

Minutes of a Special Meeting of The National Archives' Board
Held on Tuesday 9 July 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 (via VC for items 1-5)
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
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 (via VC)
John Sheridan (JS) Digital Director

Also present:

Asha Bagayat (AB) Head of Governance (Minutes)
Marie Twomey-McLeod (MTM) Head of Finance (Item 5)
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. Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24

2.1. The Board was invited to review and approve the near-final designed version of the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) 2023-24 for onward submission to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Board also received an update on progress of the final audit by the National Audit Office (NAO) and outstanding areas of work; on pressures around the timetable following the impact of the General Election; on scenario planning for laying the report in Parliament; and assurance around the transition of Accounting Officer responsibilities in respect of the signing of the accounts, in the event the report was laid following JJ's departure.

2.2. The Board:

- (i) Agreed the near-final designed version of The National Archives' Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 and praised the quality of the document;

- (ii) Noted the areas of outstanding work, particularly receipt of the final Audit Completion Report from NAO;
- (iii) Agreed to submit the latest version to DCMS for sign off of the narrative and noting of the accounts, starting with the Permanent Secretary and then the Secretary of State;
- (iv) Received assurance around the transition of Accounting Officer responsibilities in relation to the signing of the accounts;
- (v) Noted the challenges and scenario planning with regards to laying the report in Parliament; and
- (vi) Noted that the final report will be circulated for approval via write round, first to the Audit and Risk Committee and then the Board, along with the final Audit Completion Report.

Action by: NC/AB

POST MEETING NOTE: The final ARA, along with a copy of the near-final Audit Completion Report and a cover note from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, was published on Convene for write round approval on 12 July 2024. The ARA was successfully laid in Parliament on 25 July 2024.

3. Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the North-East Partnership Project

- 3.1. Further to the discussion at the 4 June meeting, the Board received the final draft of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for review and agreement. The final document will be submitted to HM Treasury and asks for £1.2m to complete the Outline Business Case (OBC), which will provide a rigorous examination of the value for money of the project and the likelihood of it delivering its potential benefits.
- 3.2. The Board welcomed the SOC, noted that it read well and covered the expected direction of travel.
- 3.3. There was a discussion on management's confidence and commitment to the project, including the surfacing of pressures and challenges. All agreed the project provided an opportunity to be creative in finding solutions for some of our strategic issues, such as storage, digital and technology and would require commitment, energy and enthusiasm to deliver.
- 3.4. The Board:
 - (i) Thanked the project team for their work;
 - (ii) Endorsed the SOC for submission to HM Treasury; and

- (iii) Agreed that the transition in CEO & Keeper provided an opportunity for the organisation to reaffirm its commitment to the project as a strategic priority and champion it with renewed energy and drive.

4. Verbal Update on The National Archives' Relationship with the Trust

4.1. GMR provided a verbal update on The National Archives' relationship with The National Archives Trust.

4.2. The Board:

- (i) Noted the update and looked forward to further updates on the direction of travel.

5. Spending Review and Prioritisation

5.1. The Board received a presentation providing a further update for the 2024 Spending Review (SR); noting that the dimensions remained uncertain but should be clearer once HM Treasury presented their assessment of public finances to Parliament later in the month. Meanwhile, management had undertaken preliminary work to look at scenarios and pressures impacting our baseline, and had begun to develop a set of cases for SR funding. The presentation provided a high-level summary of current thinking, within the (developing) context of the new administration and its priorities.

5.2. The Board discussed the priorities to be included in the SR, including building a solid case for pressure areas impacting our baseline and opportunities for cross-departmental collaborations. The likely timetable for the SR was also noted.

5.3. The Board:

- (i) Noted the update and broadly endorsed management's thinking for developing a set of cases for SR funding.

5.4. At this point MR left the meeting.

6. Verbal Update on the Parliamentary Archives Partnership

6.1. JJ provided a verbal update on the Parliamentary Archives Project, noting that conversations continued with regards to areas of divergence, such as how records covered by Parliamentary privilege will be catalogued and managed. The digital burden and resource implications remained an area of risk. There was a discussion around scenarios, but generally, management remained positive about the partnership.

6.2. The Board:

- (i) Noted the update, including the risks and challenges; and
- (ii) Requested a further update at the next meeting.

7. Any Other Business

7.1. Vote of thanks: As this was JJ's last meeting as CEO & Keeper, AW led on a vote of thanks. He noted that JJ had been instrumental to the extraordinary period of change at The National Archives over the past decade and praised his personal leadership-style and stewardship of the organisation and wished him well for the future. In response, JJ thanked the Board and his colleagues for their work and support and described his decade-long service as being 'a blast'. This was followed by a round of applause.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 13:07.