

Meeting: Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee

Date: 20th January 2015

Title: Report of the Library Review Study Group

Author: Library Review Study Group

Tel:

Service: Environment and Leisure

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To consider a report produced by the Library Review Study Group on its findings of the review of Library provision across the Borough.

2. Recommendations

2.1 To receive the report and forward it to the Overview, Scrutiny & Development Committee for referral to Cabinet.

3. Details

3.1 At its meeting on the 2nd September 2014 the Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee agreed, as part of its work programme 2014/15 to establish a study group in relation to the review of library provision in the Borough.

3.2 At the initial scoping meeting with the Head of Environment and Leisure, Members agreed the focus of the study was to consider the ability of the Authority to meet its obligation to provide a Library Service, as defined by the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964, which makes public library services a statutory duty for local authorities, stating that Councils must:

- i) Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons in the area that want to make use of it.
- ii) Lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.

3.3 The Government has a duty to oversee and promote the public library service and take action where a local authority fails to perform its duties.

3.4 The study group considered these obligations in the context of:

- a shrinking financial envelope to meet service delivery;
- the wider review of Council accommodation and its use;
- changing patterns of consumer behaviour in relation to print and published media; and
- greater expectations for partnership working arising from the change programme.

- 3.5 The outcomes of the study are intended to support the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Tourism in deciding policy objectives for the service in the next three years, taking these considerations into account.
- 3.6 Members held a series of evidence gathering meetings with expert witnesses between September and December 2014. The study group met on four occasions and received a range of reports and statistical data from officers to inform its considerations. In addition, Members visited a selection of libraries across the borough as part of their evidence gathering.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 The current network of libraries across the Borough consists of fourteen buildings delivering a range of services to local communities. At the core of this provision is the traditional library service consisting of book issue, people's network access and informal learning for both adults and children. In addition, community programmes support local families and provide the focus for a range of services delivered by the Council and its partners.
- 4.2 The library service is being complemented by rapid changes in media technology, and customers are increasingly choosing to consume and interact with books, music and video in different ways.

5. Findings and Recommendations

- 5.1 The study group noted that over the past five years the pattern of expenditure in the library service has shown a shift from spend on staffing to spend on buildings. In broad terms the staffing budget of the service has reduced by £1.5m while the cost of associated buildings and premises has increased by the same figure.
- 5.2 Strategically this shift has been part of a pattern of modernisation which has resulted in investment in the Customer First Centre network across the Borough, as well as key private finance initiative projects, such as the John Willie Sams Centre and Shiremoor Library. Additional investment in a new facility at Howdon Library was made available from the Big Lottery Fund.
- 5.3 Current data shows that there are 64,383 library users in the Borough of which 42,463 (66%) use the four Customer First Centres with the remaining 21,920 (34%) using the network of ten branch libraries. In considering travel distance to the four Customer First Centres, the minimum number of facilities required to meet the Council's statutory obligation, the study group noted that no resident of the Borough would be more than 2.5 miles from a library. The existence of the branch facilities means that these travel distances are much shorter for many residents.
- 5.4 The group noted that, based upon customer survey work undertaken in September 2014, library use is still dominated by the core business of borrowing and returning books, films etc (47%) with computers and technology at 19% and advice and information at 14%. However it was accepted that this data did not capture the wide range of other activities which are on offer to library users including bounce and rhyme activities for children; schools class visits; and author events amongst others.

- 5.5 In addition, the service provides a range of non-building based services including the mobile library service; the e-books collection; audio books; the Zinio magazine service; home loans; Libraries at Home; Discover North Tyneside; and the Schools Library Service. This wide ranging offer was seen as being both valuable in itself and integral to the diversity of the service offer. However, the study group recognised some of these services could be delivered from other community based facilities and would urge some investigation of these options.
- 5.6 The group acknowledged that significant advances in the utilisation of new technology have been made in recent years, resulting in a high degree of self issue at the bigger sites and the increasing use of online services for reservations. In addition, the People's Network computer provision was recognised as being a well used facility across the service, playing a role in job search activities, educational provision and recreational use for many. While it was noted that the growth in personal computers, smartphones and tablets means that access to online services is now more widespread than ever, the demand for a public access network remained. However, it was felt that monitoring patterns of use would remain important to ensure that the library service could keep pace with technological innovation.
- 5.7 The group recognised that the delivery of key services relied on partnerships with a range of other providers, including health visitors for the Bookstart scheme; service level agreements with schools for the Schools Library Service; collaboration with the RVS to deliver Libraries at Home; as well as customer service and housing provision in the Customer First Centre facilities. Informal support provided for job seekers was recognised and the possibility of developing more formal partnerships to support job search activities was raised.
- 5.8 The extent to which the Customer First Centre network promoted community partnerships and community activity was recognised. The group did express some concerns about the financial model, especially in relation to facilities supported through private finance initiatives, and urged that further work be undertaken to consider the long term revenue impact upon the service.
- 5.9 In considering its recommendations the study group were acutely conscious of the need to balance the *Creating A Brighter Future* change programme objectives and the shrinking finances available to the Council over the next three years, with the significant public support for libraries. This support ranged from an acknowledgement that promoting literacy and creativity in the early years is essential to positive social integration later in life, to the recognition that for many older people libraries are a key point of social contact in their local community.
- 5.10 The recommendations are framed to reflect the challenges ahead but also to suggest that there are opportunities which the library service in North Tyneside is well positioned to build upon. In continuing to deliver to existing standards, while considering how a library service for the future can be shaped, the group concluded that the Council will be able to both fulfil its statutory obligations, to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service", and to meet the wider needs of its residents.

