

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

24 JUNE 2010

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

MODERNISING ARCHIVES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of Wirral Archives Service since its reopening in September 2008. The report details the improvements that have been made, the challenges currently faced and recommends strategies to ensure that the Archives continues to meet expectations.
- 1.2. The recommendations outlined in sections 4-8 were put forward by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and The National Archives (TNA) in the Government policy: 'Archives for the 21st Century', presented to Parliament by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice in November 2009. The report can be read in full at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/aft21c/archives-for-the-21st-century.pdf
- 1.3. The policy 'sets out the strategic vision for the sustainable development of a vigorous, publicly funded archives sector across England and Wales'. It outlines how the world in which archive services operate has changed over recent years, with the rapid increase in the amount of electronic information being created and held. It sets out a vision for archives to aspire to in the way they deliver services; outlines the challenges currently faced; sets out five key recommendations in order to create 'a more vibrant and sustainable archive sector'; and, highlights the need for concerted action by all parties in order to secure a sustainable future.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Established in 1974 following local government reorganisation, the Archives preside over a rich set of holdings reflecting the outstanding contribution to global economic development throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – most notably the Cammell Laird shipbuilding archives.
- 2.2. By 2007 the quality of service being experienced by the people of Wirral was at a disappointing level. The Archives was failing to exploit the potential of its collections. Restricted to a public opening timetable of only thirteen hours per week, and with staffing resources of less than two full-time equivalents, a substantial appraisal and cataloguing backlog had built up. With holdings dispersed across multiple remote storage locations, retrieval was time consuming and many collections were suffering damage resulting from unsuitable environmental conditions. Direct access to collections failed to reach the desired standard, and remote enquirers were being let down, with enquiries typically turning round in an unacceptable timeframe of three months.

- 2.3. The Archives re-opened in a new state of the art facility based at Cheshire Lines Building on 1 September 2008. The move followed a major relocation from Birkenhead Town Hall and nearby archives storage in Wallasey.
- 2.4. The new facility, comprising a spacious and attractive search room, temperature and humidity controlled strong rooms and modern information technology and conference facilities, is ideally situated in central Birkenhead, with excellent bus and rail links. The premises offer optimum environmental storage conditions for the collections and ensure immediate access to the varied resources. Visitors are now able to take advantage of radically improved opening hours and the staff are welcoming school and community groups, in an effort to engage with new community groups and expose them to the rich archival heritage.
- 2.5. The Archives include those of the world-famous Cammell Laird Shipbuilders, as well as local schools, cemeteries, hospitals, local government and Poor Law records. The amalgamation of these collections into one site supports the delivery of a new educational programme, including themed workshops for a range of community groups on a variety of family and local history topics. The service began a promotion and outreach programme with the launch of revamped information leaflets and online resources.
- 2.6. The facility was designed, built and populated in close consultation with The National Archives Advisory Services, who conducted periodic visits to Birkenhead throughout the process. Their supervision has ensured that the new facility was granted status as a Place of Deposit, following an inspection in 2009.

3. ARCHIVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

- 3.1. The National Archives, alongside the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, have put forward five key recommendations to create an archive sector fit for the 21st century:
 - (i) Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector;
 - (ii) Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce;
 - (iii) Co-ordinated response to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future;
 - (iv) Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitized archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them;
 - (v) Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community.
- 3.2. This report examines each of these recommendations in turn and considers the implications for Wirral Council of each.

