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ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 4th SEPTEMBER 2023

COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND ACCESS POLICY FOR
THE RECORD OFFICE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND
RUTLAND

MINUTE EXTRACT

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities on the revised Collections and Development Policy and Access Policy for the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR), which were a requirement for archive accreditation and would support the Record Office's accreditation submission to The National Archives on 8 November 2023. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion and questions, the following points were noted:

- i. In response to questions raised, Members were informed that the Records Office would not accept material that did not fall within the geographical boundaries of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.
- ii. Regarding digital access to records Members heard that some, such as family history records, had been digitised to a high standard through working with partners, and could be accessed through home computers, in libraries or within the Record Office itself. Other records received which were not in a digital format, posed a challenge as resources were limited to invest in facilities that could ensure these were digitised and made accessible to a high quality for decades to come.
- iii. Members raised concerns about limited storage availability at the current Records Office in Wigston, particularly for documents that needed to be stored in specific conditions. The Director assured Members that the professional staff at the Records Officers were in a position to make assessments of the different types of material held and identify those that needed to be in controlled conditions, and those that could tolerate conditions that did not need, for example, climate control. Methods such as using archival boxes and tissue paper added for the protection of items when not in use were sometime suitable alternatives.
- iv. Members questioned what progress had been made in the development of the Eastern Annex and raised concerns that the time it would take to get this facility operational given the desperate need for appropriate storage capacity. The Committee raised particular concerns about the risk to the Authority in losing its accreditation. The Director said the timescale for the development was actively

being worked on and there was an expectation that a report on future proposals for the Collections Hub and Records Office would be brought to Committee at its November meeting. However, Members noted with concern that it would likely be five years before the new facility became available, and there would therefore be a period when these Policies were in place but the Council might not be able to be 100% compliant.

- v. In response to a Member question, it was reported that overflow storage had been used in the Eastern Annex, which was also reaching capacity, but fortunately levels of incoming material had been of a modest amount. It would, however, be a challenge to accommodate a large archive of multiple boxes until the new facility was in place. The Director provided some reassurance that the Council could fulfil its responsibilities around accepting statutory records in the short term. It was noted that there were some strategies around sampling, but this would only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances.
- vi. In response to a Member query, it was explained that the Records Office was a partnership provision managed by the County Council, with an annual contribution for provision from all three partners. The strong rooms held material from all three partners. Different models had been looked at in the past with partners, but a partnership approach provided the most efficient model.
- vii. The Committee was unanimous in highlighting its view that the preservation of records in an acceptable storage space with access for members of the public was essential, and that it supported the Cabinet Lead Member, Mrs. Radford, in seeking the development of the Eastern Annex as a priority.
- viii. The Committee agreed that the biggest risk to the Council if the Eastern Annex development was not delivered within a reasonable timescale would be running out of space and therefore the risk of having to refuse a collection, and the loss of the Council's accreditation which would have financial implications for the Authority.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the revised Collections Development Policy and Access Policy, for the Record Officer for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR) be noted;
- b) That the comments now made by the Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 15 September 2023;
- c) That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee unanimously supports the need for the Authority to preserve local records from across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and to retain its accreditation and therefore requests that proposals for a new records storage facility be prioritised.