Minutes of a meeting of The National Archives' Board
Held on Tuesday 4 June 2024 at 10:00
Location: The National Archives, Kew and Video Conference (VC)

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
Ros Scott (RS) Non-executive Board Member
Emmajane Avery (EJA) Director of Public Engagement and Sector Leadership
Neil Curtis (NC) Chief Operating Officer
Lucy Fletcher (LF) Director for Public Records Access and Government Services (Items 1-11)
Jeff James (JJ) Chief Executive and Keeper
Gemma Maclagan Ram (GMR) Research and Commercial Development Director
Andrea Metcalf (AM) Director of People, Inclusion and Change
John Sheridan (JS) Digital Director

Also present:
Programme Manager, Digital Archiving (Item 3)
Asha Bagayat (AB) Head of Governance (Minutes)
Jack Butterworth (JB) Head of Grants and Academic Research (Item 5&6)
Service Owner – Digital Preservation (Item 3)
Head of International and External Affairs (Item 4)
Alex Forbes (HF) Head of Government Services Strategy and Engagement (Item 8)
Head of Strategic Compliance (Item 7)
Head of Public Records and Standards (Item 8)
David Moore (DM) Head of IT Operations (Item 3)
Tina Morton (TM) Head of Archives Sector Leadership (Item 8)
Saul Nassé (SN) Incoming Chief Executive and Keeper
Knowledge and Informational Management Project Lead (Item 7)
Marie Twomey-McLeod (MTM) Head of Finance (Item 6 via VC)
Sam Whaley (SW) Head of Strategy

1. **Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

   1.1. There were no apologies for absence.

   1.2. There were no declarations of interest.

2. **Northeast Partnership Project**

   2.1. The Board received a paper providing an update on progress towards a completed Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the Northeast partnership project - a potential new, complementary second location for The National Archives. The Board was also invited to review and discuss the developing narrative case for change and to see the developing options for buildings(s)

configuration and location and note the impact of the announced General Election on 4 July upon the timescale for completing and transmitting the SOC to HM Treasury.

2.2. The Board noted the delay in producing the full draft of the SOC which was owing to delays in developing the economic case and agreed to have a further discussion at its July meeting.

2.3. There was a detailed discussion on configuration and location and the importance of the latter being accessible and having passing trade to become a high footfall visitor attraction. Consideration also needed to be given to the options mix to attract repeat visitation, potential for sharing the risk and cost of the build and for future financial sustainability.

2.4. Noting the scale and size of the project, the Board encouraged the project team to be clear in their ambition to set the objectives and positioning and think about how the project fits with the Kew operating model and developing this in parallel.

2.5. Risks to the project, including the state of Local Government finances and outcome of the General Election and Government priorities were noted.

2.6. The Board:

(i)   Welcomed and noted the update; and

(ii) Agreed to hold a further discussion at the 9 July meeting, where it hoped to receive the fully drafted SOC.

Action by: SW/AB

3. Cybersecurity Assurance Programme Overview

3.1. Following heightened focus on cybersecurity within the archive sector and an internal review of the recommendations presented to the sector by the British Library in the aftermath of their ransomware attack, a paper was presented to the March 2024 Audit and Risk Committee outlining our approach to the management of cybersecurity risk and providing an assessment of known gaps, inconsistencies in our approach and concerns.

3.2. Leading on from this, the Board was invited to review a paper providing an update on the Cybersecurity Assurance Programme, which had recently been initiated to drive and coordinate our work on improving our approach to cybersecurity, alongside the delivery of some specific interventions to address identified risks.

3.3. Lines of questioning related to the known gaps and concerns, possible controls and mitigations and sources of assurance across the teams working in very different delivery environments. JS noted that the wide scale adoption of cloud services had reduced our cybersecurity risk.

3.4. It was noted that the Programme team would be presenting a report on insider risk to the Audit and Risk Committee for assurance.