- 5.11 The proposed recommendations of the Library Review Study Group are, that Cabinet:-
- i. Does not proceed with any immediate library closures as part of the budget setting process for 2015/16;
 - ii. Examines the sustainability of library building assets in the context of the wider accommodation review, being undertaken as part of the Council's change programme;
 - iii. As part of the accommodation review, considers how community facilities can be best used on an area basis;
 - iv. Explores the feasibility of expanding alternative delivery models for library services utilising mobile facilities and electronic media;
 - v. Examines the financial model and revenue structure of Customer First Centres;
 - vi. Asks the Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee to work with officers to review progress on the above recommendations in the coming year.
- 5.12 The Sub-Committee is asked to endorse the six recommendations of the Library Review study Group as set out above, to be forwarded to the Overview, Scrutiny & Development Committee for referral to Cabinet.
- 5.13 If the study group's recommendations are approved by the Culture and Leisure Sub-Committee, a report will be submitted to the 2nd February 2015 Overview, Scrutiny & Development Committee, and referred to the 9th February 2015 Cabinet meeting for consideration.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Review of library provision across the Borough – scoping template

Appendix One - Scoping Template

Title of study	Review of library provision across the Borough
Name of sub committee/study group	Library Review Study Group
Membership	Councillors C Davis, S Day, P Earley, S Mortimer and P Oliver
1.	Focus of study
	<p>The study group will consider the ability of the Council to meet its statutory obligation to provide a Library Service in the context of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a shrinking financial envelope to meet service delivery • the wider review of Council accommodation and its use • changing patterns of consumer behaviour in relation to print and published media • greater expectations for partnership working arising from the change programme <p>The outcomes are intended to support the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Tourism in deciding policy objectives for the service in the next three years, taking these considerations into account.</p>
2.	Objectives
	<p>To understand the changing pattern of service financing over the past five years.</p> <p>To understand the parameters of the statutory obligations the Council must address.</p> <p>To consider the community impact of further service reductions in the next three years.</p> <p>To consider the opportunities for changes to service delivery presented by new digital technology.</p> <p>To consider the implications for further partnership working arising from the change programme</p> <p>To provide a report for the Cabinet Member which advises on the available options in the context of reduced finance, changing accommodation patterns and changes in consumer behaviour.</p>

3.	Key questions
	<p>What is the Council obliged to provide, by statute?</p> <p>How does existing provision meet that obligation?</p> <p>Does meeting the statutory obligation require the existing number of service points?</p> <p>How can new technology be utilised to deliver the service differently?</p> <p>How are other local authorities addressing similar pressures upon services?</p>
4.	Evidence to be obtained
	<p>Service membership figures</p> <p>Service financial records</p> <p>Service customer use figures</p> <p>Service issue figures for books/dvd/e books etc.</p> <p>Accommodation spread across the Borough</p>
5.	Witnesses to be interviewed
	<p>Councillor E Darke, Cabinet Member - Leisure, Culture and Tourism</p> <p>Mr P Scott – Head of Environment and Leisure</p> <p>Mr S Bishop – Senior Manager, Cultural Services</p> <p>Ms Y Gorgon – Group Manager, Cultural Services</p> <p>Ms A Stephenson, Group Manager, Cultural Services</p> <p>Library members, officers and customers as required.</p>
6.	Identify methods of evidence gathering
	<p>Background reading of existing reports and data</p> <p>Briefing Notes as required</p> <p>Interview of witnesses</p> <p>Visits to selected library's across the Borough</p>
7.	Support required by the group/sub committee
	<p>Supported visits to facilities</p> <p>Data and information provided by officers</p>
8.	External/independent advice
	<p>Legal advise in relation to precedents regarding changes to library provision</p>

9.	<p>Consultees for draft report</p> <p>Councillor E Darke, Cabinet Member - Leisure, Culture and Tourism Councillors C Davis, S Day, P Earley, S Mortimer and P Oliver Mr P Scott – Head of Environment and Leisure Mr S Bishop – Senior Manager, Cultural Services Ms Y Gorgon – Group Manager, Cultural Services Ms A Stephenson, Group Manager, Cultural Services</p>
10.	<p>Date draft report required</p> <p>28th November 2014</p>
11.	<p>Date final report required</p> <p>9th January 2015 – to be circulated in advance of the Culture and Leisure Sub Committee scheduled for 20th January 2015</p>
12.	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Have the terms of reference been met?</p> <p>Has the work of the Study Group helped inform the Cabinet Member's position?</p>