4. DEVELOP BIGGER AND BETTER SERVICES IN PARTNERSHIP

- 4.1. The aim is to move towards a collaborative and innovative culture for archive services whereby greater efficiency and effectiveness is achieved through the establishment of new partnerships within or between funding authorities. These partnerships could be with other cultural services, such as libraries and museums; or with partners outside of the organisations, such as Universities or other local authorities.
- 4.2. The Archives has made a number of real improvements in this area over the last two years, developing and establishing a number of key partnerships both within and outside of the local authority.
- **Local businesses** - The Archives work closely with the Invest Wirral team who help identify local businesses that may benefit from a closer collaboration with the service. One recent success was the development of a commercial partnership with Birkenhead Press.
 - **Schools** – The Archives target is to host at least two school visits per month, ensuring as many children as possible from the Borough are able to experience history brought to life through access to our heritage. Since opening in September 2008, The Archives has successfully hosted 15 visits, with more than 180 children visiting. A series of educational packs has been drafted to improve the learning outcomes for all pupils and assist teachers in meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum. Examples of collaboration with local schools include the Heritage Lottery Funded 'Rewind' project at Mosslands School and the "Parks for People" project, involving a link up between local young people, studying the history of Birkenhead Park, and young people in Central Park, New York.
 - **Higher Education** - The Records Manager is a member of the University of Liverpool Centre for Archive Studies' (LUCAS) Executive Committee. A number of events have been held in collaboration with the University of Liverpool, including 'Parks and Gardens in the Archives'; an annual tour and presentation for students; and a yearly two week cataloguing placement for two postgraduate students within the Archives.
 - **Tourism** - The Archives is a member of the Wirral Attractions Partnership. Membership ensures regular communication with other tourism and heritage attractions throughout Wirral, opportunities to participate in events and use shared resources for promotional activities. The Archives has been present at the national 'Who Do You Think You Are? Live exhibition at London's Olympia, for the last two years. Upcoming events arranged by the Partnership, which Wirral Archives Service will also be present at, include the Port Sunlight Village Festival in July 2010 and the Birkenhead Park 'Festival of Transport' in September 2010.

- **Cultural Services** – The Archives has established a number of valuable partnerships within the cultural sector, including the Lady Lever Art Gallery (recently collaborating on the ‘An Edwardian Family Album’ exhibition and events); Port Sunlight Museum; local family and history societies; Birkenhead Rotarians; and the University of The Third Age (U3A). Each of these partnerships presents opportunities for the Archives to promote itself as widely as possible, as well as delivering a service that not only meets the needs of our users but also exceeds them.

4.3. The Archives has made improvements in relation to this recommendation, it also continues to source new and innovative partners thus broadening the scope of the partnerships as much as possible.

4.4. Despite all efforts, the Archives is currently not meeting the target of two school visits per month, as a result of logistical problems for schools as well as difficulty in securing appropriate conference facilities to accommodate the children whilst they are on site.

4.5. In order to further improve in relation to this recommendation, it is intended that The Archives will:

- (a) seek out new strategic partnerships with a range of organisations in the North West in order to explore opportunities for shared resources, skills and promotional events;
- (b) facilitate school workshops at schools throughout the Borough, in order to avoid the logistical problems currently faced at Cheshire Lines.

5. **STRENGTHENED LEADERSHIP AND A RESPONSIVE, SKILLED WORKFORCE**

5.1. This recommendation aims to raise the profile of the profession and demonstrate the role and importance of archives at a strategic and national level. Active promotion; benchmarking; and making the best use of skilled, professional staff can all help to build a sustainable future for archive services.

5.2. A number of improvements have been made in this area and staff have embraced opportunities to widen their skill sets and attend training, not only within the professional sphere but also internally.

- **Organisational structure** - Wirral Archives Service and the Records Management Service relocated to the Information Management Section of the Finance Department in 2007. This has resulted in a number of clear benefits for the Archives Service. Records identified as having long term historical value are now transferred directly to the Archives for accessioning. Both the Archives and the Records Management Service benefit from the essential storage conditions of controlled temperature and humidity, as well as sophisticated fire detection and suppressant systems. Furthermore, there are now intrinsic links with Knowledge Management and the development of the electronic document management system.