3.5. Insights and learning from other organisations indicated that third-party infrastructures posed a significant risk and consideration needed to be given on the extent to which organisations outsourced activity and around implementing robust vetting and validation processes to limit exposure. Assurances were provided to the Board in this regard.

3.6. It was acknowledged that cyber security posed a significant continued threat, and the public sector was having to manage and deliver programmes from existing budgets and the continued challenge on which initiatives to prioritise.

3.7. The Board welcomed the update and received assurance on the organisation's ongoing cybersecurity approach. The Board also thanked the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) for highlighting this important issue.

3.8. The Board:

(i)   Received and noted the update and supported the Programme;

(ii) Agreed that the topic would be a standard agenda item at ARC meetings and delegated oversight and scrutiny of delivery of the Programme to it;

(iii) Noted that the ARC would be receiving a paper on Insider risk for assurance; and

(iv) Agreed that a further update on the Programme should be presented in 6 months' time.

Action by: NC/DM

4. International Strategy Update

4.1. The Board received a presentation providing an update on the delivery of the refreshed International Plan which was adopted a year ago. The presentation covered our international activities, including working in partnership with the global archives community through membership of the International Council of Archives (ICA) and Forum of National Archivist (FAN); leveraging our collections and expertise to contribute to the UK Government's cultural and diplomatic efforts through VIP visits, marking of anniversaries and document displays; and generating value from our collections and expertise through collaboration, training and consultancy programmes and commercial partnerships.

4.2. RS noted various international Parliamentary and FCDO cultural diplomacy related activities, including visits, delegations and trade missions and queried the extent of our involvement and participation in these. She also volunteered to broker connections in this regard for potential collaborations. In response, JJ stated that our engagement with FCDO was limited owing to our independence as a non-ministerial department but welcomed opportunities to work with other parts of Government.

4.3. There was a question related to our return on investment and the time taken to explore and build international relationships with commercial projects coming to fruition. It was noted this took a long period of time, but we were building our reputation. There was a further question

on how international engagement activity was being prioritised, noting that commercial activities were being driven by partnerships with the Middle East; whilst the ICA was focused on Africa and the Caribbean.

4.4. The Board:

(i) Welcomed the update and noted the range of international activities and possibilities; and

(ii) Requested a further update in the Autumn.

Action by: AB

5. **Delivering our Research Vision**

5.1. The Board was invited to review and agree The National Archives' Research Vision 2024 – 2027. The document set out the vision for how the potential of our collection and our people might be realised, for the benefit of The National Archives and the wider UK. It is underpinned by a Mapping document, which connects current research projects to these priorities and to our corporate strategic outcomes, and by a Roadmap, which connects this vision to measurable outcomes and activities in the operational practice of the Research, Grants and Academic Engagement department.

5.2. The vision adopts sector standard research language and seeks to drive our research excellence and ensure the organisation receives the benefits from its research activities, which includes knowledge creation.

5.3. The Board:

(i) Agreed the adoption of the Research Vision 2024-27.

6. **Grants and Funding – Business Performance Update**

6.1. The Board received a paper providing an update on our fundraising and sector funding business performance and was invited to review and comment on future directions for The National Archives' grant portfolio, particularly against the Research Vision and Roadmap for 2024-27 and agree where future oversight and scrutiny of the grants portfolio should sit.

6.2. GMR congratulated JB and his team for moving the operation and reporting of the grant and funding team to a more sophisticated position.

6.3. The Board congratulated the team for its impressive grant success rate of 40%.

6.4. There was a discussion on the team's relationship with the National Archives Trust, noting that the philanthropic funding landscape was an area that the Trust could lead on. Further discussions were taking place with the Trust on its relationship with The National Archives.

6.5. The Board:

(i) Welcomed the update and congratulated the team;

(ii) Supported the direction of travel and endorsed the actions; and

(iii) Agreed to delegate oversight and scrutiny of Grants and Funding - Business Performance to the Finance and Performance Committee.

