

RECORDS OFFICE
BEST VALUE REPORT
2002

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

This report sets out the findings of the review of the Isle of Wight Council's Archive Services which was carried out between April and November 2002.

1.2 The Aim of the Review

To look at the policy and practices of the archive service all through the Isle of Wight Record Office and to establish what improvements could be achieved in line with Best Value.

1.3 The Objectives of the Review

To identify and challenge the Archive Services current provision for all its users.

To identify and challenge how the service meets the corporate objectives of the Isle of Wight Council.

To establish through consultations with key stakeholders what the service's objectives for the future should be.

To compare performance in terms of quality and value for money with other service providers.

To produce an Improvement Plan for the next five years.

1.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations have arisen from an analysis of the evidence presented within the Best Value Review report and the appendices which accompany it. The recommendations are grouped within five main areas:

1. Upgrade the accommodation and facilities provided by the Record Office.
 - When planning new Record Office, give consideration to the extent to which local history material could be delivered from one single site, and the range of facilities to be provided.
 - Identify suitable location for a new Record Office and likely funding sources.
 - Address issue of immediate storage requirements of the Record Office, before new building becomes available.
 - The present building needs to be prepared for the Disability Discrimination Act.
2. Measures to improve the conservation and preservation of documents.
 - Establish best means of implementing conservation priorities.
 - Find external support for funding of conservation work.
 - Increase range of documentary sources made available by quality copies of the originals.

3. To improve physical and intellectual accessibility of collections, along with the standards of collection management.
 - Policies in the fields of collection management and conservation need to be updated.
 - Funding for training and staff cover during training, is needed to keep staff abreast of developments in the archive world.
 - The office needs to make greater use of Information Technology to improve collection management and make information about collections on-line.
 - A larger number of catalogues and indexes need to be made available on-line to help remote access of the service.
 - Microfilm / microfiche viewers need to be updated as part of a rolling programme of improvements to equipment.
 - Improved IT facilities are required for both staff and public.
 - The increases in the backlog of cataloguing needs to be addressed, maximising resources available for this work, and identifying possible sources of additional funding.
 - The Record Office needs to review its opening hours, investigating the feasibility of introducing some evening or weekend opening.
 - Improvements need to be made in the publicizing and signposting of the service
 - The officer should seek the means to fund a new post of strongroom assistant to help improve strongroom management and security.

4. Ensuring the presentation and proper management of records that may be at risk of destruction.
 - The record officer should investigate the resourcing of projects to survey archive holdings at present outside its custody, to help ensure their future survival.
 - The office should expand its advisory role to the custodians of other archives on the island.
 - Investigate feasibility of creating single control store for Records Management for the local authority to consolidate the work already being undertaken through a survey of local government records.

5. Development of stronger relations with the community.
 - Greater use of volunteers by the Record Office should be considered, possibly in conjunction with other services.
 - Consider establishment of a friend's organisation which could bring in funding from a wider range of sources, including the possibility of Trust status for such a support group.

1.5

Area for Improvement: SAFEGUARD THE COLLECTIONS PART 1**UPGRADE ACCOMMODATION AND FACILITIES PROVIDED BY RECORD OFFICE**

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
1a) Carry out research into Record Office, scooping the facility needed	Richard Smout	Feb 2003 April 2003		£30K one off	Report Commissioned Report produced Range of facilities to be provided agreed	1,3	1
1b) Find element of funding needed from council for new Record Office	John Metcalfe	Oct 2003	£3500K	£15K	Council's contribution secured – bid to grant making bodies made. Aiming for grant of 65% - 75% of cost	1,3,6	1
1c) Locate and find funding for temporary accommodation for material which will not fit within main Record Office building	Richard Smout John Metcalfe	June 2003		To be identified £60K (?)	Overflow material moved into new site	1,3,6	1
1d) Prepare present building for Disability Discrimination Act 2001	Property Services	April 2004	Awaiting property services report		Office meets requirements of Disability Discrimination Act 2001	2,3	1

Priority Levels 1 = Highest
6 = Lowest

Area for Improvement: SAFEGUARD THE COLLECTIONS PART 2**CONSERVATION**

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
2a) Establish best means of implementing conservation priorities	Richard Smout	Oct 2003		To be identified neutral > 18K	Report produced Decision reached on whether to continue to purchase in this service, or have paper conservation carried out in house	3,6	2
2b) increase range of material made available via quality copies of originals	Richard Smout	Dec 2004		£15K	Microfilms purchased of at least 50 years of an Isle of Wight newspaper. Outside funding for 30% to 50% of cost obtained	3	3

**Area for Improvement: TO IMPROVE PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL ACCESIBILITY OF COLLECTIONS,
ALONG WITH THE STANDARDS OF COLLECTION MANAGEMENT**

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
3a) Increase number of formal policies to be put in place within Record Office	Richard Smout	June 2003		Revenue neutral	Revise / complete collecting policy and conservation strategy	3,6	2
3b) Increase professional skills of staff by improving level of resources for training	Richard Smout	June 2003		1/2K	All staff to have attended at least one training event geared to improving knowledge of sources/archive issues	3	4
3c) Computerise collections database, and begin to make available collection level descriptions on line (see also 3)	Richard Smout	July 2003 Oct 2003 March 2004	15K	3K	Purchase of CALM 2000 system. Computerization of accessioning records, 1985-2002. Place 500 more pages of catalogue on internet	1,3	2
3d) Set up Replacement Programme for microfilm/fiche machines	Richard Smout	Sept 2003		2K	Purchase of two replacement film/fiche machines per annum with improvements to image	3	5

