

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 28<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2003**

#### **SCOTTISH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH SERVICE**

##### **Report by the Director of Community Services**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To consider the response to the consultation letter from the General Register Office for Scotland (GRO) on the establishment of a Scottish Family History Centre, its implications for the delivery of a service at a local level and to consider options available for the development of an East Ayrshire service.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Community Services Committee of 19<sup>th</sup> September 2001 agreed on the Council's response to the consultation paper from the Register General on the Digital Imaging of the Genealogical Records of Scotland's People.(DIGROS)
- 2.2 In response to the above, senior officers in Library, Registration and Information Services investigated the possibility of revitalising and adding to the Burns Monument, Kay Park, Kilmarnock to create a Heritage/Family History Centre.
- 2.3 The Community Services Committee of 13<sup>th</sup> November 2002 agreed to the proposals for the revitalisation of the Burns Monument and to remit to the Director of Community Services to submit an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project planning grant in respect of the development proposals. As well as family history, the project would include social and industrial history.
- 2.4 Heritage Lottery Funding was sought to develop the above but conditions on the granting of funds meant that additional accommodation for the Centre could not be attached to the Burns Monument itself and would have to be constructed using red sandstone. Alternatives are currently being developed to attempt to attract maximum external funding and secure a sustainable use for the Monument.

### **3. PROPOSED FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH SERVICE**

- 3.1 On 3 December 2002 Mike Watson MSP, the Tourism Minister and Hugh Henry MSP, the Depute Minister for Justice announced the setting up of a new Scottish Family History Research Service. This is a joint project between the General Register Office for Scotland, National Archives for Scotland and the Court of the Lord Lyon.  
This would create a new integrated family history "campus" based around New Register House, Edinburgh.
- 3.2 The Register General wrote to Council Chief Executives on March 2003 outlining the new National partnership and seeking views on the implications for this at a local Council level. The proposed response, outlined in Appendix One, relates to answering five questions posed by the Register General and is appended to this report.

#### **4. INTEGRATED APPROACH**

- 4.1 As outlined in section 2.3 above an agreement, in principle, had been taken to pursue the possibility of developing a Heritage/Family History Centre. The new National partnership offering an integrated service, allowing access locally to a vast range of information allowing an opportunity for the development of very attractive, income generating family history service in East Ayrshire.
- 4.2 East Ayrshire Council is possibly in a unique position in Scotland to take advantage of this opportunity, as Registration and Family History are based in the same section, Libraries, Registration and Information Services, ensuring local service delivery is also integrated.

#### **5. FUTURE OPTIONS**

- 5.1 A Family History Centre would be located in premises that include a Registration service to comply with GRO's condition that DIGROS images viewed by customers must be under the supervision of a Registrar.
- 5.2 While DIGROS images can be viewed by any local office Registration staff, a research centre where the public can view certain records, will require space for PC's, support staff and paper records. It would also be essential to have disabled access and adequate parking.
- 5.3 Since Tourism and its economic development potential would be part of such a service, good accessibility to a research centre would assist greatly in marketing and promotion.
- 5.4 Funding may play an important part in the size and scope of the proposed project so it is important to pursue any options in relation to external funding.
- 5.5 The Scottish Family History Research Service will not be fully operational until 2006, although many records are available now and increasing continually. A very adequate service could be provided now as the systems evolve into a fully integrated and accessible research tool.
- 5.6 Existing operational premises may be used but with limited scope for parking and public participation. Refurbished premises or new build premises may be the preferred option and if possible, shared with other service providers to reduce costs.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 A fully equipped facility within East Ayrshire would generate income including that from tourism, as well as being one of the market leaders in Scotland because of the existing integrated service structure.
- 6.2 There is enormous potential for such a service for local as well as international based customers ( it is estimated there are approximately 28 million people throughout the world with genealogical links to Scotland)
- 6.3 Without investment a limited service could be offered from existing Registration offices but it would be difficult to offer a research facility for the public to browse

themselves. It is the browse facility that would generate most income. Links with the existing Family History service would be more difficult if based in different buildings.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Capital investment would be required for refurbishment or new build and whilst it is not possible to quantify these at present, further work on this matter is progressing. External grant funding may be possible for capital works and income generation would assist revenue sustainability.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Statutory Fee mentioned in section 5.1 of the Appendix is governed by the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act, Section 37 (2).

## **9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The establishment and development of a Heritage/Family History Centre would concur with the Council's Cultural Strategy.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 The committee is asked to agree :-

- (i) to the proposed response to the GRO consultation letter outlined in the Appendix; and
- (ii) to remit to the Director of Community Services to continue seeking external funding sources and suitable premises.

