

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance Policy & Resources
DATE	9 March 2017
DIRECTOR	Richard Ellis
TITLE OF REPORT	Digitisation of Historical Electoral Rolls
REPORT NUMBER	CG/17/011
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek approval to enter into a five year contract with Ancestry Information Operations to digitise electoral roll records for the period 1832-1974.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee delegates authority to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to enter into a contract with Ancestry Information Operations to digitise electoral roll records for a period of up to five years.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There may be a minimal amount of expenditure (less than £1,000) required for conservation work on volumes before they can be digitised. Otherwise the associated work can be met from the existing budget. Projected income for the five year term of the contract is as follows:

Year 1: £9000
Year 2: £7,500
Year 3: £7,500
Year 4: £7,500
Year 5: £7,500
Total: £39,000

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The electoral rolls will be digitised by Ancestry at the Town House, thereby minimising the handling and transport of the original records. Space on the third floor has been identified for this, which will also enable Archive staff to be on hand to supervise the process. It is estimated that the imaging of the documents will take approximately two weeks.

Given their responsibility for compiling the electoral registers, Grampian Valuation Joint Board have been consulted about this contract and the Assessor has granted his approval.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

From feedback gathered during the course of customer surveys carried out in 2016, the Archive service is aware that there is demand for more of its records to be made available online. The example of websites like ScotlandsPeople, FindMyPast and Ancestry also demonstrate that there is a willing market for genealogical material that is available via the internet and a potential income stream for the service.

The historical electoral rolls held by the Archive are a valuable public record and a key source for genealogists and local historians. Because it was normal to publish them annually, they provide valuable supplementary information to the census returns which are only released once every ten years and have a one hundred-year closure period. By making the electoral rolls available through the popular platform of Ancestry they will reach a much wider audience than at present and will undoubtedly boost the profile of the Archive service and the wider Council.

For the Archive to work with colleagues in IT to produce an in-house solution would be costly in terms of the budget and staff time required. A major advantage of the images being hosted by Ancestry is that they already have a tried-and-tested platform for making such records available to the public.

6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience –

The Archive service has a global reach, with enquiries regularly received from throughout the UK as well as from the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Making digitised, searchable versions of original records available via the internet helps to improve the customer experience for these remote users.

The contract will also enable, visitors to the Archive to have preferential access to Ancestry's extensive online resources via the public access computers at the Town House and Old Aberdeen House.

Improving Staff Experience –

By making the records available digitally, staff will be able to direct researchers to the online resource, rather than having to spend time researching the original records. The inclusion of our records on the respected and well known Ancestry website will further raise the profile of the service.

Improving our use of Resources –

As well as making better use of staff research time, digitisation of the electoral records will mean that there will be far less need to handle the originals in the future, thereby helping to preserve them. Entering into this contract will also help to realise the latent commercial potential within this series of records.

Corporate -

By providing wider access to this cultural resource, this proposal addresses the Smarter Living and Smarter People aspects of 'Aberdeen – the Smarter City' as well as a major service objective for the Archive as part of Legal & Democratic Services.

Public –

This proposal will be of interest as it will make an important public record more widely accessible.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

A small financial risk is involved with regard to the management of the contract. This will be minimised by a scrutiny process to ensure that both ourselves and Ancestry adhere to the terms of the contract.

During the imaging process there exists a small risk of damage to the original records because of careless handling. This will be minimised by conducting the digitisation process at the Town House, where the records are held, with close supervision and handling procedure training provided by Archive staff.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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