**Area for Improvement: TO IMPROVE PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL ACCESIBILITY OF COLLECTIONS,
ALONG WITH THE STANDARDS OF COLLECTION MANAGEMENT**

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
3e) Upgrade current IT equipment	Richard Smout	Sept 2003		15K	Update two machines currently in use	3	3
3f) Reduce cataloguing backlog	Richard Smout	Jan 2004		10K	Find Partnership funding for professional post to reduce backlog of cataloguing from current backlog of at least 12 years work to 10, 50% funding sought	1,3,6	3
3g) Investigate options for opening hour of Record Office	Richard Smout	May 2003		To be identified up to 10K	Report on proposed changes to hours submitted for approval	1,3	5
3h) Find new means of publicizing / signposting the service	Richard Smout	Nov 2003		2K	New signage from Fairlee Road, Town Quay and improved signage in hall of Record Office	3	6

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
3i) Improve efficiency and quality of Strongroom management and security	Richard Smout	March 2004		15K	Appointment of Strongroom Assistant	2,3,6	3
3j) Appointment of member of staff to input data relating to Record Office holdings including indexes	Richard Smout	March 2004		15K for 2 years	Appointment of inputter (Two year project)	2,3,6	4

Area for Improvement: ENSURE THE PRESERVATION, AND PROPER MANAGEMENT OF RECORDS THAT MAY BE AT RISK OF DESTRUCTION

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
4a) Investigate feasibility of creating single centre store for Records Management for the Authority	Richard Smout	July 2004		To be identified Not until 2004/5	Feasibility report produced. Decision made	1,3	4
4b) Expand advisory role to other archive custodians	Richard Smout	Dec 2004		None	Advice given to a dozen individuals / organizations	3	3
4c) Obtain funding for project to survey group of archive holdings currently outside custody of Record Office to help ensure future survival	Richard Smout	May 2004		2K	Survey of parish council records commenced	1,3	4

Area for Improvement: DEVELOPMENT OF STRONGER RELATIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives	Priority Level
			Capital	Revenue			
5a) Consider establishment of Friends Organization, and greater use of volunteers, in conjunction with other parts of Community Development	Richard Smout	Dec 2003		Revenue	Organization set up. 80 members. Programme for volunteers in place with quality control	1,3	5

2.0 CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY PLAN, AND TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

There are important links between the work of the County Record Office, and both of these plans/objectives. These links are not always immediately apparent, but documentation about the past, whether about decisions made, or the nature of earlier communities, and landscapes, is always an important element in informing the policies which need to be framed for the future. The links are set out below.

2.1 LINKS TO THE COMMUNITY PLAN AND CORPORATE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

The Community Plan lays out seven main themes. Aspects of the contribution of the archive service to each are listed below:

1) Guaranteeing our Quality of Life and Sustainability.

Documents act as the memory of a community and as such are important in reinforcing a sense of identity and belonging. Archive material provides a database of information about land use, the existence of key features such as hedgerows, coastal erosion rates, and climate change. Without such information it is difficult to assess the nature and rate of change taking place.

2) Improving Access to services.

The archive service is provided free to all users, and is a service which has a particularly high take up rate among people within community.

Documentary material can be an aid to reminiscence, and keeping minds stimulated. Although the service is provided from a central office, in Newport, talks are given to a range of groups and Societies to make the service more accessible. The development of a web site will also assist with this aim.

3) Promoting Equality

The service is provided on an equal basis to all individuals but its central location and opening hours means there are issues to address in getting the service out to those in full time work, or with mobility/transport difficulties.

4) Supporting Jobs and the Local Economy

This is principally achieved through support for the Tourism sector (see theme 6). Information on previous land-use informs decisions about the siting of offices/factories.

5) Developing learning and skills

The County Record Office is an important educational resource, which can be utilised for both school-based education, and life-long learning. Information about the past helps us to interpret the development of the communities on the Isle of Wight, and the landscape in which they are set, they help to inform the decision-making process. Schools make use of archive material held by the office for a range of topics including Local History, and studies of the Victorians, World War One and coastal erosion. Annual WEA classes are run on the use of archival material to study particular topics, and the office participates in Adult Learning and Family Learning events, as well as offering opportunities to individual students in the form of work experience.

6) *Developing Tourism*

The Record Office regularly attracts a small but significant number of visitors to the Isle of Wight, who have come specifically to study material held within the office. Most visitors from mainland UK come in the summer months, but numbers of overseas visitor, in the February 2001, survey, the Record Office was the main reason for wishing to visit the islands. There is clearly scope for considering the all year around attraction of family history to help develop a long tourist season.

7) *A Quality Built Environment*

Photographs, maps, prints, and building control/architect's plans all help to show a building's original lay-out and design. Records can also provide information on building materials and their exploitation. All of these elements help to protect and restore the character of island settlements. Photographic evidence of street furniture in some towns has been used to try to ensure that any attempts of restoration are carried out in a manner in keeping with the character of the town.

2.2 CORPORATE PLAN

1 *Improving health, housing and the quality of life*

The sources held by the Record Office help to inform local people about issues affecting health and housing, particularly in terms of the preservation of building plans, and records relating to drainage and sewage. Archives can be used to help in reminiscence therapy, and in common with other services in Community Development enhance the quality of people's lives.

