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CABINET
20 DECEMBER 2019

LIBRARIES STRATEGY

Relevant Cabinet Member
Mrs L C Hodgson

Relevant Officer
Director of People

Recommendation

1.   The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities recommends that Cabinet:

   (a) notes the feedback captured throughout the development of Worcestershire's Libraries Strategy;

   (b) approves Worcestershire's Libraries Strategy which sets out the vision, ambition and high-level transformation for the service over the next five years;

   (c) authorises the relevant Strategic Director to take all appropriate action to implement the Libraries Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities in relation to strategic matters.

Background

2.   Library authorities (upper-tier local authorities) have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it (Section 7). Local authorities have the scope to offer wider library services beyond the statutory service to other user groups, and the Act allows for joint working between library authorities.

3.   The Act does not try to define what a 'comprehensive and efficient Library service' is, but when considering how best to deliver the statutory duty, each library authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs and to deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources. The Department for Digital, Cultural, Media and Sport (DCMS) updated their guidance for library authorities earlier this year and is available on this link https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service

4.   In fulfilling its duty under s7, a library authority shall, in particular, have regard to the desirability of — amongst other things:

a)   securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the

borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and

b) encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service.

5.   The general duty under s7(1) of the 1964 Act does not extend "to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area".

6.   The Council currently meets its statutory duty through the services delivered via twenty-one static libraries, a mobile library and a range of digital services and digital content that are accessible on the Council's library web pages. In addition, there are two fully volunteer-run community library links based in village halls at Welland and Martley and the library service also operates the prison library in HMP Hewell.

Next phase of transformation

7.   The role of libraries within Worcestershire communities has been changing for over a decade and continues to evolve within a challenging financial environment. Traditional library services of book borrowing are now delivered alongside computer access, family activities, a comprehensive adult learning programme, targeted reading and literacy schemes, job clubs, job fairs, health and well-being services and a varied volunteering programme.

8.   Considerable progress has been made over recent years in modernising Worcestershire's library services and ensuring value for money. Over £3.9m of efficiency savings has been achieved since 2011/12, when the Libraries Transformation Programme was first launched by Cabinet in May 2011. A range of transformational approaches have been implemented including: a comprehensive property re-modelling programme; a series of staff and management restructures; a reduction in the Mobile Library service; investment in self-service technology; introduction of consortium stock purchasing and direct book delivery.

9.   In October 2018, the Council's Cabinet considered a report which outlined the next phase of Libraries Remodelling. This was set in the context of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, with the report also describing that decisions made by local authorities concerning libraries should be guided by a strategic review, that in turn is informed by a needs assessment. Therefore, the report in October 2018 presented the findings of Worcestershire's libraries' needs assessment and outlined a set of recommendations, to take out to formal public consultation, for the future delivery of front-line library provision. As a result, Cabinet agreed to launch a formal public consultation exercise.

10.   In July 2019, Cabinet received a report summarising the feedback from the public consultation along with feedback from a Libraries-focused Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review that was held in May 2019. The report outlined proposals and recommendations for how to act on the findings of the consultation and Peer Review and clarified the position in relation to being on track to realise 2019/20 savings. Cabinet agreed to act upon the advice of the LGA Peer Review and take time

to consolidate all of the feedback and learning gathered through the needs assessment and public consultation into a Libraries Strategy in order to set out the vision and ambition for the service over the medium to long-term. All future delivery changes would then be underpinned by the Strategy.

11.	This report now summarises the final stages in relation to the Libraries Strategic Review which concludes by recommending to Cabinet the approval of Worcestershire's Libraries Strategy.

Library Strategy – development

15.	In early June 2019 the Council met with library policy advisors from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, who strongly reinforced the Peer Review recommendation that the county's library transformation proposals be underpinned by a library strategy that articulates the medium and long-term vision and ambition for the service. The strategy will also link libraries to the Council's corporate strategy; reflect local need as identified in Libraries' Needs Assessment and demonstrates how changes to service provision will reflect feedback from residents and communities.

16.	Building on the feedback received from the extensive public consultation exercise carried out earlier on in 2019, a further public viewpoint engagement exercise has been carried out resulting in 1468 responses as well as a series of staff engagement exercises; visits to Leicestershire and Warwickshire Library Services with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, and Corporate and Community Scrutiny Panel Members; Service Manager discussions with Staffordshire and Cambridgeshire and a completion of a Libraries self-assessment review using the DCMS framework.

17.	The visits to Leicestershire and Warwickshire were focused on learning from others in relation to two delivery models, Community Managed Libraries and 'Open Plus' Libraries. Community Managed Libraries, which is where the running of libraries has transferred to community organisations, have been implemented where there are high numbers of small libraries (Leicestershire 34, Staffordshire 27 and Warwickshire 13) and no existing community support (unlike current arrangements in Worcestershire). Authorities allowed for a long implementation lead time as the pace was driven by local communities and they also provided significant investment to secure the necessary deals. 'Open Plus' libraries have been implemented to extend opening hours as well as reduce staffing levels. Where implemented most successfully there has been high engagement with the community to promote and encourage ownership and use of the available space.

