

Minutes of a meeting of The National Archives' Board
Date of Meeting: 25 February 2025 at 10am
Location: The National Archives, Kew and Video Conference (VC)



Present:

Andrew Wathey (AW - Chair) Chair of The National Archives' Board
Nigel Baker (NB) Non-executive Board Member
Sonia Cargan (SC) Non-executive Board Member
Lopa Patel (LP) Non-executive Board Member
Rommel Pereira (RP) Non-executive Board Member
Emmajane Avery (EJA) Director of Public Engagement and Sector Leadership
Lucy Fletcher (LF) Director for Public Records Access and Government Services
Gemma Maclagan Ram (GMR) Research and Commercial Development Director
Andrea Metcalf (AM) Director of People, Inclusion and Change
Saul Nassé (SN) Chief Executive and Keeper
John Sheridan (JS) Digital Director
Marie Twomey-McLeod (MTM) Interim Director of Finance

Also present:

Peter Mills (PM) Interim Director of Finance designate
Consultants from Nous Group (Item 4)
Asha Bagayat (AB) Head of Governance (Minutes)
Jonathan Lard (JL) Head of Advocacy and Partnerships Team (Item 3)
Hannah Lee (HL) Head of HR & Business Partnering (Item 9)
Tina Morton (TM) Head of Archives Sector Leadership (Item 3)
Head of Strategic Insights (Item 4 via VC)
Sam Whaley (SW) Head of Strategy

1. Welcome, Apologies for absence and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1. AW welcomed everyone, especially MTM to her first and last Board meeting as a director and to also PM to the organisation.
- 1.2. There were no apologies for absence.
- 1.3. LP declared a new interest that she had been appointed as a Non-executive Director to the Board of NHS Devon. There were no further declarations of interest.

2. Chief Executive's Report

- 2.1. The Board received a report providing an update on the work and priorities of the Chief Executive and the activities of the Executive Team.
- 2.2. SN provided an update on three key strands of forward-facing work, which included the Strategy Review, Comprehensive Spending Review and developing a vision for the Archives Sector, which were on the agenda elsewhere. He also noted the upcoming MI5 Exhibition.

- 2.3. The Board also received an update on the Parliamentary Archives and the MoD Service Personnel Records Transfer projects, noting that both were on track and moving forward at pace. The team were looking at piloting a refreshed service in relation to managing FOI backlog and would keep the Board updated on proposals.
- 2.4. There was a question in relation to the recent Cybersecurity Gold exercise and our business continuity plans. Assurances were provided in relation to short term outages of services. However, areas of vulnerability and developing a shared view with the Board on long-term contingency plans would require further consideration. RP noted that the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) would welcome a walkthrough on the Gold exercise and to contribute to developing a shared view on what we should prioritise for recovery in the event of a successful cybersecurity attack. An Internal Audit review on business continuity was planned later this year and it was agreed that the ARC should revisit this topic following the conclusion of that review. There was a suggestion the Board undertake a business continuity exercise to test our preparedness.
- 2.5. The Board:
- (i) Welcomed and noted the update;
 - (ii) Agreed to delegate detailed oversight of cybersecurity and business continuity to the Audit and Risk Committee; and
 - (iii) Suggested that management consider undertaking a business continuity exercise with the whole Board.

Action by: GMR/RP

3. The Government's new Strategic Vision for the Archives Sector

- 3.1. In 2024, The National Archives was commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to develop a new strategic vision for the archives sector. The Board was presented with a draft vision, which identified five strategic pillars on which to focus to support the needs of archives: integral, accessible, inclusive, sustainable and impactful. The draft vision sought to advocate for the value of archives and will be the foundation for annual action plans.
- 3.2. In introducing the item, EJA welcomed comments from the Board ahead of presenting the draft to ministers for approval and added that the Government's new sector vision will be complementary to The National Archives' new strategy.
- 3.3. Commentary from the Board centred around the following themes:
- The ambitions articulated in the vision and whether they went far enough
 - Resourcing and other constraints around its delivery
 - Drawing out activities that we have done well in the past and looking at opportunities of scaling them up i.e. Plugged In, Powered Up
 - Including the word 'open' with the 'inclusive' pillar for greater impact.