2 *Encouraging job creation and economic prosperity*

This is largely achieved through the contribution that the office makes to tourism.

3 *Raising education standards and promoting lifelong learning*

This links directly to theme 5 in the Community Plan.

4 *Creating safe and crime-free communities*

Historic records can show the nature of crime in the past, and the conditions in which it took place. By adding a sense of perspective they can play a role in changing people's perception of crime, reminding people of previous ages in which crime was a major issue and the responses made to this. Thus correspondence shows a range of reactions to the agricultural disturbances of 1830 which affected Southern England far more severely than the Isle of Wight.

5 *Improving public transport and the highways infrastructure*

Documents show the nature and extent of past transport infrastructure. They can show the status and age of certain routes, and give information on past traffic level. The reports on the closure of railway lines on the 1950s are particularly helpful.

6 *Protecting the Island's physical environment*

The Record Office is a major source for land use; the existence of hedgerows and footpaths; and rates of coastal erosion. A knowledge of past changes in the landscape, and in agricultural practice, are important in helping to account for changes in biodiversity on the Isle of Wight.

The service has an important role to play in preserving papers, which help to provide the context in which many of the themes and objectives, identified in the above plans, lie. Many archives are directly relevant, but in providing specific answers to practical problems.

The Record Office service plan focuses on three key issues.

Task 22: looks at consideration of the development of a new Record Office.

Task 25: refers to computerizing collections databases and making them available on-line.

Task 28: seeks to ensure the preservation of key local government records that may be at risk of destruction.

All of these aims are directly relevant to preserving and making available material of practical benefit to the Island, through the promotion of tourism and education, by helping to inform people's decisions, and improving the accountability of local government bodies. Unless current facilities can be expanded it is inevitable that some material will be lost. Increasing use of IT is one means of making the service available to a wider range of the community, even if it is only being provided through a single service point, due to staffing levels currently in operation.

3.0 AIMS OF THE RECORD OFFICE

The aim of the Record Office is to safeguard documents of historical interest, relating to the Isle of Wight and its inhabitants, and to make them available to the public.

31 Values

The Record Office needs, first and foremost, to ensure that documents of historic importance are preserved not just for this generation, but for future generations to study. Action taken should seek to preserve the archives both physically and intellectually through a system of cataloguing which will show how all the documentation inter-relates. The interest of those depositing material including the Council itself, private individuals, societies, and religious and other bodies need to be respected if material is to remain within the custody of the Record Office. Those using the research facilities provided by the office are entitled to a quality service provided to all regardless of their age or personal circumstances, and delivered with courtesy and integrity.

3.2 Methods

These aims are achieved through four main functions:

- The acquisition and storage of historic documents.
- Action to ensure the conservation of documents both through physical repair and by measures which will help to prevent damage.
- Making archive material available to the public, both intellectually through catalogues and indexing, and physically through the searchroom, remote services, the provision of information on-line, and by programmes of talks and lectures.
- The care of those records of the Isle of Wight Council and its predecessor authorities, no longer in everyday use but still required to be kept for administrative reasons, thereby ensuring the quality of the future archive of that body.

3.3 Good Practice/Standards

A whole range of standards and guidelines are in existence, and are aspired to by the Isle of Wight Record Office. Of these the most important are: BS 5454: 2000, the British Standards Institute's recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents.

Beyond the PRO: Public Records in Places of Deposit – produced by the Public Record Office.

HMC Standard for Record Repositories produced by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts.

These standards are the ones laid down by the Commission and by the Public Record Office who will come together in April 2003 in a single organisation to be called the National Archives and develop a single regime for the inspection of archive repositories.

Other standards which are of particular importance to the service are the General International Standard of Archival Description (ISAD (g)), and the National Standard for Access to Archives. The first sets down standards for cataloguing while the latter lays down guidelines for providing quality access services in archives for the user.

The Record Office has been a member of the Public Services Quality Group, an informal network for archivists interested in best practice and quality issues, since its inception in 1996. It is this group that has co-ordinated the questionnaires which are analysed later in this report.

4.0 OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SERVICE

4.1 The Service

The collections held by the Isle of Wight Record Office relate, overwhelmingly, to the island itself. Where families of individuals have held estates, or public office, elsewhere, this information is retained within the core of the family papers, of which it forms an integral part. Due to the mobility of population, the office provides a service not just to the inhabitants of the Isle of Wight, but also to the descendents of former island residents.

Records are at present, largely in paper or parchment format, but could equally well include microfilms, photographs and electronic records. The earliest items date back to the 12th century, the most recent relate to the current year.

The office caters for a wider range of users: family historians, those tracing the history of their property or local community, individuals wanting information on the council and its activities, those with legal queries, students and academics. This pattern of use reflects the delicate balance between the three main strands of use for archives in today's society; for the evidential value as a record of the activity of individuals and corporate bodies; for recreational use including the promotion of personal development and to strengthen a sense of community and local identity. An invaluable analysis of the value of archives appears on *Charging the Future of Our Past*, (National Council on Archives, 2002).

An analysis of visitor numbers, and of the types of visitors in two months in 2002 is given at Appendix 1.

The Isle of Wight Council is able to provide an archive service through the powers given by the Public Records Acts of 1958 and 1967 and the Local Government Act of 1972.

