

Case study

Archivist Caroline Sampson discusses forward planning at the University of Leicester and Warwickshire County Council

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Caroline Sampson has recently moved to the University of Leicester as part-time University Archivist. Prior to this Caroline worked as County Archivist and Head of Cultural Services and Warwickshire County Council. Here she describes how she has developed forward plans and why they are important.

- **Why are forward plans important?**

At Warwickshire, I found forward planning to be a valuable tool that gave everyone a chance to get involved and to share a sense of what the service was aiming to achieve. I was also able to use the plan to deflect spontaneous, casual or random claims on our time! Leicester's archive service is relatively new and has a number of challenges to address. Forward planning will help me to capture what needs to be done, what order to do it in, and who will be able to help with various components.

- **How did you prepare for writing your plan?**

My first step is to do a personal brainstorm of all the tasks, problems, opportunities, etc. that are buzzing in my head. I can then turn an uncluttered mind to the contributions from colleagues, users and stakeholders.

- **Did you have already a plan in place? If so, were you able to adapt it?**

In Warwickshire, the archive service's planning process complemented plans created at divisional and directorate level. Our planning took these into account alongside previous archive service plans and any relevant project plans.

- **Who else was involved in the process?**

We had "all staff" planning sessions which I tried to make informal so that people didn't feel uncomfortable about raising new points or challenging what was being suggested by others. We engaged with colleagues in other services with whom we worked closely so that we understood up front whether they were planning work that would make claims on our time and also to seek their input to tasks we were leading on where appropriate.

- **How did you make sure that it fitted with wider organisational plans?**

We mapped all the suggestions to Warwickshire County Council's priority objectives so that all stakeholders could see the contribution the record office was making to the council's core business.

- **How did you ensure that stakeholder views were included?**

We looked at the feedback and data from recent PSQG surveys and user feedback from other sources. We also shared draft copies of the plan with our User Forum which included representatives of key stakeholder groups at sessions designed to give User Group members a chance to challenge and contribute.

- **How long did the whole process take?**

There were clearly peak periods of activity leading to when the plan had to be published in line with council deadlines but I tried quite hard for it not to be an intense and irksome task that was done once a year then forgotten about until the next time. We used the plan throughout the year and individuals would think ahead to what items could be included in the next forward plan.

- **What was the hardest part of getting your plan together?**

The council had a tendency to change the format it wanted services to use for their plans year on year, and leave it to the last minute to confirm the template. This tended to create an additional editing job which could prove time-consuming.

- **What has been the most useful part of the plan?**

Making sure all staff have a shared understanding of what the service is prioritising at any one time and being able to use it to prevent last minute "good ideas" which haven't been properly thought through from monopolising large amounts of time.

- **How have you continued to use and develop the plan?**

In my experience one plan morphs into another, so it becomes a rolling framework for long-term improvement and development.

- **What tips would you pass on to other archive services for writing their forward Plan?**

Share the load with colleagues from your own and complementary services. Make the plan work for you, rather than seeing it as an administrative task that's been foisted on you by someone else. And last but not least, bring chocolate to the planning and monitoring meetings to celebrate your successes to date!