**Vision and purpose of London Archives Partnership (LAP)**

To enable a collaborative, creative and cost effective approach to the management of London’s local authority archive services, increasing access to the city’s history, preserving its heritage and reflecting the changing character of London and Londoners.

We want to reflect the recommendations of The National Archives’ *Archives for the 21st Century:*

* *Develop bigger and better services in partnership–working towards increased sustainability within the sector*
* *Strengthened leadership and a responsive, skilled workforce*
* *Co-ordinated response to the growing challenge of managing digital information so that it is accessible now and remains discoverable in the future*
* *Comprehensive online access for archive discovery through catalogues and to digitised archive content by citizens at a time and place that suits them*
* *Active participation in cultural and learning partnerships promoting a sense of identity and place within the community*

**The story so far**

The Association of London Chief Librarians (ALCL) and The National Archives (TNA) commissioned a study in 2013 to explore the potential advantages of archive services in London working more closely and creatively together. The report uncovered a complex landscape for archives and local studies in London in terms of size, range and resources. However, we all share the ever increasing pressures on budgets, the need to look for alternative ways of funding services, and the need to demonstrate how heritage services meet council priorities.

Although archive services normally represent a very small part of any authority’s total budget it is recognised that this does not exempt them from the need to deliver greater efficiency. It is also clear that any proposals for the future will need to be realistic; flexible enough to adapt in a changing landscape where funding streams are likely to be increasingly mixed and complex.

It is important to look for efficiencies that will deliver cashable savings with least damage to the services that customers value and that staff have worked hard over decades to develop. In simple terms there are two ways to do this – reduce gross costs (mainly staff) or increase income in order to reduce net expenditure. The main proposition that emerges from this project suggests that a mix of both cost reduction and increased income is necessary.

Service redesign is needed to release scarce resources to invest in areas that have the potential to reach and engage meaningfully with many more people. Although individual services could make some of these changes on their own, there are clear advantages of doing this in collaboration with others. The degree of change needed will require strong leadership. ALCL will be critical to progressing any of the recommendations that are adopted.

**The recommendations of the report are attached at Appendix one.**

Following a successful workshop in March, attended by the majority of the 33 boroughs, a number of projects are already underway

* The creation of a shared London archives catalogue by using the existing AIM25 network
* Joint initiatives around WWI commemorative events, led by the London Metropolitan Archives
* Joint initiatives around the 50th anniversary of the London boroughs in 2015, led by London Councils
* A digitisation partnership leading to a commercially viable shared images portal
* London wide procurement of conservation, storage, training etc

Additionally a number of options are being considered

* Shared marketing and collective branding/identity
* Public access points and shared staffing
* Joint schools provision and production of learning resources linked to the London Curriculum
* Working more effectively with HE and FE sector
* A London wide volunteer programme
* Joint bids for external funding and sponsorship

**Role of the City of London and London Metropolitan Archives (LMA)**

The current and potential role for the City and LMA is outlined in the ALCL/TNA report, particularly in relation to leadership and governance for the LAP itself. For local government archive services in London more broadly, there are two key areas where LMA can contribute particularly:

Collaborative projects

The leadership of collaborative projects such as in the past the successful Access to Archives (A2A) retro-conversion bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the current WWI bid, also to HLF. There is a clear track record that this works and is and should continue for the benefit of current and future users. There are significant benefits in the scaling up of specific projects.

Commissioning

The potential to be commissioned to deliver a range of archive services on behalf of one or more London boroughs. To a certain extent this already happens in such areas as the storage of film archives for a number of boroughs as part of London’s Screen Archives.

While the City (including LMA) is subject to the same budgetary pressures as other publicly funded bodies and will be making significant financial savings over the next few years, it does have an explicit ‘Supporting London’ strand to its strategic objectives and in many areas of local authority work provides both political and departmental leadership. This does mean that although there can be no ‘cost free’ areas for commissioned work, there is potential for the delivery of services from the smaller to the larger scale and at competitive rates.

**Project Management**

A Project Board has been set up and currently consists of:

Sue Mckenzie - LB Brent (Chair) Tina Morton – The National Archives

Geoff Pick – City of London and London Metropolitan Archives

Ted Rogers – LB Hackney Souraya Ali – London Councils

Simon McKeon – LB Bexley/Bromley Pam Usher – LB Southwark

Lorna Lee – LB Waltham Forest

The Board meets every three months and will be complemented by a London wide group of practitioners.

**Funding**

TNA have already funded the consultancy and the project set up costs, and they may be able to continue to support some core activity. However, one of the key aims of LAP is to bring in external funding for London collaborative projects. Funders such as ACE and HLF look kindly on cross borough projects; we need to create the capacity to write the applications.

**Building the Partnership**

The Partnership is open to all those with responsibility for archives in London local authorities.

Each authority will:

• Make a commitment to the principles of collaboration, actively seeking ways to achieve service improvement and developments through shared resources, such as a single catalogue, rather than making individual arrangements

• Participate in appropriate shared projects, including releasing the agreed staff capacity to deliver the outcomes of the projects

• Promote the partnership alongside their individual service

The capacity of some individual borough services to play an active part in projects will be limited. Even the bigger services are struggling to meet demand and respond fully to the opportunities presented by digital developments. A collaborative response to the challenges and opportunities will create a collective strategy that would be better placed to meet the increasingly complex demands of existing and potential users and strengthen the position of the local authority archives and local studies services. The support of ALCL, TNA and London Councils in this process is invaluable. We will also work in close partnership with Archives for London and the ARA London group.

LAP will bring together the boroughs that are prepared to work together for change. As with any partnership, this will involve both give and take. Some aspects of the partnership will be more attractive to some than others, and some aspects might even go against the grain of current ways of doing things. For all members of the partnership the benefits of the collective will have to be set against the freedom of independence. There will be aspects of the partnership that could be optional but there will be a core of agreed commitments that anyone joining would have to adhere to.

The Partnership could work, regardless of the governance of individual services. A council run service, a trust or external contractor could all be valid and equal members in the Partnership.