7. Update on Accessioning Inquiry Records

7.1. The Board received a paper providing an update on our work to support inquiries throughout their life cycle and noted that the pace and profile of inquiries were changing and creating complexity and challenge to the organisation. The paper also provided an update on progress against our corporate priority of accessioning the records of inquiries this year; noting we were currently transferring the records of IICSA and have progressed arrangements to transfer the records from up to 4 further inquiries.

7.2. In introducing the item, LF noted that we had been supporting the transfer of inquiries records as business-as-usual activity. The work related to our core public task and that accessioning and presenting the records of traumatic events which evoke a deep sense of emotion and capture the public eye required a step change in approach. Noting this complexity and the challenges around scalability and sustainability of undertaking the work, she stressed the need for proper resourcing and exploring the potential to build a case for further investment as part of our next Spending Review bid.

7.3. There was a discussion around risks and challenges, including the length and degree of our support and involvement, as inquiries could go on for years; FOI and reclosure burdens which were difficult to predict; and sensitively reviewing and managing distressing content and supporting staff and audiences.

7.4. In response to a question on why we were accessioning records early in view of capacity and resourcing issues, the Board noted that there were multiple reasons, including public pressure to provide access to the records, capability within departments to retain the records and the high public confidence in The National Archives and the public records system. There was a further, widely supported comment that more needed to be done upstream with regards to resourcing discussions when the inquiries were first set up.

7.5. The Board suggested undertaking further data analysis work in respect of volume, timing and cost of our inquiries-focused work and presenting this to the Finance and Performance Committee for discussion.

7.6. The Board:

(i) Welcomed and noted the update, including the risks and challenges;

(ii) Supported management's view in exploring the potential to build a case for further investment as part of our next Spending Review bid; and

(iii) Agreed that regular updates on our inquiries-focused work, including metrics and data be delegated to the Finance and Performance Committee.

Action by: LF/MR/NC

8. Public Records Act Compliance

8.1. The Board received a paper providing an overview of our monitoring of compliance with the Public Records Act (PRA), noting that although there is a high level of legal compliance, government as a whole continues to retain a significant volume of legacy records. The paper also provided an overview of the Records of Local Interest (ROLI) New Burdens programme, which distributes funding to Local Authority Places of Deposit for accessioning paper records that fall under the 20 year rule, and is due to finish at the end of 2024.

8.2. The National Archives continues to maintain a good credible voice with government departments with regards to compliance with the PRA. Wider conversations were also taking place with the ONS, Police Records and NHS on the public records system.

8.3. The number of Local Authority Section 114 (Bankruptcy) notices were at an all-time high, although, this was not having too much of an impact on Local Authority Places of Deposit, which were operating minimum standards of opening and being monitored by the Archives Sector Leadership team.

8.4. A decision on how to manage the preservation and access to digital public records of local interest (created by ROLI bodies) still needed to be agreed across The National Archives.

8.5. The Board:

(i) Received and noted the update; and

(ii) Endorsed the activities that have been prioritised to support Public Records Act compliance.

9. Corporate Risk Register and Issues Log

9.1. The Board received the Corporate Risk Register and Issues Log, noting that owing to the timings of meetings, the Audit and Risk Committee will receive a more up-to-date version at its next meeting.

9.2. NC reported that a number of risk areas have moved on since March, with Senior Leadership Turnover and the Parliamentary Archives project increasing to red.

9.3. LF provided a verbal update on the Parliamentary Archives project.

9.4. The Board:

(i) Reviewed the Corporate Risk Register and Issues Log; and

(ii) Endorsed management's approach to the Parliamentary Archives project.

10. Preparing for Spending Review 2024

10.1. The Board received a paper and presentation setting out the context for the 2024 Spending Review (SR) and the initial work to prepare The National Archives' submission, including potential scenarios and early thinking by management on potential areas where we might want to make a case.

