

The proposed transfer of the Local Studies and Archives Service from the Central Library, Bexleyheath to Bromley Central Library under a shared service arrangement.

The North West Kent Family History Society has many members who live in the area and who use the Local Studies and Archives at the Central Library. At recent Branch meetings, and at a meeting between the Trustees of the Society and Volunteers, the matter was raised by many who live in the area. On their behalf the Society would like to make the following comments.

We understand the financial pressures that Councils face at the present time. However, these proposed changes would achieve minimal savings compared to the impact they will have on the users of the service and the Borough.

The Local Studies and Archives are valued, respected by and important to a wide range of organisations and people. The impact of this proposal would fall on all groups within the area. The elderly, low waged, volunteers, students, community groups, family historians, local historians and others who wish to use the service. The Borough and its people would be losing a large part of the area's history and identity. The travel time and cost of people having to go to Bromley will have a major detrimental impact on all within the Borough and we believe that this proposal should not be implemented.

There are also some points that we believe would need clarification and more detail provided before people could make further informed comments on these proposals.

1. Further development of the online local studies and archives service.

It is not clear what this means. What further development? When would it take place and how would this help to reduce the impact? As far as we are aware the greater bulk of the material within the archives are not, nor will be in the near future available online. We are unaware of any plans to copy electronically the holdings of the Archives, where would the cost of this come from?

Thus we can see no way that the 'further development of the online local studies and archives' would in any way reduce the impact of this proposed move.

2. Possible 2014/15 saving • £41,000

It is not clear how this figure is reached. Is it an estimate, if so what is it based on? If people are being asked to comment on this proposal some details should be provided.

Is this £41, 000 saving after shared costs with Bromley? Will these costs be ongoing? Does it take into account any moving costs of the Archives?

3. The Archival material. What provisions would be made by Bromley Central Library to store and provide access? Will Bromley Library be increasing staffing levels to deal with this? What provision will be made for any transfer of knowledge of the Archival material to Bromley?
4. The history of an area creates its character and provides a sense of being that will be lost by its transfer out of the locality. Existing Staff have a learned

local knowledge that will be lost. Bromley staff would have to try to gain the knowledge of the area and archival material which is not theirs.

5. What use will be made of the building/space that will become available if the Archival material and Staff are moved?
6. Impact. We believe that the impact of this proposed move is greater than indicated.

Like many Local Studies and Archives and indeed our Society, volunteers play a growing and important part of the service and running of the Archives. Moving to another Borough and the increase in time and travel costs is bound to have a major detrimental impact.

There is no sign that any volunteers have been consulted to see what impact this would have on their continuing to support and use of the Archives.

7. There seems to have been no investigation into the impact this proposed change would have into the use of the archives by people such as volunteers involved in Community projects, Family and Local Historians, Schools, Students and different Societies and other organizations within the Borough. This is normally established by a proper consultation process.
8. We believe that there would be a considerable and detrimental impact on the elderly and low income groups as well as Schools and students and others in having to travel to Bromley. Effectively denying them the opportunity to use the Local Studies and Archives. The traveling required and the cost of traveling will also have a major impact on Volunteers and other users of the Archives.
9. The Local Studies and Archives contain the history of the Borough and its people. If this is not taken care of and developed, quite often with the help of volunteers, it will become moribund and a loss to the Borough and its inhabitants.

We believe that this proposed move would reduce the donations of material by many organizations and individuals in Bexley and greatly diminish the Archive collection, reducing its growth and importance. This would be a loss of important sources of research for future generations of students and historians and of the history of the Borough.

10. We have reports from members in the Bromley Area that the Bromley Central Library is already making provisions to accept the Archival material from Bexleyheath. If this is so it places some doubt on the process being used by the Council. Some of our members have expressed the view that the decision has already been made.

The NWKFHS find this difficult to believe and that the intention is to have a proper and full consultation. However, the perception that this is the case is starting to spread and the lack of details provided is only adding to this belief. Many of our members have expressed surprise that that proposal was not on the consultation section of the website.

This proposal surely deserved to be subject to consultation within its own right. It is no small change to propose moving a Local Studies and Archives service physically out of the area.

11. We believe that there are other options that could and should be explored to ensure that the history of this Borough is retained in the area for all to use.

The Society and the members we represent would be grateful if these comments are considered and that the answers to the above points could be provided to enable our members and this Society to make more informed and relevant submissions to the consultation process.

To assist in the consultation the Society will also be asking the Federation of Family History Societies to ensure that all Family History Societies throughout the Country who have members in the area are aware of these proposed changes.

Yours Sincerely,

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