18.	The most recent viewpoint survey was instigated to try and encourage feedback from non-library users. Out of the 1468 responses 29% (420) had not visited a library in the past 12 months. When asked what would most encourage non-users to visit a library in the future, the top three responses were improved awareness of library services; improved IT and longer opening hours. Responses also mentioned improved accessibility (parking, opening times, transport).

19.	59% of respondents had not accessed online services in 12 months. The factors most likely to encourage use of online services included access to e-resources; a Library App and the ability for online chat with library staff. When asked about getting involved in the running of the libraries 21% of all respondents stated they would be interested in

having a say in the running of their local library (9% of non-users). There was highest interest from those in less-affluent socio-economic groups.

Library Strategy - Content

20.   This Strategy consolidates and builds on all the changes that have gone before. The Strategy centres around five strategic ambitions which articulate the vision for the Library Service over the next five years and aims to ensure libraries are positioned at the heart of the Council's corporate priorities and remain fit for the future.   The five strategic ambitions are outlined in the diagram below.

21.   The strategic ambitions consider the local, national and financial context described within the Strategy. They have been shaped by 5803 responses from Worcestershire residents to three library consultation and engagement surveys and by feedback received at 23 public consultation meetings which were attended by a total of 800 residents. Specifically, there was strong support from the public of sharing library buildings making this the preferred transformation option. There were also low levels of support for fully Community Managed Libraries so, taking this and the learning from other areas, this option is no longer being considered.

22.   The ambitions have also been shaped by feedback from library staff and Council service leads, recommendations identified in the Libraries' Needs Assessment; service improvements identified in a self-assessment review undertaken by the Library Service

in October 2019 and learning from the transformation experiences of other library authorities.

23.   In summary, the transformation plan for the new 5-year strategy for Worcestershire libraries will:

- promote the library service and its benefits more widely across the county to reach more residents
- establish libraries as the front door for Council and community services where appropriate
- establish libraries as community assets and increase community involvement through use of library space and volunteering opportunities
- tailor libraries' service offer to meet a wider range of Council priorities and community needs, focusing on the most vulnerable and promoting independence
- seek to sustain our existing 21 public libraries, 2 library links and 1 mobile library, by:
  o extending self-service technology to allow customers to access library services independently at times that are convenient to them
  o building on our successes at Broadway, Hagley and Upton to engage communities in sustaining and supporting libraries with lowest need (as defined by the local needs assessment), and
  o optimising library space by sharing it with other services to generate income
- enhance and provide new ways to access our digital library services
- right-size staffing resource to activity levels and need
- introduce an optimal library management structure that can deliver strategic ambitions for the service
- establish the Hive as a centre for service innovation and development for all county libraries
- invest in library resources to improve service quality and meet changing customer expectations
- manage libraries more efficiently through new approaches to funding
- explore opportunities for library service growth, in partnership with local communities, and in relation to significant housing developments in the county.

24.   Included as Appendix 3 is the high-level plan which will be implemented on approval of the Strategy.

25.   Cabinet is asked to approve the Libraries Strategy and high-level transformation plan and authorise the relevant Strategic Director to take the necessary action to implement the Libraries Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities in relation to strategic matters.

Financial and HR Implications

26.   £196K permanent savings were realised in 2018/19 with £4K carried forward to 2019/20. The target for 2019/20 has been to save £395k (plus £4K carry forward) and is on track for delivery albeit only £310K are permanent savings with the remaining £89K being realised through one-off savings. This means the £89K will need to be carried over to next financial year. This leaves an additional £205K (total £294K) to be delivered in 2020/21 and will be identified through the development and implementation of the Libraries Strategy through securing income from renting space within libraries,

introducing self-service technology, seeking further community support for libraries and right sizing frontline staff and management resource in accordance to need.

27.   Early investigation of the introduction of self-service 'Open Plus' libraries will require capital investment. A detailed business case will be developed to ensure the cost of any capital investment, purchase of equipment, software and licences and any other implementation costs are covered by changes in staffing, income from fees and charges or other revenue generating opportunities and there is a quantifiable return on investment.

28.   The implementation plan will involve a full library service staffing review with the scoping out of a staffing and management structure that best responds to the strategic priorities and sustainable service delivery models. As ever, the Council will aim to minimise the need for compulsory redundancies as a result of this process and will actively engage with our Trade Unions when proposals are created.

Privacy, Public Health, Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments

29.   The potential Public Health and Equality Impacts of the proposed strategic direction has been jointly assessed and recorded (Appendix 2). There are clear synergies regarding the potential impact for Protected Groups (listed in Equalities legislation) and residents who could be impacted from a Public Health perspective. The joint assessment has enabled the Council to better understand the combined impact of proposals and has identified no adverse impact at this stage. The implementation of the Library Strategy may require additional PHEIA Screening and assessment, for specific areas of change and transformation. This process will be managed by the Libraries Transformation Programme Board.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 - Worcestershire's Library Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Public Health Impact Assessment – available electronically
- Appendix 3 - High Level Plan – available electroncially

Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report
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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of People) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and background papers for the meetings of the Cabinet held on 18 October 2018 and 11 July 2019