3.4. There was a longer discussion on making a compelling case to HM Treasury (HMT) for funding and investment to support the sector and the constraints around this, as The National Archives was not presently set up to be a funding body. Opportunities for partnerships between commercial archives with funding and smaller archives were also noted.

3.5. The Board:

- (i) Received and commented on the draft vision;
- (ii) Agreed that as presently articulated, it aimed to bring stability to the sector and provided an opportunity for The National Archives to continue to build on our reputation as a leader and allow us to strengthen our ambitions and case to ministers and HMT in future years; and
- (iii) Subject to the above, broadly endorsed the vision for submission to ministers.

4. Strategy Review Progress Update

4.1. The Board received a presentation and paper providing a progress update on the strategy review.

4.2. Consultants from Nous facilitated the session which looked in detail at the priority areas, themes and overall direction of travel for the strategy review. Feedback from engagement with the Senior Leadership Team was noted and the Board was invited to provide further comments and input on the proposed workstreams to support the development of the strategy.

4.3. Comments from the Board centred around what was missing and areas which could be teased out further within the workstreams. High-level suggestions included 'people' i.e. both staff and those that we serve, upskilling and reskilling our people in relation to AI and teaching our audiences how to interact with us in a digital world and the cultural pieces around this. The Estates workstream also omitted to comment on locations and access beyond Kew.

4.4. The Board:

- (i) Welcomed the update;
- (ii) Provided comments and steers on the hypotheses and questions presented to drill down the five priority areas to develop the key landmarks for the strategy; and
- (iii) Noted the next steps and looked forward to a further update at the next Board meeting (potentially at the Board Development Session on 3 April).

5. Spending Review

5.1. The Board received a presentation providing an update on the Spending Review, which covered an update on discussions with HMT and their steers with regards to growth, reform and efficiencies, an outline of the commissions and work thus far and an update on the timetable.

5.2. RP shared insights from other organisations and stressed the importance of the narrative accompanying the numbers to be compelling.

5.3. There was a discussion around income generation and the potential for reopening discussions with HMT regarding commercial freedoms.

5.4. The Board:

- (i) Welcomed and noted the update; and
- (ii) Discussed the framing, risks and opportunities.

6. Budget 2025-26

6.1. The Board was presented with the proposed RDEL budget by directorate for 2025-26 which had been approved by the Executive Team, this included an outline of the adjustments made to original directorate budget bids submitted back in December in order to balance the overall budget and headroom. The Board was also presented with the CDEL Budget proposal as agreed by the Executive Team.

6.2. The Board:

- (i) Endorsed the Budget and headcount growth.

7. 9+3 Financial Forecast

7.1. The Board received the 9+3 Financial Forecast which presented an underspend largely driven by a reduction in staff costs due to delays in recruitment and the impact of pausing Project Omega on the year-end accounts.

7.2. The Board:

- (i) Endorsed the 9+3 Financial Forecast and the mitigations set out in the paper.

8. Update on the Implementation of the Strategic International Plan

8.1. The Board received a paper providing a progress update on the implementation of our strategic international plan and an overview of the impact and benefits we were realising from different strands of activity. The Board was invited for its views on opportunities that could be developed further and to comment on the direction our international work might be able to take in the context of the strategy review.

8.2. In introducing the report, SW highlighted the role of The National Archives is supporting the government in cultural diplomacy and soft power.

8.3. The subsequent discussion centred around the opportunities and pace for developing an international archive training programme –noting our own resourcing challenges to deliver, and access issues for smaller international archives that had no budget; looking at opportunities for strategic partnering with other archives to deliver strands of activity; extending soft power capabilities to share knowledge assets and building on our reputation as an international leader in archives; and developing further opportunities for international commercial partnerships.

