

Local Government Review Team
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

18 February 2004

**THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES (NCA) RESPONSE TO THE
BOUNDARY COMMITTEE'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF THE NORTH
EAST, THE NORTH WEST AND YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER.**

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. The NCA works in partnership with The National Archives, MLA: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, the Society of Archivists and the Association for Chief Archivists in Local Government.

Our comments on the draft proposals are limited to the issues affecting archives and records management. We would argue that the issues apply to all three regions. We, therefore, hope that you will copy this response to the respective regional teams as necessary.

We note that under the **Other services** section of each report, it is stated that:

‘...we expect the authorities... to work together closely to ensure that specialist expertise is not unnecessarily broken up and that existing levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of relatively small-scale but important functions such as trading standards, archive provision and emergency planning are maintained’

We would argue that records management should be added to this section, given that the records management functions of some authorities do not necessarily fall within the remit of their archive service provision. The argument for including records management is strengthened by the forthcoming implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in January 2005.

The principal issue, even under present arrangements, for archives and records management services is one of ensuring that they have the capacity (as referred to in the Overview report 4.11) to deliver an effective and sustainable service, regardless of the tier of government at which such service provision is made.

We understand from the Overview report (para 3.5) that:

“we are asked to put forward proposals that do not involve the creation of further joint arrangements between authorities”.

Since local government reorganization in the 1980s, joint arrangements have been the most common solution to the delivery of archive services where new unitary authorities have been created.

The experience since that reorganization has shown that:

- Those unitary authorities that have made independent provision have really struggled to provide quality services because the capacity of the service is too weak to meet the demand.
- Joint arrangements have sometimes led to the effective continuation of services previously carried out at the county level, but
- Some joint arrangements have suffered from poor governance and ownership issues
- Some joint arrangements have proved difficult to sustain, with a disproportionate amount of time being expended on maintaining the structure rather than developing the service strategically, especially in the absence of powers to enforce their continuance
- Some joint arrangements have led to the stagnation of services, as the level of development is determined by the weakest partner.

If you would like more information about the effectiveness of existing joint arrangements for archive services we would be happy to provide you with it.

Although there is evidence that existing joint arrangements have both worked well in some areas and caused problems in others, we would argue that the Commission needs to advocate flexibility in the approach to providing archive services. This may entail the creation of further joint arrangements in some areas; but the important thing is that new arrangements should support the maintenance of strong existing archive services and promote the enhancement of those which are already fragile.

We would argue that there could be a case for extending joint arrangements or for regional provision, where this might involve the creation of larger, more viable, units. Whilst certainly not advocating a “one size fits all” policy, we feel that regional provision may have the potential to rationalize unsustainable small services and gain economies of scale. Any consideration of regionally managed provision would, however, need to provide for the local delivery of services in a way that meets users needs.

We would be happy to discuss further any of the comments made in this consultation response and would ask that you contact Katie Norgrove, our Policy and Development Officer in the first instance on 0208 392 5376.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Kingsley,
Chairman, The National Council on Archives