

PARTNERSHIP MODELS FOR WEST WALES ARCHIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan, Consultant Archivist

June 2015

SUMMARY

Strategic Context

Archive provision in the Swansea Bay City Region is currently delivered through three services: Richard Burton Archives (Swansea University), Carmarthenshire Archive Service (Carmarthenshire County Council), and West Glamorgan Archive Service (a joint service of the City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council).

The parent bodies of all three services have strong strategic and operational drivers providing a common need for innovative development of their archive operations. These needs include accommodation issues, audience development aspirations, funding constraints, and the ambition to exploit effectively the opportunities offered by digital technologies.

The strategic environment and successful examples of existing joint working in the archive sector make this a good time to explore partnership working as a means of addressing these needs. Partnerships can offer a range of benefits, including pooling of resources, access to new audiences and funding, and the opportunity to innovate in responding to key challenges.

To explore the potential for partnership in the delivery of archive services in West Wales the Welsh Government provided support for this initial research. The full report looks at the requirements and development needs of the potential partners, reviews existing partnership models, and appraises partnership options that will:

- enable the local authorities to meet their statutory duties in relation to archive provision;
- enable development to meet the needs of service constituencies, and take into account new ways of working and delivering services;
- maximise service efficiency and effectiveness;
- ensure any resulting partnership is positioned to achieve the Archive Service Accreditation standard.

Report findings

The research found that the services all have core strengths that must be protected and built on in any future developments, but that they also face some significant issues. These are summarised below.

STRENGTHS
<i>Collections</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unique collections which provide a rich information, evidential and historical resource• Potential for reaching out to a wide range of audiences
<i>Staff / service</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very capable staff with unmatched collection knowledge / strong core professional skills• Good reputation amongst local communities where known• Very high levels of customer satisfaction
<i>Support</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong support from key agencies including the Welsh Government, through its Museums Archives and Libraries Division and The National Archives

ISSUES

Sustainability

- Long-term sustainability in doubt due to constraints on local government funding
- Audience development

Accommodation

- Carmarthenshire Archive Service and West Glamorgan Archive Service both require new accommodation providing environmentally controlled archive storage, and appropriate public facilities
- Richard Burton Archives would benefit from additional operating space to expand use and undertake key operational work

Perpetuation of traditional service models and user base

- Limited capacity to reach wider audiences particularly local communities, hard-to-reach groups, and education audiences, working as individual services
- Lack of skills and capacity to address digital development and preservation needs

The recommendations of the report, following an appraisal of the partnership options, are that the partners explore developing a joint service together on a single site in the Swansea Bay City Region.

Potential 'Vision' and 'Mission' for a new joint service

Representatives of the services and their parent bodies have identified an initial joint Vision for a partnership service:

'Connecting global and local audiences with the documentary heritage of our areas in Wales, to enrich lives and communities by inspiring learning, research, discovery and identity.'

The Mission:

'By 2020 we will create an innovative combined archive service for Carmarthenshire Archive Service, the Richard Burton Archive and West Glamorgan Archive Service. It will be located in a purpose-built facility in the Swansea Bay City Region and will be a focus for civic pride. The new service will be known and valued by diverse audiences, bringing together our local and academic communities to foster opportunities for research and exchange. This service will professionally manage, employ and develop the totality of our rich collections to meet stakeholders' needs and ensure the ongoing curation of the region's documentary heritage, celebrating its cultural and linguistic diversity. It will radically exploit digital and analogue technologies to create a range of relevant amenities and products for audiences ranging from the local to the international. This will be a high profile organisation, grounded in excellence, with a strong service ethos and a culture of innovation from which others can learn. It will be funded from a diverse range of income streams and will be creative in how it accesses and uses resources.'

Next steps

The partners are seeking approval from their governing bodies to develop a Memorandum of Understanding as the basis for more detailed work to explore the development of a joint service.

This work would comprise a detailed options appraisal of key factors including:

- Scope of the partnership
- Location for the service
- Governance model and management arrangements
- Investment requirements / costs / funding options
- Options for local service delivery (online provision; local hubs; outreach work)