

Minutes of The National Archives' Board		THE	
		NATIONAL	
Held on 18 July 2023 at 10:00 at The National Archives, Kew and via Video Conference (VC)		ARCHIVES	

**Present:**

Andrew Wathey (AW - Chair) Chair of The National Archives' Board  
 Sonia Cargan (SC) Non-executive Board Member  
 Rommel Pereira (RP) Non-executive Board Member  
 Mark Richards (MR) Non-executive Board Member  
 Emmajane Avery (EJA) Director of Public Engagement  
 Neil Curtis (MC) Chief Operating Officer  
 Lucy Fletcher (LF) Director for Public Records Access and Government Services  
 Jeff James (JJ) Chief Executive and Keeper  
 Valerie Johnson (JV) Director of Research and Collections  
 Gemma Maclagan Ram, Commercial Director  
 Andrea Metcalf (AM) Director of People, Inclusion and Change  
 John Sheridan (JS) Digital Director

**Also present:**

Senior Marketing Officer (Item 6 via VC)  
 Asha Bagayat (AB) Head of Governance (Minutes)  
 Rachel Corver (RC) Head of Marketing and Communications (Item 6)  
 Marie Twomey-McLeod (MTM) Head of Finance (Item 3)  
 Alex Forbes (AF) Head of Government Services (Item 5)

**1.0 Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

- 1.1 Owing to technological issues and varied connectivity, Ros Scott (RS), Non-executive Board Member was unable to participate in the meeting and gave her apologies. There were no further apologies for absence.
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

**2.0 Letter from Rt Hon Lucy Frazer MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport**

- 2.1 The Board discussed the contents of a letter addressed to AW from the Secretary of State, setting out a checklist of responsibilities of public body chairs and DCMS' four priority areas: data, youth, environmental and sustainability and levelling up, and asking The National Archives to consider how it can support and contribute to their delivery. JJ outlined some of the drivers behind the letter, including renewed focus on clear accountability and assurance from public bodies to their parent departments via the chairs. In terms of taking the discussion around the four priorities areas forward, it was agreed to look at alignment and synergy with *Archives for Everyone*.

2.2 There was acknowledgment that as part of our preparation for the next Spending Review we should be looking at data to evidence value and impact of our activities and developing KPIs, which are linked to our statutory responsibilities and that also take into account our status as a non-ministerial department. VJ noted an internal paper from the Collection Care department on sustainability that she was happy to share with Board. It was also suggested that we should consider how aligned our sustainability activities were with the priorities of DEFRA.

2.3 The Board:

- (i) Received and noted the letter;
- (ii) Noted that the Chair would respond to the letter;
- (iii) Agreed that the Collection Care department's paper on sustainability would be added to the Board Forward agenda; and
- (iv) Agreed that JJ and AW would consider how to take the four themes forward for a further Board-level discussion.

*Action by: AW/JJ/AB*

### 3.0 In Year Affordability Challenge

3.1 The Board was invited to comment on a paper outlining in-year budgetary challenges, largely due to unforeseen staffing pressure, and the proposed plan to mitigate them. The paper also outlined the risks and opportunities associated with each intervention proposed.

3.2 The paper was generally welcomed and provided Board with assurance on our approach and the mitigations proposed, noting that the savings identified felt considered and sensible and should succeed in easing pressure on the in-year budget.

3.3 Questions related to: management looking at what we might need to stop doing in the medium to long term if budgetary challenges continue; HM Treasury's view on allowing us to move capital to revenue to relieve budgetary pressures and ensuring the National Audit Office (NAO) are onboard to prevent year end accounting challenges; and the potential for boosting our commercial activities to raise income. Staffing risks, particularly leavers in business-critical roles and their impact on the delivery of activities, were also noted.

3.4 The Board:

- (i) Welcomed the paper and endorsed the proposed plan to mitigate the in-year budgetary challenges; and
- (ii) Looked forward to receiving the 3+9 Financial Forecast, which will incorporate the July Management Accounts, out-of-committee for monitoring and assurance.

*Action by: NC/MTM*

**Post meeting note:** The 3+9 Financial Forecast report was shared with the Board out-of-committee on 7 August. No comments were made and the item has been recorded as received and noted.

### 4.0 Quarter 1 Business Priorities

- 4.1 The Board received the Q1 Business Priorities update for monitoring and assurance.
- 4.2 There was a discussion on the proposed amber RAG rating for the Transfer Digital Records (TDR) item, noting our capacity to deliver was impacted by recruitment challenges and securing specialised technical skills. Possible mitigations, including offering apprenticeships and hiring consultants were suggested. JS highlighted the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the software development market and being alive to this moving landscape and the opportunities they present. LF noted that interest from government departments in the TDR service had been gaining momentum, and this may be impacted if growth was stalled.
- 4.3 The Board:
- (i) Noted and endorsed the Q1 Strategic business priorities update and endorsed the RAG ratings and commentary.