- **Benchmarking** – The National Archives’ Self-Assessment programme enables archive services to judge the adequacy of their services and compare their service provision to others in the UK, on an annual basis. The assessment looks at governance and staffing; documentation of collections; access services; preservation and conservation; and buildings, security and the environment. In 2007, Wirral Archives Service was identified as one of the most poorly performing in the UK, with an overall rating of 0* out of a possible 3*. Just two years later, the service was recognised by The National Archives for its development and achievement, and was given a rating of 3* out of a possible 4*.
- **Active Collection Policy** - The Archives seeks to pursue an active rather than a passive Collections Policy. It aims to build up a range of collections which reflect all of the activities to be found on the Wirral, balancing its already strong holdings of local government and business records with collections representing leisure, sport and cultural activities. This will achieve a balanced and varied archive of historical documents, available to present and future researchers.
- **Website** – There has been a complete redesign of web resources, recognising not only the importance of the web for existing users, but also in connecting to new target audiences. A new suite of information leaflets has also been created and made available online for users to download.
- **Professional Groups** - Staff within the section are active members of a number of professional groups in the region, including the Merseyside Archives Liaison Group (MALG), the North West Region of the Society of Archivists; the Records Management Society North Group; and the North West Digitization Consortium. Attendance and regular consultation with such groups, not only offers opportunities for further partnership working but also regular training in order to keep abreast of all developments within the profession.
- **Training** – All staff working for the Archives have attended and completed a variety of training modules over the last couple of years. Such training has included Customer Care, Leadership, Management, Equality and Diversity, Copyright and Strategic Thinking.

5.3. Although the Archives has made improvements in relation to this recommendation, it continues to actively pursue the Collections Policy in order to ensure survival and authenticity of key collections.

5.4. In order to further improve in relation to this recommendation, it is intended that The Archives will:

- (a) seek out new transfers of records, in particular from sport and leisure organisations, in order to enhance collections and ensure they represent the history of Wirral, to its fullest;
- (b) continue to research and create additional web content to be uploaded to the website.

6. CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE TO THE GROWING CHALLENGE OF MANAGING DIGITAL INFORMATION

- 6.1. This recommendation aims to ensure archive services have the skills and technology required in order to face the ever-growing challenge of managing digital information, in order to guarantee that it remains accessible both now and in the future. It is recommended that this is best achieved through the establishment of close working relationships with existing Information Management functions within the organisation, to ensure key digital records are identified and transferred to the archives in a timely manner, as they would in the paper environment.
- 6.2. With Council business records increasingly produced in the electronic environment, The Archives needs to focus on the capacity to manage digital archives and continue to make these available.
- 6.3. One of the core functions is the provision of public access to local government records. Access should be provided to the records held in the centralised Council repository for electronic information (Documentum), while at the same time ensuring that information security and integrity are not compromised.
- 6.4. In order to improve in relation to this recommendation, it is intended that the Archives will:
- a) work alongside Records Management staff to develop a comprehensive migration strategy;
 - b) develop a digitization strategy to identify collections at risk of becoming inaccessible due to technological obsolescence;
 - c) develop a user interface solution, in collaboration with Wirral IT Services in order to allow public access to electronic records across the internet.
- 6.5. In embarking on a digitalisation strategy the Archives recognise the increasing expectation that traditional, paper records be made available digitally, first on computers in the search room, and ultimately via remote access over the internet. Wirral is currently negotiating for digital access to local street directories and parish registers. Wirral has joined with other archives to form the North West Digitization Consortium, a group which aims to negotiate with some of the major record providing websites.
- 6.6. Ultimately, the Archives aims to provide digital access to all collections. As the official repository, the Archives must be equipped to provide public and internal access to Council digital records of archival value.
- 6.7. Success in relation to this recommendation is dependent upon the capacity to manage these requirements of the Archives Service alongside those of the rest of the Authority.

7. COMPREHENSIVE ONLINE ACCESS FOR ARCHIVE DISCOVERY

- 7.1. The aim of this recommendation is to meet user expectations for resources to be made available online and to set priorities for the digitization of collections. Partnerships with the private sector and charitable trusts are recommended as the best way to co-ordinate the mass transfer of paper records into digital format.