8.4. The Board noted the team size and the reactive nature of some of the activities. Whilst it supported agility and flexibility, suggestions were made to set tighter guidelines to enable focused growth.

8.5. The Board:

- (i) Welcomed and noted the update;
- (ii) Provided steers on areas which could be developed further; and
- (iii) Welcomed a deep dive on income streams at a future Finance and Performance Committee meeting.

Action by: SN/GMR

9. Staff Survey Results and Update on the Wellbeing Framework

9.1. The Board received a paper providing an update on the key results from the annual staff survey and the associated action plan. The Board also received an update on staff wellbeing and initiatives.

9.2. AM highlighted that there had been improvement in some areas but that we had fallen out of the top quartile in terms of response rate and pay and benefits and leadership and management remained areas of concern.

9.3. Sharing insights from other organisations, including the private sector, the Board noted that it was usual for pay and benefits to feature in staff survey results.

9.4. The Board also delved deeper into the statistics around 'raising a concern' and received assurance that mechanisms were in place for staff to raise concerns and these were published and promoted. However, some of the drivers related to a lack of awareness that our Raising a Concern policy was aligned to the Civil Service Code, and therefore we plan to ensure that this is made explicit in our communications.

9.5. In discussing the results around management and leaderships, the Board noted this was a transition year and offered its support to the initiatives planned, including those related to the strategy review, to engage and bring staff along.

9.6. The Board:

- (i) Received and noted the update;
- (ii) Endorsed the associated action plan; and
- (iii) Expressed an interest in receiving an update on the Pulse Survey results.

Action by: AM/HL

10. Updates from the Board Sub-Committees

- 10.1. AW, as interim chair, provided a verbal update on the 12 February meeting of the Finance and Performance Committee and noted there had been a good discussion on the Spending Review and financial reports and work was underway to develop a performance dashboard.
- 10.2. RP provided a verbal update on the 24 February meeting of the ARC. He noted the heavy agenda and the items that had been considered, including a progress update on an assurance map. He praised LF and her team on the MoD Service Records FOI Lessons Learned report. He also noted a review was underway by NAO on fees and charges and recommended this as a potential item for an all Board Thought Leadership session.
- 10.3. There was a question on whether the Corporate Risk Register should be presented at every Board meeting, and assurance was provided that it was considered by the ARC at each meeting. However, AW and SN would more generally review the items that should be coming back to Board from the sub-committees.
- 10.4. The Board:
- (i) Received and noted the verbal updates; and
 - (ii) Agreed that AW/SN, in conjunction with the Head of Governance, would consider which items from sub-committees should come back to Board for oversight and assurance.

Action by: AW/SN/AB

11. Non-Executive Board Member Verbal Updates

- 11.1. Non-executive Board Members (NEBMs) each provided a verbal update on their recent activity, including insights from other organisations.
- 11.2. RP noted attending the DCMS ARC Chair's meeting and shared insights in relation to the Spending Review and year end accounts and auditing.
- 11.3. SC noted preparation for an upcoming Parliamentary Archives meeting.
- 11.4. LP noted attending various AI related national and European forums and summits.
- 11.5. All NEBMs noted holding individual induction meetings with the two new NEBMs.

12. Minutes, Matters Arising and Actions

- 12.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2024 were approved as a correct record.
- 12.2. As a matter arising, AW reported that last year's external spend on Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion activities required sign off by the Board and he had approved this on its behalf

out-of-committee and was formally recording it here for the minutes. The value of the total spend was £23,418.

12.3. The Board reviewed and agreed the Actions Log.

13. Any Other Business

Forward Agenda

13.1. The Board received and noted the Forward Agenda.

Reflections from the meeting

13.2. The Board noted the quality of discussions.

Items for information

13.3. There were no items for information.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 14.49.