

Committee(s): Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Discussion	Dated: 16/05/2022
Subject: Strategic Direction for London Metropolitan Archives	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 4, 8, 9,10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	Existing resource
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: The Town Clerk and Chief Executive	For Discussion
Report author: Emma Markiewicz	

Summary

This paper sets out the current operating context for LMA and for archives in general; it provides background as to our collections and services and sets out a future direction for the LMA under TOM phase 2.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- note the paper and its suggested next steps

Main Report

Background

About London Metropolitan Archives

1. The London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) is the City's and London's memory and our collections reflect centuries of its diplomacy, precedence and tradition. We are also the major collecting body for the City's more recent past and have a vital role to play in its present and future. Our mission is to collect, preserve and make accessible the record of the history of London, the administrative record of the City of London Corporation; the complex London government of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the archives of businesses, schools, hospitals, charities and many other organisations from the London area. Our 100km of holdings form the largest civic archive in the UK, and the second largest archive, after The National Archives. They are a powerful resource for research and learning; for understanding decision-making and democracy; and they tell the national story of London as one of the most significant and historic capital cities in the world.

Our Collections

2. Our collections are unrivalled for metropolitan archives, covering all aspects of London's history, as well as acting as a mirror for experiences and a map for decisions affecting life today. The diversity of people and communities across London are richly represented through official sources, and information can be found across all our records as to all aspects of society fundamental to society. Through our records can be found evidence of **London as a centre for migration** for people from across the world; the work of activists within the LGBTQ+ community over the decades; the influence and experiences of the Jewish community, its representative bodies, charities, schools and synagogues. We have a number of key black and Caribbean community archives, Chinese and Muslim communities and growing these collections and others is a central plank of our acquisitions policy. **The built environment** is documented through archives of construction firms, building control files, plans and drawings created by architects, engineers, surveyor and planning departments of the City Corporation and London government bodies such as the London County Council and Greater London Council. The London Picture Archive holds images of London over the last 300 years, through photographs, maps, prints, watercolours and etchings. We hold the largest **business archive** for a public archive in England and Wales, representing businesses mainly based in the square mile and Greater London region, reflecting London as a national and international commercial and financial centre. These collections include management and financial records, technical innovation, plans, photographs, advertising and employment records. They range from individual craftsmen in the 15th Century, to large partnership and limited companies such as Lloyds of London, predecessors of Transport for London, Lyons and global banks and multinationals such as Standard Chartered Bank and Kleinwort Benson.
3. **The Justice system** is well represented among our records, and we hold records for different kinds of court, such as coroners, magistrates, county courts and Middlesex Sessions, as well as records of the City of London Police and prisons (Wandsworth, Holloway and Feltham Young Offenders). We are an essential destination for anyone researching ancestors from the London area, and we can support them in searching our parish registers, electoral registers, land tax records, wills and parish poor relief records amongst others. Many of these and more are available fully indexed via Ancestry.com and we obtain an annual income from Ancestry for these records through a licensing partnership. Arts and culture; public health and wellbeing; livery companies; City administration; the themes within our collections and its research potential is endless.

Our services

4. We are a centre of expertise and knowledge and we strive to connect people with their history through the collections in a wide range of ways:
 - **Research and enquiry services:** our reading rooms are open to the public, free of charge, 4 days a week. Our opening hours are under constant review post covid.
 - **Digital resources:** including the highly regarded London Picture Archive which provides free access to over 250,000 historical prints, maps and photographs of London; our extensive online catalogue and records available via partners such as Ancestry.com
 - **Public engagement:** Free exhibitions and events programme on site and online - talks, workshops and webinars
 - **Education and Learning programme:** in 2021/22 we had 96 school visits onsite and online, and we reached over 5000 learners through direct engagement across all our schools, community and adult learning activities (nb this is not quite at pre-Covid levels)
 - **Community engagement:** working with local charities and depositors to exploit their collections for their needs, and to make our spaces available to them; delivering grant-funded programmes such as Unlocking Our Sound Heritage
 - **Volunteering opportunities:** to improve and enhance our catalogue. LMA currently has around 100 volunteers who contribute both remotely and onsite to improving our find aids and supporting events (in 2021/22 just under 3000 hours of volunteering were given).
 - **Being the City Corporation's memory:** using our collections and expertise to bring to life its history, to explain its ancient customs and practices, and to enhance the experience of visitors, members and colleagues
5. LMA also holds some collections still housed at Guildhall and has responsibility for the Guildhall Library and the Small Business Research and Enterprise Centre which both operate from the Guildhall site.

Current Position

6. Archives are going through a period of change. For many years, reading rooms were the lifeblood of all types of archives services, serving large numbers of family historians and academic researchers (amongst others) through delivering original documents on site. Increased digitisation and an ageing population has seen a drop-off of these users in recent years, and this has perhaps increased more steeply through measures put in place to manage covid, though the full impact of this remains to be fully understood. Certainly, people are using our services differently and have been for a number of years: enquires are less frequent but more complex; users spend less time in the

reading room as technology now enables them to photograph documents in far greater volumes for later use. On site visits have grown amongst certain other groups, such as students encouraged to consult original sources, and specialist researchers such as architects. We receive constant approaches from all our user groups to take in their archives.