## **5.0 Freedom of Information Performance**

- 5.1 In March this year, The National Archives received a Practice Recommendation that noted the concerns of the Information Commissioner in relation to our performance in responding to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. In particular, FOI requests relating to MOD service personnel records meant that our compliance rate was consistently below the target of meeting statutory deadlines for 90% of requests.
- 5.2 The Board received an update paper providing an overview of our actions to recover FOI performance, noting that we responded to 89% of non-MOD requests on time, despite the volume of requests increasing by over 40% compared with the previous quarter and that following staffing investment in the MOD FOI Service, we expect to start seeing the impact of this uplift in the Q3 (July-Sept) statistics and more substantively from Q4 (Oct-Dec). The paper mirrored a letter recently sent from the Keeper to the Information Commissioner, the first of what will be quarterly updates on the outcomes of our improvement activity. The public version of our action plan that is available on our website will also be subsequently updated.
- 5.3 The update on FOI performance was welcomed. Questions related to lessons learned and the potential for proactive planning when we accession large volume of records in the future and the challenges around the data, particularly access status and predicting demand for accurate modelling. In response to queries: assurances were provided around our relationship with the Information Commissioner and that they understood and were sympathetic to our situation, whilst noting their regulatory position; our approach to processing FOI requests, which was strategic and centred around managing compliance, and staff recruitment and retention and team morale, noting that the support of the Board and Executive Team was welcomed.
- 5.4 The Board:
- (i) Received and noted the update on our FOI performance;
  - (ii) Agreed with the assessment and tolerance of the risk;
  - (ii) Noted and endorsed the pace with which we were managing a return to compliance;

- (iii) Requested visual presentation of the projection of FOI casework and compliance and ensuring that this data is produced robustly and clearly mapped out;
- (iv) Agreed that governance would remain with the Board (not Audit and Risk Committee), although the new Independent Audit and Risk Committee member should be briefed on the matter;
- (v) Requested quarterly updates on performance, with graphical representation, via the Executive Team update report; and
- (vi) Agreed that once we had more reliable data, conversations should take place with HMT on resourcing and managing the burden.

*Action by: LF/AF*

## **6.0 Brand Campaign**

- 6.1 In support of *Archives for Everyone* and the corresponding Public Engagement Strategy, the Board received a presentation on the newly developed public facing tagline and brand building campaign approach, which had been approved by the Executive Team. The intention was to move to rollout in the beginning of this Autumn and the Board's views were invited on its deployment and development. Questions included the relative importance of local advertising, compared with that which would have a wider reach and audience.
- 6.2 The Board:
- (i) Welcomed and received the presentation and congratulated the team on developing a tagline that resonates;
  - (ii) Agreed that engagement from the locality with The National Archives could be developed further, alongside a growing National visibility; and
  - (iii) Asked that the presentation slides be shared with members via Convene.

*Action by: AB*

## **7.0 Executive Team Updates**

- 7.1 The Board received a report on Executive Team activities, including assurance around the partnership relationship of a research project, a review of the organisation structure for IT Operations, which will form part of our workforce planning conversations and the Swedish School's latest OFSTED report and safeguarding responsibilities.
- 7.2 During the course of the meeting, Board members were pleased to note that the Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 had been successfully laid in Parliament and would be published imminently on the website. The Board congratulated the project team.
- 7.3 The Board noted the updates.

## **8.0 Non-executive Board Member Verbal Updates**

- 8.1 Non-executive Board Members (NEBMs) each provided a verbal update on their recent activity, including insights from other organisations.

- 8.2 RP was pleased to note that an offer had been made and verbally accepted for the Independent Audit and Risk Committee member role. He also noted attending an NEBM/Chairs meeting, which covered the role of boards in times of sustained pressure, the importance of Board effectiveness reviews, challenges to traditional models of risk and the importance of openness and connectivity.
- 8.3 SC noted visiting the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, on a recent trip.
- 8.4 MR noted reading an interesting paper (which he was happy to share) on social mobility and openness in the creative industries, stating that only 7% of the workforce were from working class background.
- 8.5 AW noted attending and participating in DCDC2023 in Durham and congratulated the team.
- 8.6 All Board members noted attending the Board workshop on 4 July to consider the recommendations from the external Board effectiveness review.
- 8.7 The Board noted the updates.

## **9.0 Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log**

- 9.1 Subject to minor amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 were approved as a correct record.
- 9.2 The Board reviewed the Actions Log.

## **10.0 Any Other Business**

### Forward Work Programme

- 10.1 The Board reviewed the Forward Work Programme for Board meetings.

### Vote of thanks to Valerie Johnson

- 10.2 AW led the vote of thanks for VJ, who was leaving The National Archives at the end of July. He spoke of her extensive contribution and, on behalf of the organisation and the Board, thanked her for her service. He looked forward to working with VJ in her new capacity as a Strategic Advisor. In response, VJ spoke about the enjoyable time she has had at The National Archives and the opportunity to learn from people and the privilege of working with everyone, particularly Board members. This was followed by a round of applause.

### Items for information

- 10.3 The Board received and noted two items for information: Total Facilities Management Update and July Talk Issue.

**There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 12.37**