In addition local authorities are under an obligation to make proper provision for their own records under s.224 of the Local Government Act, 1972. The Isle of Wight Record Office's services also come under a number of other pieces of legislation both parliamentary and from the Church of England Synod. As a result the Record Office is licensed to hold certain classes of central government records, tithe and manorial records under the Public Records Act, 1958; The Manorial Documents Rules, 1959, 1963 and 1967 and the Tithe Rules, 1960, 1963.

The office has been approved as a place of deposit for parish records falling within the Archdeaconry of the Isle of Wight by the Bishop of Portsmouth under the Parochial Register and Records Measure 1978.

4.2 Historical Background

The Isle of Wight Record Office was first founded in 1952 at Carisbrooke Castle Museum but the original arrangement lasted less than a year. The service was re-established in January 1961 at the same venue, under an honorary archivist with no professional qualification. It was only in 1970 that the Isle of Wight County Council funded the first professional staff members, and the office moved into property under its own control. The Record Office has been at its current site in Hillside since 1972 with

record storage at the same site arriving two years later. Substantial alterations including the enlargement of the searchroom were carried out in 1984.

The office had some 3,800 visitors last year and use of the service in 2001/2 was at an all-time high. Visitor numbers doubled between 1976/7 and 1986/7, reaching a total of 2,404. The increase was due in part to the upsurge of interest in family and local history during this period. Since 1986, visitor numbers have risen by a further 50%.

4.3 Staffing

Despite the rise in visitor numbers referred to above it is worth noticing that, in the last 25 years, the permanent establishment at the Record Office has only risen from 3 to 3.5 posts, and the number of professional posts has stayed static.

The current establishment comprises the County Archivist, and his deputy, both of whom hold professional archive qualifications. The Archive Assistant share, with the Deputy County Archivist responsibility for the day to day supervision of the searchroom; and helps with the answering of the bulk of the genealogical enquiries, by post and e-mail. A part-time clerical assistant post has been in existence for the past 12 years.

In addition, since July 2002 a further post, (project-funded for two years) has been introduced. The post-holder is surveying the Isle of Wight Council's own records, producing recommendations for the length of time for which each class of records should be retained.

The high level of satisfaction with the service provided by the staff is a striking feature of the questionnaires responses received (see Consult and Compare).

4.4 Premises

The service is delivered from a public searchroom, and headquarters at 26 Hillside, Newport. There are also five outstores which are not manned, but from which documents are retrieved, as and when requested. One store at the headquarters is purpose-built; all the other accommodation has been adapted from other use. Only the headquarters building is licensed to hold public records, and the renewal is at present provisional, subject to a resolution of the current storage problems.

4.5 Finance

For the year 2002/3 the budget for the service was £122,372. This includes £20,000 for the first year of the two year project, to survey and recommend retention periods for records of the Isle of Wight Council. Of the remainder £10,161 (almost 10%) comprises recharges, the overwhelming majority of which is allocated from Property Services, £18,281 (82%) of the budget is spent on staff. This leaves the remaining sum £12,850 to be spent on all other expenses, including equipment, computer supplies, stationary, postage, purchases and conservation. The total budget for acquisitions is £400 and for conservation measure £2,900. The current budgetary arrangements leave little room for flexibility in spending and therefore help is needed from outside the archive service's budget when the purchase of major items, such as the new reader printer acquired in 2000 is required.

4.6 Links to other departments and archive services

The Record Office is not the only area within community development to hold information of interest to the local family historian. The library holds an important collection of printed and secondary source material, as well as some local newspaper:

the museum service as well as holding an important collection of three dimensional objects relating to the history of the island also holds some archive material, particularly with relation to its maritime collection. Both the Record Office and the archaeological service have documentation relating to the built and historic landscape of the Isle of Wight but here the demarcation is more precisely defined. There is scope for greater clarity in holdings of certain classes of material....most obviously newspaper, photographic materials, and watercolours/fine art.

Recent developments at a regional and national level with the creation of Re:Source and the South-east Museums library and Archive Council (SEMLAC), reflect a high level of co-operation already in existence on the ground in the Isle of Wight Council.

This co-operation has manifested itself in a number of ways, by the co-operation of Museum Service and the Record Office in the IW Museum Strategy, and more recently in the purchase of the Rowlandson Collection; but above all from the use of the Technical Service section of the IW Museum Service in giving conservation advice and support, the provision of a photography service for public use and preservation, the development of publication of materials, and help and advice with exhibitions. The library service funds the filming of the Isle of Wight County Press, while the Record Office makes its printing service available to the libraries. Joint exhibitions and educational events have been run both with the library and the museum service on an occasional basis.

The Isle of Wight Record Office also has a role to play within the development of improved regional and national archives services. Many archive collections include material covering more than one county, and the administrative past of the Isle of Wight, (until 1890 part of Hampshire, and successively in the diocese of Winchester and Portsmouth) highlights this. This means that the need to co-operate and exchange information with mainland Record Offices is particularly important (an issue to be borne in mind when considering IT solutions). Links therefore exist not only to the Council's own Corporate Objectives and Strategic Plan (SEE THE ANALYSIS UNDER Challenge) but also to agendas set by the regional and national archive community.

CHALLENGE

Two Challenge events were held in the course of his review, and a report was commissioned on the service from a “critical friend”.

The first challenge event was for Town and Parish Councils and was held at Ryde Theatre on 10th July. A range of users and non-users of the service were represented. The second was for stakeholders in both the museum and archive services and was held at the Riverside Centre in Newport on the 28th August. At the latter event representatives were invited from local history societies, family history organizations, and a range of other bodies which used both services. Both fora were unanimous in their views that there was a need for an archive service and that the Council should continue to provide it.