7. The challenge is for archives to remain relevant and used, and this can only be achieved by diversifying our audiences and using the collections in different ways. In the age of Google search, people expect to use our resources with a greater emphasis on 'search' over 'research'. It is beholden on us to find ways to bring the collections to people, and many will assume there is nothing for them if they do not come to us with specific research needs. We need to turn around these perceptions in a curated and exciting way that doesn't require pre-existing knowledge or specific research questions. We need to reach out more to schools, to adult learners and to community groups with a structured offer of events and other activities in which they can truly participate. We need to maintain and develop our research service by providing more space and flexible ways to access collections for those who wish to research, and to find audience focussed ways of showing what we hold to enable new audiences to harness the research potential in areas of the collections not traditionally found through using our online catalogue.
8. The need for archives to provide specialist knowledge and support is therefore greater than ever, but the role and skills of an archivist are changing. Skills now tend to be around communicating more widely to groups as well as individuals; communicating in a digital environment as well as a physical one; communicating to those with no prior knowledge of archives and their potential; and facilitating many different types of work and use. This expertise needs to encompass fundraising activity, a working understanding of information legislation, a nose for commercial opportunity; and digital skills from preservation, to access, to engagement.

Physical spaces and location

9. The public spaces on site are no longer suitable for changing user need and our physical storage capacity is becoming stretched. Our exhibition space is small and quickly becomes crowded, there is nowhere for group activities with collections, and our education room is small and not conducive to expanding our learning programme. Not only does this limit our capacity for growth and for truly becoming a modern archive, but our ability to generate income through engagement activity and commercial storage is limited,
10. These spaces have not been refreshed for over 10 years, and no longer meet the needs of new audiences or new ways of using the collections. The archives

search room (where original material is presented to those with a History Card) is often crowded, while the resource centre can feel empty. There is insufficient space for people to bring their own devices, and the atmosphere is not conducive to group work or relaxed study.

11. In terms of public engagement, our exhibitions can be very popular. *Magnificent Maps*, which opened on 11th April this year has had upwards of 100 visitors on some days, and the small space can start to feel quickly cramped. We have a well-appointed exhibition space at Guildhall and a long-standing relationship with the Art Gallery and our displays here are designed to link to wider City events, but there is a lot more we could do to raise our profile in this area. The new 'destinations' strategy, led by the Innovation and Growth team may provide a more strategic framework for events and activities involving LMA expertise and collections. We have some rooms for events hire and for hosting conferences which were well used pre Covid, but lack a modern feel and are not able to host hybrid technology or high quality, paid for events.

Options

12. As one of the largest and most important collections in the country, LMA can be a leader in its field. We have a staff of experienced experts, who are passionate and committed to bringing the collections to life. However, in order to capitalise on this and to reach our potential, we will need to reshape our resources, skills and spaces.
13. We have recently lost a number of posts through the Target Operating Model process, and we have no vacancies through which to bring in new skills. The current staff has largely been in post for a minimum of 10 years and there is little to no turnover currently.
14. In order to take an evidence-based approach to making the changes needed to bring out LMA's potential as described above, to establish priorities for moving forward, and to ensure staff engagement through the process, I propose to take the following 3 steps over the coming year:
 - a. **Commission an in-depth strategic review of our current and future audiences** to better understand who they are and what they need. This would enable us to segment our potential audiences and how to shape our on-site and digital offer accordingly. Essentially it would provide the groundwork for trialling activities and events, for better understanding the potential for growth across all aspects of community work; public engagement such as exhibitions, events and talks; education and learning; digitisation and curated licensing projects; research services and the capacity of the space. The outcomes of

this review will form the basis for a new vision and communication plan for LMA to be agreed at Committee

- b. **Review the staffing structure:** Run a staff consultation exercise to gather feedback and ideas on reshaping the current structure to unlock our expertise; grow capacity for our engagement and learning offer, and digital services. This structure will also be informed by the audience research and an investigation of other leading archives services. It will involve staff at Guildhall Library and the Small Business Research and Enterprise Centre with a view to better understanding where these services should be based. It will seek to create more development opportunities for existing staff by broadening out roles to take on a specialist focus based collections expertise and shifting to an audience-centred rather than a task-based approach.
 - c. **Enable members and colleagues in City Surveyors to take firm decisions about whether we can remain in our current location** at the end of the lease term in 2035. Long term, there is significant potential for development of the current site in terms of:
 - Higher quality physical spaces for events and research
 - Prioritising learning and education activities
 - Social spaces for group and community work
 - Targeting specific audiences (such as undergraduates, postgraduates from across London universities) to use the space
 - Growing our storage space to enable income generation
15. Our Islington location (EC1, Farringdon/ Clerkenwell) makes us well placed to exploit the new Elizabeth line, the move of the Museum of London to be much closer, the many and growing creative businesses and charities, and other cultural organisations in the Knowledge Quarter. There is potential for expansion on the current site, and sufficient time to explore co-location arrangements with other organisations (for example learned institutions, university services) who may be seeking archival storage and reading room or event space in a central London location.
16. In parallel, I will also seek to:
- a. Continue to build activities back to pre-Covid levels; piloting more flexible opening times to build new audiences, and inform planning for the longer-term future direction of LMA
 - b. Build relationships to ensure LMA is linked in to planning for the new Museum of London site, the Barbican development work and re-modelling of Guildhall

- c. Develop relationships with Innovation and Growth to exploit potential for LMA within the Destinations strategy
- d. Develop relationships with Community and Children's Services to better understand how LMA can support activity within the City's schools, academies and libraries; piloting activities before wider roll out within Islington and neighbouring boroughs
- e. Continue the conversation with members as to the future governance model for LMA to ensure we have the flexibility, resource and strategic oversight to realise our potential

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Financial implications – none at this point. Longer term there are implications for the development of the archives building, wherever it is sited.

Resource implications – as above.

Legal implications - none

Risk implications – none

Equalities implications – we will continue to undertake equalities impact assessments

Climate implications – none

Security implications – none

Emma Markiewicz

Director, London Metropolitan Archives

T: 07966 423683

E: emma.markiewicz@cityoflondon.gov.uk