William Stafford  
Director of Community Services

WS/GC

9<sup>th</sup> May 2003

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. Consultation letter from the Register General "SCOTTISH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH SERVICE: ISSUES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES"

Anyone wishing to inspect the background papers should contact John Griffiths, Head of Leisure Services, on 01563 576264.

**Implementation Officer** – [john.griffiths@east-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:john.griffiths@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)

**SCOTTISH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH SERVICE: ISSUES FOR LOCAL  
AUTHORITIES**

**RESPONSE PAPER – EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Outlined below is the response to the letter of the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2003 from GRO highlighting the issues around the proposed Scottish Family History Service and its implications for integrated services at a local level.

1.2 The format of the response will concentrate on the five questions posed by GRO for local Councils as part of a consultation process.

**2. WOULD YOUR AUTHORITY BE INTERESTED IN SETTING UP AN INTEGRATED LOCAL FAMILY HISTORY SEARCH CENTRE?**

2.1 We fully intend setting up an integrated family history centre because we feel there is enormous potential for the development of such a centre in East Ayrshire.

2.2 We are in an excellent position to set up such a centre as our Registration service is already in a section that includes Libraries with an existing family history service.

2.3 In view of our position we would be willing to participate in any pilot scheme that may be suggested.

**3. WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ON HOW SUCH A SERVICE SHOULD BE STRUCTURED?**

3.1 We would prefer a new customised “centre of excellence” integrated unit based in our principal town, Kilmarnock. This base would have networked links with the decentralised Registration offices and Libraries.

3.2 The integrated unit would include all the staff and services provided at the existing Kilmarnock Registration office, the transfer of family history staff and any additional staff required when the service is fully developed. The Senior Registrar would have operation responsibility to comply with the GRO condition that DIGROS images were made available to customers under the supervision of a Registrar.

3.3 As well as the partnerships developed at a national level, of which we would be willing participants, we envisage developing other partnerships within the Council such as with Economic Development and Education, as well as external partnerships such as with Visit Scotland. The reasons for this are outlined in the last question in section 6 below.

**4. WHAT, IF ANY, INPUT WOULD BE HELPFUL FROM THE PROJECT PARTNERS?**

4.1 The partners have an obvious expertise in their own fields, which possibly could be useful to those staff involved with setting up and developing an integrated service. Once a service is up and running continued links would ensure standards were high.

**4.2** Detailed briefings from the partners could be arranged at a national level. The seminar hosted by GRO on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2003 was an excellent introduction to the process and this type of concept could be developed further.

## **5. WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE CHARGING REGIME IN YOUR LOCAL AREA FOR SUCH A SERVICE?**

**5.1** We are pleased that GRO are considering abolishing the £10 statutory fee as we feel each Council will be offering a different level of service and therefore requiring a different level of initial and continued investment. This investment will need to be sustainable if the new service is to succeed.

**5.2** Obviously it would not be prudent for local Council fees to be more than those charged at a national level or on the Internet. (other than the charge for a supporter/facilitator at a personal level)

**5.3** Charges, then, will be dependent on the level of service each customer requires. This will include a service in addition to family history per se, extending to a range of social and industrial history that should cater for school children, academics researchers and general interest at a local or even international level (“destination tourism”)

## **6. WHAT DO YOU SEE BEING THE BENEFITS OF SUCH A SERVICE?**

**6.1** The speed of access and the wide range of information available should result in a very attractive package for those interested in such concepts. This will apply to customers visiting Edinburgh, local Council areas and Internet users. We can also offer an Internet service to those who do not own a computer as local Libraries offer free Internet access.

**6.2** Different packages could be offered to different groups or individuals and with proper branding and marketing this should attract the wide spectrum of potential customers.

**6.3** Clearly, because of the potential for development and the financial investment required for such a comprehensive service, an income stream would be generated which should ensure the future development of such service.

**6.4** It would also be of mutual interest to all parties involved to develop Web based links. This may not only include core partners but others such as Visit Scotland, hotels with licenses for Marriages Outwith, specialist historical interest organisations and other heritage centres.

**6.5** East Ayrshire is a land locked area and does not enjoy the tourist attractions of areas that have beaches.

The area is rich in industrial and social history and has associations with many internationally renowned people such as Robert Burns and William Wallace. e.g. Web page: “Come to East Ayrshire and see if you are related to Robert Burns”

**6.6** Any boost to tourism and related services would be welcomed by East Ayrshire Council in terms of much needed employment and investment.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1** GRO is to be congratulated for the excellent work involved in developing DIGROS and we look forward to the completed project including the digitising of the other two core partners records.
- 7.2** As a result of this work, we feel GRO and local Councils will be able to offer a service that will be the envy of the world in terms of easy access and scope of material available for research.