79% of those asked in the MORI 5 survey believed that the Council should be responsible for providing community development services, and only 10% felt that they should not: but these figures are based on the grouping together of all of these leisure services. This is the closest that it has been possible to come to a non-user survey.

Although there appears to be support for the Council continuing to supply the service MORI 5 also showed that 59% of those interviewed felt that a subsidised cost, or some sort of price based on cost should be charged. With the notable exception of the library service, the Record Office had the lowest percentage expecting to pay some sort of cost, although this partially reflects a large percentage (19%) of don't knows.

The issue of payment for services would however attract particular difficulties to an archive service. Many papers are deposited at the Records Office rather than in ownership of the Council. Deposits, and gifts have been made in the belief that the general public will be able to study the documents free of charge, and material could be withdrawn from the archive were that to happen. Any investigation of charging which may be carried out as a result of this review, would need to take account of such issues.

Critical Friend

The Record Office commissioned a report from Dina Hardin, archivist to the Royal Yacht Squadron, as the only professional archivist outside the Record Office currently working on the Isle of Wight. The report is included as Appendix 7, and raises major concerns that the Isle of Wight Record Office is being left behind. In particular it highlights the problems caused by the lack of space, and the fact that much of the storage is not at the level required by the British Standard.

The effects of staffing levels on the ability to service outstores, conservation survey work and cataloguing are also highlighted. It is suggested that the appointment of a strongroom assistant would make the greatest impact. On access, suggestions are made for the improvement of facilities, and opening hours. The case for increased use of IT is made, as is the need for further development of outreach work. On the positive side the work of the staff at the office, and the card index 'do much to overcome the office's inadequacies, and it remains generally popular with its users'. The potential of the Record Office's role in the local community is highlighted.

Summary

There is a very strong body of opinion that the Record Office provides an important service and that the Isle of Wight Council should continue to run it.

The service is popular with users, but needs to address some serious areas of weakness, above all in the field of accommodation.

Recommendations:

- The Record Office requires new premises; at present there is insufficient space, and storage does not meet the British Standard.
- Consideration should be given to uniting local history collections on one site.
- The Record Office needs to investigate means of maximizing use of existing resources in the fields of cataloguing and conservation, identifying new sources of funding where possible.
- To meet the challenge of providing an accessible service, the office needs to develop further the use of IT.
- Improvements to opening hours should be investigated.
- The office should seek the means to fund a new post of strongroom assistant, to help improve strongroom management and security.

COMPARE

A number of comparisons have been undertaken with other local archive services. These comparisons fall into two main categories. The first group are reports from outside individuals or bodies, who have wide experience of other Record Offices and are therefore well placed to make comparisons. Although some of the examples are two to three years old the remarks made are still valid and can be tested against comments made specifically for this Best Value process. The second group of comparisons are made up of a statistics analysis of the performance of the office based on questionnaires to the public and figures supplied to CIPFA, a process which will be further developed through the adoption of key performance indicators. Finally a visit to Portsmouth to see the City Museum and Record Office enabled useful comparisons to be made about the method of service delivery.

A Reports from outside bodies/individuals

All these reports contain invaluable advice indicating the areas in the service where improvements need to be made. Each of the three reports come from within the profession and two of these represent the views from bodies responsible for the licensing of the Record Office to hold certain classes of archive material.

1 Mapping Project

The Archive Mapping Project for England provides useful data, even though this is based on information gathered in December 1999. It is most recent information available on professional perceptions of the comparative strengths of services. The charts in Appendix 8 show the results achieved, when set against the national and regional aggregates. It makes a useful comparison with public perceptions of the relative strengths of the service as delivered to them, which can be seen from the Public Services Quality Group survey analysis (Appendix3).

In absolute terms finding aids, and information technology were the two areas identified as very poor. The finding aids questions concentrated on the volume of uncatalogued material, the absence of automated catalogues and the lack of a published general guide. It is estimated that it would take one person twelve years to catalogue all items currently uncatalogued at the Record Office. In the meantime the number of accessions received continues to increase.

Although cataloguing backlogs remain a problem, an increasing number of catalogues are now being made available over the Internet, and the office's own website does have increasing volumes of information on the office's holdings.

On Information Technology the office's lack of a website, and facilities to enable the public to search the Internet for details of other Record Offices have been addressed, but there is still a lack of ICT for general management and no digitisation projects in progress. The low levels of scores for public access were due more to lack of facilities than to opening hours, although the lack non-standard opening hours may well have been a contributory factor.

2 Public Record Office – inspection

The inspection, in September 2002, was carried out under the duties to inspect places of deposit for public records under section 4 (1) of the Public Records Act, 1958. The inspector focussed on his serious concerns over archive storage; which failed to meet the recognised standard. There was also concern about the lack of time available for cataloguing and outreach work, and for greater use of IT. The lack of Records Management is currently starting to be addressed by the introduction of a records

management survey across the whole authority. Despite this, work needs to continue to develop on freedom of information, data protection and electronic records.

The inspector was only able to grant renewal of place of deposit status conditionally until September 2003, because of the inadequacies of the accommodation. If the offices status as a place of deposit for public records were to be lost, then public records (including records of hospitals and courts) would have to be removed to another place of deposit, presumably in Hampshire, or to the Public Records Office at Kew. The negative publicity for the repository would have a serious impact on the credibility of the service and might well lead to other material being lost to the Isle of Wight. For details see Appendix 11.

