory for only very short- term tasks.

### **How could the in house service be restructured or repositioned?**

47. *Modern Records.* Discussions between Service Heads have clarified the need for continued professional archive involvement in Records Management

48. *The whole Record Office.* Since 1998 Records has formed an integral part of Cultural Services. Despite some staff SWOT reservations, and inevitable occasional managerial tensions, the amalgamation has worked remarkably well. Public Record Office and Historical Manuscripts Commission Inspectors have commented respectively that: "integration with Worcestershire's Library Service - on both strategic and practical levels -hold the key to the future of the Record Office and that the Phase 2 proposal has " the added and very timely advantage of embracing cross sector collaboration and enhancing cultural services for users at a prominent and easily accessible location". This must be developed.

#### *Functional/Generalist*

49. At present most staff undertake a wide variety of tasks across the board and there is little specialisation. This has its value, particularly in providing backup cover, but it would seem logical and more cost-effective, to move staff towards a much more specific style of work. Such specialisation was proposed but not implemented by the 1993 Position Statement because although visionary, the time was not ripe.

50. Experience since then has raised the concept again, - particularly ongoing cataloguing problems and the opening of Phase 1. The latter has brought major change in search-room experience, along with almost insurmountable difficulties with rotas, opening hours and the difficulties of knowing where staff (quite legitimately) are at any one time.

51. Staff structures were obtained from 17 counties. There are wide variations in job title and descriptions, but it appears that (wholly or in part), 9 are functional and 8 general, - although one of the latter was described as "old-fashioned", while an informed professional archivist commented confidentially that Worcestershire's structure contains "anachronisms". Of the 8 Nearest Neighbour counties, 6 are functional, only 1 general and one no return. Staff consultation has also identified weaknesses in career structures at most levels. A proposed outline structure is at Appendix 1

52. It is also hoped that experience gained would pave the way for further joint functional working within Cultural Services, particularly Outreach, Public Services, Life Long Learning, Conservation, Administration and Senior Management. This would be examined in greater detail in the proposed Cultural Services Best Value review in 2003-2004. For the interim, a full review of the Record Office is proposed with a view to the possible implementation of functional working. An initial structure diagram has been prepared for consultation and development.

53. It is proposed that for the time-being, the structure be limited to the Records Service. Nevertheless, it is the intention to develop further linkages, first with Libraries, and later with the County Museum and County Archaeological Services. Prior to Local Government Re-organisation in 1998 detailed informal proposals of this nature were drawn up but consultation did not take place and they were not proceeded with because of the major upheaval of re-organisation itself.

**Could existing arrangements with current providers be re-negotiated where this is permissible**

54. The Regional Archive Strategy foresees potential in regional working, and it may be that the notion of a national archive service develops in time from that. The latter is a distant idea at present.

55. Locally, a new working agreement with the Diocese should be considered, and the possibility of changing past deposits to gifts (including copyright) explored.

**Could the service be jointly commissioned or delivered?**

56. Core services are certainly the responsibility of principal authorities under the Local Government Act 1972. There are however, possible openings for further working with Districts, other public bodies such as Tourist authorities, and within the County Council itself, especially Environmental Services and Education.

**57. "Must do" priorities in relation to ;**

- (i) Lack of storage:
- Progress Phase 2 of the Library and History Centre project with the utmost urgency; [*Improvement plan "Storage" item 1*]
  - Establish contingency funding
    - to allow the Office to continue to receive new records, albeit stored elsewhere, and

**SUMMARY**

- against Gloucester suddenly or in 3 years (at end of present agreement), requiring back the space occupied there; *Improvement plan "Storage" item*

(ii) Staffing difficulties:

- Meet minimum national pay level for archivists; [*Improvement plan "Service-wide management" item 3*]
- Provide 4 contract cataloguers; [*Improvement plan "Cataloguing" item 2*] These posts are already suggested in the current Record Office Unit Business plan
- Provide a Senior Outreach/Life Long Learning /Communication archivist; [*Improvement plan "Outreach", item 1(ii) ]*]

(iii) Conservation:

- Establish extent and nature of need and establish a strategy by one -off Conservation consultancy report; [*Improvement Plan "Conservation" item 2 (I)*]
- Buy in Conservation for the time being - until Phase 2 plans fully developed/implemented); [*Improvement Plan "Conservation item 2(ii) ]*]

**58. "Must do" Invest to Save priority**

- Establish a substantially self-funding Fundraiser (see Summary para 26; [*Improvement Plan "Cataloguing" item 3 (i)*]

59. Further opportunities to develop the service can also be taken:

- Positive change from general to functional (specialist) working, and to provide career structure [*Improvement Plan "Service - wide management" item 4 ]*
- Rationalisation/tightening of acquisition and disposition policies to ensure space is used efficiently and cataloguing standards improved; [*Improvement Plan "Acquisition" item 1]*
- Much improved Web-site access [*Improvement Plan "Outreach" item 4 ]*
- Revision of the Office's existing Education and Outreach Policies to include all aspects of Life Long learning; [*Improvement Plan "Outreach" item 4(v) ]*

**What will bring the service into the top 25% of service providers?**

60. In various areas the Record Office already is in the upper quartile. Its clear 1993 Position Statement *aim* consistently remains - irrespective of the advent of Best Value - "to seek to improve for its customers, access to and knowledge about records, while continuing to identify, acquire, store and treat



## Comments from UNISON

## Options for Consideration

## Supporting Documentation

## Contact Points

records emanating from both official and private sources".

61. In addition to the Priorities outlined above, the following targets - all achievable from within existing resources -are likely to bring the Office to the top quartile:

- Introduction of electronic records management and of corporate policies/practices relating to Freedom of Information and Data Protection; [*Improvement Plan "Modern Records" item 3*]
- Re-introduction and expansion of media activity, events and lecture programmes
- [*Improvement plan "Outreach" item 1(i) and 2*]

62. UNISON has no particular concerns with the direction of the Improvement Plan but would be sceptical about the ability to complete all actions identified as being "within existing resources". Certainly, in order to pursue some of the larger issues, it will be necessary to improve the levels of resources which are currently committed to the Record Office.

63. The Review has identified several service areas which require investment and improvement. It appears that there is a persuasive argument to address staffing structural issues, but UNISON will expect further consultation if and when such proposals come forward.

64. The references to recruitment and retention difficulties are symptomatic of many services within the County Council and demonstrate that this is a difficulty not restricted to the headline services such as social work.

65. Finally, UNISON would reiterate the need for ongoing consultation as and when proposals for future change are brought forward. This will be particularly relevant in relation to the proposed changes in accommodation for the office.

66. The Panel needs to consider whether it is content to agree the final report and the Improvement Plan for submission to the Executive Committee.

- Proposed Record Office Structure – Appendix 1;
- Improvement Plan – Appendix 2.

### County Council Contact Points

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### Specific Contact Points for this Report

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## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case, the Director of Corporate Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers and Minutes of this Panel on 16 February 2001, the Cultural and Community Services Panel on 4 October 2001 and the Cultural and Community Services Committee on 15 June 1999.