- 7.2. There is currently a large backlog of uncatalogued material and some material that has been catalogued has been poorly structured. Only a fraction of the catalogued material has been inputted onto the archive software "Calm". The priority is to input all catalogues into Excel or Word, using international standards for archival description, improve the text to create a consistent and clear house style, and then block import into Calm (and also upload to the website). This will substantially improve the intellectual control over the holdings of the Archives, as well as facilitate quicker and more efficient access to collections for users.
- 7.3. The catalogues will be complemented by a comprehensive system of indexes according to subject, name and place. This will allow searching to become more productive.
- 7.4. As a result of the release of the 'Archives for the 21st Century' policy, a new professional group has formed under the direction of the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government. The group proposes, with support from The National Archives, to undertake large-scale digitization projects, involving large numbers of archive services throughout the UK. It is hoped that this will encourage services to participate and lead to the mass digitization of collections for availability online. The first project is to focus on the digitization of Schools Admissions Registers from 1870-1914 and Wirral Archives intends to fully participate in this project.
- 7.5. In order to further improve in relation to this recommendation, it is intended that the Archives will:
 - (a) tackle the backlog of uncatalogued collections and ensure all material is fully detailed on Calm;
 - (b) transfer paper catalogues into electronic format and upload onto the website;
 - (c) submit a funding bid for a National Cataloguing Grant to catalogue the Cammell Laird collection. The bid will be for a two year period and will total £40,000.
 - (d) develop a comprehensive set of subject, place and name indexes in order to further facilitate research;
 - (e) identify priorities for digitization within collections and resources to assist in scanning these items.
- 7.6. Success in relation to this recommendation is dependent upon the outcome of the National Cataloguing Grant funding bid; the number of volunteers available to assist with this major project; and the availability of adequate funding to digitize collections identified as a priority. Informal talks regarding submitting an application have received favourable feedback.

8. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL AND LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

8.1. The aim of this recommendation is to ensure archive services are 'capable of making an important contribution to improving the quality of life for local people, assisting the understanding of identity, building bridges across social and cultural divides and generally shaping better places to live'. This is best achieved through the delivery of key local government policy goals including:

- education and learning
- empowering and engaging communities
- supporting regeneration and growth
- facilitating volunteering opportunities

8.2. The Archives has made improvements in relation to this recommendation:

- **Education and Learning** – free monthly Saturday morning workshops are delivered to members of the community on local history topics. The Archives regularly delivers presentations to local and family history societies, and educational groups; and a programme of exhibitions has been rolled out. More formal learning is also represented, by hosting school visits; and facilitating work experience placements from schools and universities.
- **Empowering and Engaging Communities** - Through the establishment of the Friends Group, users are provided with a regular forum to discuss and offer feedback on the services offered by Wirral Archives. Users are therefore empowered to directly feed into the delivery of services.
- **Supporting Regeneration and Growth** - Wirral Archives is an active member of the Wirral Attractions Partnership, to increase tourism to Wirral. The Service works closely with the History and Heritage Association in order to market Wirral as a destination for heritage tourism. For example, archaeological work will shortly be underway to determine whether Bromborough was the site of the Battle of Brunanburh in 937, and Wirral Archives intends to be fully involved in promoting this project. Guided tours of Birkenhead Priory are also offered as part of the annual Heritage Open Days.
- **Facilitating Volunteering Opportunities** – The Archives currently runs a successful Volunteer Programme offering placements to students interesting in pursuing archives as a career, members of the community who are interested in contributing to the delivery of the archive service to others; and work experience placements from local schools.

8.3. In order to further improve in relation to this recommendation, it is intended that the Archives will:

- (a) continue to offer work experience placements for children attending schools in the Borough;

- (b) facilitate the publication of a quarterly newsletter, on behalf of the Friends of Wirral Archives
- (c) offer advice and research guidance to heritage groups regarding the history of key places of interest in the Borough;
- (d) broaden the Volunteer Programme to accommodate those who have been long-term unemployed and offer them the opportunity to increase their confidence in returning to the workplace

8.4. Success in relation to this recommendation is dependent upon the capacity to accommodate as many work experience placements and volunteers as possible.

9. NEXT STEPS

9.1 It is proposed to implement the various recommendations as set out in section 4 to 8 above and in particular:-

- (i) Work with colleagues and partners to develop the Archives in line with the Archives for the 21st Century guidance document.
- (ii) Implement the Archives Service Strategy – see Appendix 1.
- (iii) Submit a Heritage Lottery bid to secure funding to facilitate the cataloguing of The Cammell Laird collection.

10. ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no asset management implications in this report.

11. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 A successful Heritage Lottery Bid would fund a fixed term post, of an experienced Cataloguer, over a two year period. The bid will be for £20,000 funding for year 1 and £20,000 for year 2.

12. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. The Archives is fully accessible from Canning Street under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

12.2. There are no Equal Opportunities implications in this report relating directly to women, the elderly or people from racial minorities.

13. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

13.1. There are no Development Control implications in this report.

14. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no community safety implications in this report.

15. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. The proposals will ensure the Council is successful in meeting all statutory obligations with regards to the retention of and access to the information it creates, uses and maintains. This will include the rights of access to information afforded to citizens under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

16. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1. There are no Local Agenda 21 implications in this report.

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1. Archives for the 21st Century - Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice - November 2009.
- 17.2. Archives for the 21st Century In Action - The National Archives and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council - March 2010.

18. LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 18.1. Wirral Archives Service is situated in the Birkenhead and Tranmere ward.

19. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 19.1. That the Cabinet consider this report in the context of the Archives for the 21st Century policy and agree the recommendations as outlined in paragraphs 4 to 8.
- 19.2. That the Cabinet endorse the Wirral Archives Service Strategy 2010/2011.
- 19.3. That the Cabinet agree to the submitting of a bid for the cataloguing of The Cammell Laird Collection,

IAN COLEMAN
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

WIRRAL ARCHIVES SERVICE - STRATEGY 2010-2011

Scope and Purpose

This strategy sets the vision and direction for Wirral Archives Service (The Service) as it continues to build on the improvements made since its reopening in September 2008. The strategy links with the wider strategies of the Finance Department and the Council as a whole. The strategy will be reviewed and updated annually or earlier if deemed necessary.

This, the third strategy produced by The Service, has been written to reflect the five recommendations of the government policy: '*Archives for the 21st Century*', presented to Parliament in November 2009:

1. Develop bigger and better services in partnership – working towards increased sustainability within the sector;
2. Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce;
3. Co-ordinated response to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future;
4. Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitized archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them;
5. Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community.

The Vision

The vision for Wirral Council is to provide a first class archives service, which promotes the highest levels of customer service and customer satisfaction from the largest number and widest range of users. These users will comprise a diverse and inclusive group, from family historians and school parties to academics and enthusiastic members of the public, who have an interest in archives. The Service will be a useful resource for other professional researchers including in-house researchers.

The Service will provide an excellent professional service with high customer standards, whether they visit in person or choose to utilise our services remotely. The Service is not only available to residents of Wirral but to worldwide enquirers as well. We offer a complete Service to all, including answering enquiries, a research facility and the active promotion of the archive collections.

The Mission

To stimulate the excitement of historical discovery for the communities of Wirral and beyond, inviting and encouraging all ages and all users, demonstrating our inclusive Service for all.

1. DEVELOP BIGGER AND BETTER SERVICES IN PARTNERSHIP

The Service aims to move towards an increasingly collaborative and innovative culture whereby greater efficiency and effectiveness is achieved through the establishment of new partnerships within or between funding authorities.

The Service will look to focus on the following two key areas over the next twelve months:

Strategic Partnerships

The Service will actively seek out new strategic partnerships with a range of organisations in the North West in order to explore opportunities for shared resources, skills and promotional events.

The Service, in consultation with other Record Offices, and the Invest Wirral team; will continue to investigate all possible commercial partners, both locally and nationally throughout 2010.

School Visits

The Service will aim to meet its target of facilitating two school visits per month and avoid the current logistical problems currently faced at Cheshire Lines; by visiting schools throughout the borough, and facilitating educational workshops at the schools.

2. STRENGTHENED LEADERSHIP AND A RESPONSIVE, SKILLED WORKFORCE

The Service aims to continually raise its profile and demonstrate the role and importance of archives at a strategic and national level. Active promotion; benchmarking; and making the best use of skilled, professional staff within the Service will all play a part in helping to build a sustainable future.

The Service intends to focus on the following five key areas over the next twelve months:

Active Promotion

The Service will extend the current range of information leaflets, with three new leaflets, to be made available by the end of 2010. The titles are:

1. Birkenhead Park
2. Cammell Laird Shipbuilders
3. Local Newspapers of Wirral

Website developments are also underway. The Service will continue to liaise with the Press and PR department over the next year, to research and create additional content to be made available online.