3 Museums Strategy Visit

Cynthia Short the former county archivist for West Yorkshire undertook this visit in 1999. As well as storage, the main problems referred to were in the areas of collection policy, the lack of pro-active survey work, and the need for more computerization. A copy of the report is to be found at Appendix 12.

B Comparisons through Statistical Data

Comparisons have been carried out through two principal means. The Public Services Quality Group questionnaire in February 2001 enables direct comparisons to be made with the other 125 participating archives. In addition, suitable benchmarks have been identified which can be compared with a number of comparable authorities using existing CIPFA statistics. In the longer term the intention is to perfect a set of objectives which can allow precise correlation with other authorities using rather more complex formula.

1 Public Services Quality Group Questionnaire

The results and background to this survey are given in Appendix 3. The rating of services is also discussed in the section devoted to Questionnaires under consult, but this only refers in passing to comparisons with other authorities.

The rating the Isle of Wight Record Office's services at the highest level (excellent/strongly agree) compared to the upper quartile benchmarks for the United Kingdom and the Southeast, are also given. Under this benchmarking the Record Office scores very highly in the public perception with the weakest areas being microfilm/fiche viewing, and particularly visitor facilities. This contrast with the concerns raised by fellow-professionals reflects, in part, the limited nature of the questions that can be asked in any survey.

2 Benchmarking

A list of Key Performance Indicators for the Record Office was developed during the summer of 2002 (Appendix 9). Comparisons have been made with a number of other unitary authorities, based on the most recent CIPFA archives statistics to be publicly available (at the time of writing 2001/2). The indicators chosen have been: number of reader visitors per annum, percentage of records stored in conditions conforming to B5 5454, percentage of budget spent on archive conservation, and cost of archive service per cubic metre stored, all of which are indicators which provide information on the areas not covered through the Public Services Quality Group questionnaire. Additional information has also been sought on population staffing levels, opening hours, and reader spaces, because these help with the interpretation of the figures.

The benchmarks used need further refinement to ensure comparison of like for like is being met in each case. They also need care in their interpretation. The cost of archive service per cubic metre stored may be less a reflection of efficiency than of a service which is

reaching fewer aspects of archive work. In addition, reader visits are in part an indication of search-room capacity and opening hours. In terms of reader visits per head of population, the Isle of Wight achieves figures which are broadly comparable to what is found elsewhere in the country.

3 Disability Discrimination Act

No scoring is currently available for the County Record Office under the act. It is believed however that a substantial number of alterations would be required to the building, particularly in regard to access to the searchrooms, and the toilet facilities.

C Visits

A visit took place on 10th October 2002 to see the Portsmouth City Museum and Record Office, and talk to Sarah Quail who runs the service. A report on the visit forms Appendix 10. The visit underlined the potential in uniting Museums, and Record Office services, together with other areas such as archaeology and local studies: and the important role that Friends organizations can play. It also showed the value of analysis of the visitors the different elements of a service receives. The different areas from which visitors to the various museums in Portsmouth came was particularly informative.

Summary

The evidence from comparison data is very varied. It seems clear however, that whereas statistically the Isle of Wight Record Office performs respectably, there are very substantial concerns within the archive profession about weaknesses in service provision. There may also be reduced public expectations of a small service.

Recommendations

- The key weakness to be addressed is that of accommodation both in terms of quality and the lack of additional storage space.
- The building needs to be prepared for the Disability Discrimination Act.
- The office should give serious consideration to areas where resources/facilities can be shared with those of other services, where this can be achieved to the mutual benefit of both.
- Policies in the fields of collection management and conservation need to be updated.
- Funding for training and staff cover during training, is needed to keep staff abreast of developments in the archive world.
- ICT needs to be developed to improve the tools available in the management of the office.
- A larger number of catalogues and indexes need to be made available on-line to help remote access of the service.
- Microfilm/microfiche viewers need to be updated as part of a rolling programme of improvements to equipment.
- Improved IT facilities are required for staff and public.

- The office needs to make more of its holdings accessible by reducing the backlog of uncatalogued material.
- The office should consider the introduction of non-standard opening hours.
- The office needs to investigate the resourcing of project to survey archive holdings at present outside its custody, to help ensure their future survival.
- The potential role that a Friends organization could play in supporting the service and its aims should be considered.
- Investigate feasibility of creating single central store for Records Management for the local authority, to consolidate the work already being undertaken through a survey of local government records.

CONSULT

A number of consultation events have taken place. The two challenge events have acted as a consultation exercise, but the bulk of the consultation has taken place through two national surveys. Some information from MORI surveys has also been used, to give an indication of the attitudes of non-users, and a representative from the Family History Society was interviewed, as family historians comprised over two-thirds of visits by record office users.

Questionnaires

The Isle Of Wight County Record Office is a member of the Public Services Quality Group for archives, which has developed questionnaires for uniform use across archive services in the United Kingdom.