10.2. There was a discussion around the framing of the narrative and opportunities to highlight our issues and burdens in the One Day briefing being prepared for new ministers post-election.

10.3. The Board:

(i) Endorsed the list of cases identified by management;

(ii) Agreed that as Retained European Union Law (REUL) was not part of the core baseline budget, a case should be made, as well as for Inquiries records;

(iii) Endorsed the next steps set out in the paper;

(iv) Agreed to hold a further discussion at the 9 July meeting.

Action by: NC/SW/AB

11. Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24

11.1. The Board was invited to review and comment on the latest draft of the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 and note the outstanding work and queries to the accounts. The Board also received an update on the production timetable and the impact of the announcement of a General Election on 4 July on this.

11.2. The Board:

(i) Noted that comments made in Convene will be incorporated into the next draft of the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24;

(ii) Noted that the final typeset designed version will be circulated to the ARC and then onwards to Board for write round approval, once the Audit Completion Report has been received;

(iii) Received assurance that production was on-track; and

(iv) Subject to (i) agreed to submit the latest version to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to start off the 1-2-3 sign off process of the narrative and noting of the accounts.

At this point, LF left the meeting.

12. Update on the Board Effectiveness Action Plan

12.1. The Board received an update on progress on delivering the 2023-24 Board Effectiveness Action Plan, noting that all actions, bar one were complete. The Board was also invited to agree the timing of the next self-assessment based Board effectiveness review and skills audit.

12.2. The Board

   (i)   Received and noted the update;

   (ii) Agreed the RAG ratings of the Action Plan; and

   (iii) Agreed to undertake the next self-assessment-based Board effectiveness review in December 2024 and complete a skills audit at the same time.

Action by: AB/SN

13. Update from the Board Sub-Committee

13.1. RP provided a verbal update on the 4 March Audit and Risk Committee meeting, noting the Thought Leadership session led by internal auditors, Mazars, on the topic of "Reflections on Audit & Risk Committees' effectiveness - now and in the future". He highlighted that the quality of discussions and papers were improving but needed to be consistent. The Board also noted the draft minutes of the 4 March meeting.

13.2. MR provided a verbal update on the second meeting of the Finance and Performance Committee and noted that the discussions had been productive, and the quality of papers had been good. The meeting had drilled down on the reasons behind underspends. The Board also noted the approved minutes of the 19 January meeting and the draft minutes of the 23 April meeting.

13.3. The Board:

   (i)   Received and noted the verbal updates from the two Board sub-committees and the draft minutes.

14. Executive Team Updates

14.1. The Board received a report on Executive Team activities, including an update on the MoJ Wills consultation and our work to archive government web and social media content.

14.2. The Board:
   (i)   Noted the updates.

15. Non-executive Board Member Verbal Updates

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

15.2. RS noted meeting with Patrick Vollmer, House of Lords Library and visiting The Hold – Suffolk Archives.

15.3. RP noted attending a Working Group meeting of the DCMS ARC Chair's on best practice and suggested hosting the 14 November meeting at Kew.

15.4. SC noted conversations with AM on HR and Change best practice and joining the Parliamentary Archives Project Steering Group.

15.5. AW provided a verbal update on NEBM appointments. He also noted the Buckingham Palace Garden Party for the Cultural Sector, to which he and JJ were invited, and thanked The National Archives for the document display at his event at All Soul's College, Oxford University. He also noted engaging with GMR and JB on earlier drafts of the Research Vision and attending the event at Kew to mark the 120th anniversary of the Entente Cordiale.

15.6. The Board noted the updates.

16. Minutes, Matters Arising and Action Log

16.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 29 February and 7 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

16.2. The Board reviewed and agreed the Actions Log.

17. Any Other Business

17.1. Reflections from the meeting

(i)   The Board agreed that the pattern and format of meetings was working well and the Board was making effective use of its sub-committee.

17.2. Items for information

(i)   There were no items for information.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15.29