Research Service

A Research Service was introduced to researchers from May 2010. Terms and Conditions have been approved and promotion of this new service is currently underway.

Active Collection Policy

The Service has collated details of potential depositors and will continue its programme of contacting them throughout 2010-2011. In this way, the Service can actively seek out collections

to be added to current holdings, and in doing so ensure that the holdings reflect the social history of Wirral in the widest possible way. It is also necessary to actively pursue the Collections Policy in order to ensure survival and authenticity of key collections in Wirral.

Benchmarking

The Service will complete the annual The National Archives Self-Assessment questionnaire in July 2010, with a view to highlighting improvements made by the Service over the last twelve months. Results will be published in early 2011.

Staff Training

Staff will continue to represent Wirral on a range of professional groups in the region. Staff will also look to attend any relevant training courses in order to ensure that they remain aware of all current professional developments.

3. CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE TO THE GROWING CHALLENGE OF MANAGING DIGITAL INFORMATION

The Service aims to ensure it has the skills and technology required in order to face the ever-growing challenge of managing digital information, in order to guarantee it remains accessible both now and in the future.

The Service intends to focus on the following four key areas in relation to the management of digital information:

Migration Strategy

The Service is increasingly required to manage digital records, both those created internally by the Council and those from external depositors. Currently, digital files from depositors are generally stored on storage media such as CDs or DVDs. In order for the digital information on these formats to remain accessible through available hardware and software, it must periodically be migrated to new storage media, and even new data formats. Archives staff will work alongside Records Management staff to develop a comprehensive Migration Strategy during 2010, in order to ensure that this information remains accessible in the future.

Digitization/Digital Records Strategy

The Service has an active presence on the North West Digital Preservation Group, which pools local professional experience to meet administrative challenges associated with archival records created digitally. The group's central objective is to consider how digital issues impact on all archive-tasks, and to produce guidelines, not only for professional archivists, but also for external record creators. Without such active, immediate consideration of digital preservation issues, there is a real danger that important records will not survive.

A Digitization Strategy will be researched and drawn up in order to identify collections at risk of becoming inaccessible due to technological obsolescence. It will also detail the challenges currently faced by The Service and how it intends to meet them.

Management of 'Born Digital' Records

The Service will submit a business case for the effective management of 'born digital' records within the organisation, to the project staff responsible for developing and rolling-out Documentum across the organisation. This will ensure records that have long-term historical value, but are created in the electronic environment, are appropriately transferred to The Service for long-term preservation.

Public Access to Electronic Information

As well as developing strategies to effectively manage 'born digital' records within the organisation, it will also be necessary to develop a user interface solution, in collaboration with Wirral IT Services, in order to allow public access to electronic records across the internet, whilst also ensuring information security and integrity are not compromised.

4. COMPREHENSIVE ONLINE ACCESS FOR ARCHIVE DISCOVERY

The Service aims to meet ever-increasing user expectations for resources to be made available online at a time that suits them, and to set priorities for the digitization of its collections.

The Service intends to focus on the following three key areas in order to meet these expectations:

Cataloguing

The Service will begin to tackle the backlog of uncatalogued collections and ensure all material is detailed on Calm. The immediate aim will be to transfer all existing catalogues into Excel or Word, using international standards for archival description, and then upload them to the website. This will substantially increase the amount of resources we have available for users online whilst at the same time allowing staff to begin cataloguing the remaining collections.

Each catalogue will be provided with a full Collection Level Description, comprising a summary history of the organisation or individual, and a description of how the catalogue is arranged. Research into the development of a comprehensive subject, place and name index will also continue in 2010, in order to complement the improved catalogues.

Examples of best practice and house style for entries onto Calm will be added to the Office Manual, in order to ensure all information made available online is done so in a consistent and clear manner.

Box listing of all accessioned and unaccessioned material will continue throughout 2010. This will substantially improve the intellectual control over the holdings of The Service, as well as facilitate quicker and more efficient access to collections for users.

Digitization

The Service is currently negotiating for digital access to local street directories and parish registers, both major collections used heavily by local and family historians. If negotiations are successful, it is intended that users will have search room computer access to digitized versions of these records by the end of 2010.