On average these questionnaires are issued once every eighteen months. The third and most recent was in February 2001 and a further new one was in the process of being carried out on November 2002. 126 archives took part in the February 2001 survey. A total of 61 forms were returned over a two week period, 75 having been issued to visitors during that fortnight. The questions asked, with a summary of the answers, are given in appendix.... Analyses and a report were issued in October 2001 by CIPFA, based on the February 2001 National Survey of Visitors to British archives, and this enables these figures to be compared with regional and national averages, as well as with upper quartile benchmarks. (Appendix)

The questionnaire gives a very clear profile of the Record Office's current users, although the timing of the survey may have had some effect on the results. The holding of a survey in February will inevitably under-represent the number of visitors to the office who are coming as part of an organised holiday to the Isle of Wight. Overseas visitors stay at a fairly constant level of 4% - 5.5% throughout the year, based on samples taken over fortnights in February, June, and August 2001. The numbers of such visitors dropped noticeably in 2002 (possibly due to the aftermath of September 11th, attack on the World Trade Centre0, However whereas only 7.5% of visitors came from mainland of the UK in February 2001, between 29.5 and 32.5% came from this area in the two summer months. The customer survey being used therefore took place in a period when local views were most powerfully represented.

For the purposes of Best Value the most useful sections were those asking for feedback about the quality of the service and facilities. Figures are provided in appendix.... about the percentage of individuals who regarded the service as excellent, excellent/good, so that these can be compared directly with the national averages and upper quartile figures.

In overall terms the friendliness and knowledge of staff, customer car, and document delivery come highest in terms of providing an excellent service. Least satisfaction was expressed with the quality of advance information (the survey predates the introduction of a

record office website), the film/fiche facility, opening hours, and above all with visitors facilities.

When comparisons in terms of excellence are made with other authorities catalogues and indexes, opening hours and research advice services also score highly but visitor facilities score very badly.

Appendix also includes an attempt to take account of levels of individual 'generosity' in scoring services. There has therefore been an attempt to ascertain which services received the lowest levels of scoring from an individual even if those services were described as good rather than poor.

In early November 2002 a second survey, organised by the same body, took place nationwide. An analysis of the first 39 replies has been made for questions asking about the quality of the service and the priorities for it. The results appear in appendix together with the full range of questions asked.

No benchmarking is possible on these figures yet.

Some of the questions asked in 2002 are slightly different. There are most questions about IT facilities and physical access, and users of the service are asked for their views as to which services are most important to be improved. Again greatest appreciation is shown for helpfulness of staff, quality of advice, document delivery and lists and indexes. Least satisfaction was expressed with visitors facilities, followed by physical access, microfilm/fiche viewing facilities, and on-site IT.

Initial returns reveal that satisfaction with copying services and film/fiche services and with visitor facilities have dropped. There is a more marginal slippage in appreciation of lists and indexes and in demand for changes in opening hours. On the positive side the customer care side of the service and document delivery have continued to improve from an already high base.

This year for the first time the public has been asked what areas are most important for the archive to improve. This revealed a slight change in emphasis, with greater priority being given to opening hours, and improving lists, indexes and leaflets and less interest on web-site development issues. Visitor Facilities were still the overwhelming priority. It is important to bear in mind that those already using the service are likely to have fewer problems with the existing opening hours, and with public access issues, than the non-users.

Challenge Events

The challenge events provided some useful information on views about the services provided (see appendix).

A Town and Parish Councils

There was a high-level of appreciation expressed for the work of Record Office staff, but it was felt there was a need to have better accommodation, appropriate to the valuable resources contained within them. There was scope for uniting the stores together, although a number of people felt that Newport as a town already had too many facilities. There was a need for better parking facilities, and improved signposting. There was a wish for more records to be computerised, and microfilmed, and for the Record Office to expand its advisory role.

B Museum and Record Office Stakeholders

Again there was high level of appreciation of Record Office staff, but the main demand was for a new record office. This would provide more space for archive material, in atmospherically controlled conditions as well as enhanced visitor facilities, and a designated area for cataloguing work to be carried out. There was general agreement that local history sources needed bringing together. Other requests were for greater use of ICT in the Record Office, and more use of microfilming as a conservation/security measure. There was an opportunity for the Record Office to make greater use of volunteers than it did at present.

MORI Survey

Non-user work was carried out using MORI polls. The overwhelming majority of those asked, 79% believed that the Council should continue to provide the raft of services currently delivered by Community Development, but this was not broken down further, Service-by-service.

It was interesting to note that although only 4% of users in MORI 5 said that they had used the Record Office within the last month, in MORI 6 more detail was forthcoming. 13% researched family history, 10% researched house history and 18% researched island history (which included geology and archaeology) less than once a month. Greater numbers were involved in these areas than for team sports, golf or tennis; although it was not greater than for the observation of others playing sport. In addition more people (6%) were interested in researching family history for the first time, than in taking up any new activity apart from swimming 10%, and keep-fit 9%. A lack of time was the main reason given for not taking up the interest, a response which may have implications for decisions about opening hours.

Correspondence/stakeholder interview

Feedback has come from two other sources.

An analysis has been made of correspondence received in the last nine months relating to the facilities provided by the office. The two criticisms voiced have been over lack of storage space, and the length of time take to retrieve material held in out-stores.

A meeting also took place with the Chairman of the Isle of Wight Family History Society who asked for consideration to be given to accommodation for the Society. The Society was highly appreciative of the work of the office. A new building was required, with a refreshment room/rest area, ideally in Newport or with easy access to it. There was a need for more active involvement between the Record Office and volunteers from the Society. There was also a need for greater sharing of information between the various societies in the island, many of which have information of local history interest.

Summary

The contribution that the staff makes to the success of the Record Office is widely appreciated. There is also evidence of an untapped market for the Record Office's facilities and potential for further development of the service if the office were able to overcome the initial barriers to individuals commencing work on their records.

