

The Advisory Council on Beacon Councils
C/o ODPM APBC Secretariat
Zone 3/D2
Eland House
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30th April 2003

**Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Advisory Panel on Beacon
Councils: Theme Consultation**

Consultation Response from the National Council on Archives

1. Summary of submission

- i. We would support the proposal of The National Archives for the theme of “Community Accountability” under Round 7 of the themes for Beacon Councils.
- ii. We would support the proposal of Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries for the theme of “Archives and Community Identity” under Round 7 of the themes for Beacon Councils.
- ii. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s Advisory Panel on how these themes might be developed, implemented and assessed.

2. Background

- 2.1 The National Council on Archives (NCA) is a membership organization, which represents a broad spectrum of the archival community including user groups, professionals, national and regional bodies. It aims to provide a single voice for the archival community and to lobby on matters of common interest.
- 2.2 The NCA works in partnership with The National Archives, Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, the Society of Archivists and the Association for Chief Archivists in Local Government.
- 2.3 The NCA is responsible for delivery of 15 of the 50 targets under the Government Policy on Archives Action Plan published by the Interdepartmental Archives Committee, which includes representation from the Office of the Deputy Prime minister. Many of the action plan targets involve the promotion of modernization and change that are designed to influence and enhance services provided by the network of local authority funded archive services, which form the backbone of archive provision in the UK.

- 2.4 The NCA's subsidiary arm, the Public Services Quality Group works on a number of initiatives designed to improve service delivery and performance management in publicly funded archives. Amongst other things, it is responsible for developing an Access Standard for UK Archives to British Standard status and for a series of performance indicators in partnership with the Audit Commission.
- 2.5 There are over 1 million visits to local authority funded archives in the UK and annual expenditure on these services is estimated to be £40m.

3. Round 7 – “Community Accountability”

- 3.1 We are supporting the suggestion of The National Archives for the theme of “Community Accountability” under round 7. Good records management policies and practices are essential if local authorities are to rise successfully to challenges of The Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000). Both these Acts and the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on Records Management under Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) place significant new duties upon local authorities to manage their records effectively in the interests of greater public accountability and confidence.
- 3.2 This proposal is also supported by the Records Management Society and the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government.
- 3.3 The importance of electronic records management in underpinning the successful implementation of the Government's Modernisation White Paper (1999) cannot be underestimated. It will play a vital role in the delivery of better e-enabled services to the public. The target date for managing electronic records outside central government by 2005 is extremely challenging for the vast majority of local authorities.
- 3.4 There are some examples of developing best practice in this area. We would point to:
- The Corporation of London, where the lead responsibility for an authority wide electronic records management system lies with the Comptroller (the head of legal service) but where the crucial role of implementation rests with a new department the Joint Archives Service. This is a marriage of the skills of the Corporation of London's Record Office and London Metropolitan Archives in recognition of the scale required to deliver Freedom of Information and effective records management in the electronic age. The timetable for introduction of the electronic records management system is January 2005.
 - Gloucestershire County Council, where responsibility for records management, electronic records management, Data Protection and Freedom of Information has been brought under the County Archivist by structural changes within additional funding being made available for extra post to strengthen work in these areas;

3.4 Including “community accountability” as a theme for round 7 would support and underline the importance of records management promotion being undertaken across central and local government

4. Round 7- Archives and Their Contribution to Community Identity

4.1. We would like to support the suggestion of Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries to include the theme of “Archives and their contribution to community identity”. Archives are the raw historical material that tells us about who we are and how we relate those around us. They can help to build and foster a sense of personal and community identity and can play a vital role in developing community confidence and cohesion through innovative programmes.

4.2 This role in underpinning and promoting community identity and a sense of place twinned with the role of archives in developing values of citizenship and local democratic accountability means that they can help, in a small way, to combat social exclusion.

4.3 There are many examples of how local authority archive services are strengthening and underpinning community identity. We would point out:

- **Abbeylands Project - Surrey History Centre**
Abbeylands School is situated in an area of social deprivation and has been suffering from a period of uncertainty with falling school numbers. It is to be re-launched. Attendance level and the self-esteem of pupils has been affected.

Surrey History Centre, in partnership with Brooklands Museum and the County Council’s Education Services, has devised a project that will involve pupils researching the wartime history of the local area. On one level the aim of the project is to improve the historical knowledge and ICT skills of the pupils. The real drive, however, is to raise the profile of the school and the self confidence and pride of the pupils through appearances on local radio, in newspapers and in the community venues.

- **Reminiscence Therapy – West Sussex County Record Office**
A partnership between West Sussex Record Office and West Sussex Social Services Department, has brought film archive footage into rural day centers across the county. The session include a selection of local films, amateur and professional illustrating the changing patterns of home, work and social life during the twentieth century. The films have proved an excellent way of evoking memories and social cohesion amongst the participants.

4.4 This round 7 theme would help to support and develop the forthcoming findings of the Archives Task Force, which is being conducted by Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries at the request of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The Archives Task Force

is conducting an in-depth analysis and review of the state of UK archives and their contribution to society. It will undoubtedly make recommendations in the area of fostering community identity and we would highlight the opportunity for a joined-up approach with the work of the Office of the Deputy Prime minister

We hope that the suggestions we have given will be considered, and we would welcome the opportunity of consulting further with you. If you would like any further information we would ask you to contact, in the first instance, our Policy and Development Officer, Katie Norgrove on 020 8392 5376 or by email: katie.norgrove@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,

Nick Kingsley
Chair