The Service has also joined with many of the region's other archives to form the North West Digitization Consortium, a group which aims to negotiate with some of the major record providing websites from a position of size, and therefore advantage. The Consortium is currently undertaking a project to have school registers digitized.

Priorities for digitization within collections and resources to assist in scanning these items will be identified throughout the year.

Funding

Owing to the Cammell Laird Shipbuilding Company Ltd's overwhelming local and national importance, it is intended that the Service will apply for a National Cataloguing Grant in order to catalogue this collection and make it available to as many users as possible, online. If successful, the aim will be to employ a full time, experienced cataloguing archivist, funded by the Grant, on a fixed term contract, for two years. The deadline to the first stage of the application process is 11 June 2010.

5. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL AND LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

In order to ensure that The Service continues to make a real contribution to the lives of Wirral citizens, it aims to further assist with the delivery of key local government policy goals over the next twelve months, including:

- Education and Learning
- Empowering and Engaging Communities
- Supporting Regeneration and Growth
- Facilitating Volunteering Opportunities

The Service will maintain and aim to further increase its number of visitors and enquirers, including group visits by family and local history societies, school visits to the archives and Saturday morning workshops. It will also look to support tourism and regeneration opportunities throughout the borough and expand the successful Volunteer Programme.

Education and Learning

The Service intends to produce a series of education packs for use during school visits. Each education pack will include a lesson plan, copies of documents drawn from our holdings, and guidance for activities.

The following education packs will be available by September 2010:

- Medieval Wirral
- Tudor and Stuart Wirral
- Victorian Childhood
- Wirral during the Agricultural and Industrial Revolution
- Wirral and the First World War
- Wirral and the Second World War

Empowering and Engaging Communities

A Friends Group was established in April 2010, with clear aims to provide special events for users who wish to be associated with the historical archives of the Wirral; act as a forum for users to discuss and provide feedback on the services offered; and act as a focus for fund raising.

The Friends Group, alongside The Service, will publish a quarterly newsletter, to contain news of:

- service improvements
- the latest National Archives self assessment results
- newly completed catalogues
- significant new acquisitions
- recently conserved items
- upcoming exhibitions, events and workshops; including activities of volunteers
- staff changes, including introductions to new staff and goodbyes to leaving staff

It will also contain special features, including:

- interesting extracts from the archives
- 'on this day' extracts from newspapers
- articles on types of record, periods of Wirral's history, topics for research, etc.

Supporting Regeneration and Growth

The Service is a member of the Wirral Attractions Partnership. Membership ensures regular communication with other tourism and heritage attractions throughout Wirral, opportunities to participate in events and use shared resources for promotional activities, including the publication of a Wirral Attractions leaflet. The Service will be present at the following events this year:

- The Port Sunlight Village Festival in July 2010
- The Birkenhead Park 'Festival of Transport' in September 2010

The Service will also continue to work closely with the History and Heritage Association in order to market Wirral as a destination for heritage tourism. This year, The Service will once again offer guided tours of Birkenhead Priory as part of the annual Heritage Open Days and will seek to promote Wirral as the site of the important battle of Brunanburh (Bromborough) in 937.

Facilitating Volunteering Opportunities

The Service will continue to liaise with the Council's Learning and Achievement Branch to continue to offer work experience placements for children attending schools in the borough.

The Service will also investigate the possibility of broadening the Volunteer Programme to accommodate those who have been long-term unemployed and offer them the opportunity to play a key part in delivering some of the aims and objectives outlined in this Strategy.

Challenges facing the Service

1. To tackle the backlog of uncatalogued collections and increase the amount of resources available online, using existing resources.
2. To successfully gain a National Cataloguing Grant in the present financial climate.
3. To facilitate access to archival records held within an electronic environment, without compromising information security and integrity.
4. To manage the challenges posed by 'born digital' records whilst at the same time, meeting the requirements of the rest of the authority.
5. To identify adequate funding in order to digitize collections that have been identified as a priority.
6. To accommodate as many work experience placements and volunteers as possible.
7. To meet the target of facilitating two school visits per month, in order to ensure as many children as possible, experience history brought to life through access to their heritage, in light of the logistical problems currently faced.

May 2010

Next Review Date: May 2011