Recommendations

- Public dissatisfaction with visitor facilities in the key areas to be addressed.
- Areas to be tackled include car parking, improved physical access to the existing building, signposting, and an improved reception area.
- Thought needs to be given to providing enhanced facilities for the public in any new building, including a room for refreshments, and lockers for personal belongings.
- Consideration to be given to a one-stop shop facility for accessing local history resources.
- The Record Office needs to devote more resources to microfilming as a conservation/security measure.
- More catalogues/indexes need to be made available on-line.
- Film/fiche readers need to be updated as part of a rolling programme of improvements.
- The Record Office needs to review its opening hours, with a view to attracting those who find it difficult at present to use the service.
- The office needs to develop a wider range of leaflets to enable users to prepare themselves prior to a visit, and have a greater understanding of the range of resources available.
- The office should expand its advisory role to other custodians of archives on the island.
- Greater use of volunteers by the Record Office should be considered, possibly in conjunction with other services.

COMPETE

Within local authority archives the overwhelming majority of models are similar to those found within the Isle of Wight Council. The main differences within Archive services relate to their location in departmental terms within the Council's structure.

The County Record Office traditionally grew out of the Clerk's Department of the County Council but recent developments have led to it being found with increasing frequency in departments reflecting the current emphasis given to the recreational aspects of the use of the archive service, such as Education or Recreation and Leisure.

Increasingly, however, imaginative use has been made of the synergies between various services which provide information to the local community, particularly in the field of providing a one-stop local history service. Examples would include the Surrey History Centre, which has provided a single building for the archive, local studies and archaeological services, offices such as those in Portsmouth and Jersey, which provide common accommodation for museum and archive services, and a number of London boroughs where there is a close link between library, and archive services.

The joint visit with the Museum Service to the Portsmouth Museums and Records Service showed that such an arrangement can be made without compromising the professional standards of either element within the joint service. When scoping the requirements for a new Record Office consideration needs to be given to the extent to which elements of services could come together to provide a more coherent service to the public. There is potential for offering a single set of searchroom facilities for local studies, archives, and perhaps museum artefacts, with specialised strongroom attached similar to what is being proposed in Portsmouth. Such an approach could continue to provide advice from specialists in each field, but pool staffing for reception duties, and the production of material into the searchroom.

Only one example exists of a local authority archive service provided via a Trust. This is Jersey Archive, run by the Jersey Heritage Trust, since 1981. The Trust received an annual grant from the States of Jersey to support running cost, but admission income and sponsor support is also critical. The artefacts and works of art are an important element in supporting this external income. The principal advantage to the setting up of a trust is the rating concessions, but there would be some major difficulties to address over the scale of endowment necessary, and the low levels of likely income.

Another possibility, which would repay more detailed investigation, would be to consider the establishment of an arrangement similar to the Hampshire Archives Trust. This partially acts as the Hampshire Record Office's volunteer and friends' organization, but is also part of a much wider partnership between the Record Office and the local community. The constitution defines the aim of the Trust as 'to promote the conservation and preservation of archives for the benefit of the public and to advance public education on matters connected with archives.' It supports rather than controls the work of the Record Office. A trust could also be used to play an important role in the future as a consultee, although a Friends organization could also carry out this role. The trust was not visited as part of this review, because the Hampshire Record Office was in the middle of a lengthy interregnum between County Archivists, but there is some potential in investigating this option further. A trust could in some cases attract money from sources which would not make a grant to a local authority. However it should be borne in mind that the local community base on the Isle of Wight will be substantially smaller than what is in existence in Hampshire. In 1999/2000 of a budget setting an income of £59,700, £37,000 was a grant from the Hampshire County Council.

A copy of the January 2000 service plan for the Trust is enclosed as Appendix 1.

Summary

The main area where there is scope for an imaginative solution to the problems faced by the Record Office lies in the opportunities for pooling resources. This could be achieved by working in conjunction with other sections within Community Development to provide central services and public access to the provision of an island history service, along the lines of the Surrey History Centre, or the service provided by Portsmouth City.

Recommendations

- Consider extent to which access to archive material can be co-ordinated with access to other local historical information / family history resources when planning a new facility.
- Consider establishment of Friends organization, which could ring in funding from wider range of sources, including possibility of trust status for such a support group.

CIPFA**Archive Service Estimates 2001/2**

	<u>IW</u>	<u>Southampton</u>	<u>Plymouth</u>	<u>Hereford</u>	<u>Portsmouth</u>
Population	130,000	210,352	253,182	170,500	188,708
Area	38,231	5,623	8,220	217,330	3,989
Staff	3.5	7.5	5.0	8.3	10.0
Professional staff (incl. Conservation)	2.0	4.5	3.0	3.0	5.0
Reader Visits	3729	2856	3069	7020	4098
Reader spaces (incl. microfilm readers)	24	12	32	60	30
Opening hours	40	28	29	37	35
BS 5454 met	33	Not given	Not given	85	60
5 of net revenue expenditure on conservation	2.9	0.7*	Not given	Not given	Not given
Cost of archive service per cu m stored	£428	£1239**	£724	Not given	Not given

* Does not include salary of one conservator. Also distorted by size of expenditure on office accommodation (1.3% without this element)

** £645 without office accommodation payment

Acronyms Used

BS	=	British Standard
CIPFA	=	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting
HMC	=	Historical Manuscripts Commission (Full title: Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts)
MORI	=	Market and Opinion Research International
PRO	=	Public Record Office
WEA	=	Workers Educational Association