

## **Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Tuesday, 9 July 2019, County Hall Worcester - 2.00 pm**

#### **Minutes**

#### **Present:**

Mr A D Kent (Chairman), Mrs A T Hingley, Mr R J Morris, Mr A Stafford and Mr R M Udall

#### **Also attended:**

Mrs L C Hodgson, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities

Hannah Needham (Assistant Director for Families, Communities and Partnerships), Carol Brown (Service Manager - Libraries and Culture), Jennifer Edwards (Senior Project Manager), Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) and Jo Weston (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

#### **Available Papers**

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 May 2019 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

#### **223 Apologies and Welcome**

Apologies had been received from Mr J A D O'Donnell, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner and Mr R P Tomlinson.

#### **224 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

#### **225 Public Participation**

None.

#### **226 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 May 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **227 Libraries Re-Modelling**

Attending for this Item were:

Lucy Hodgson, Cabinet Member with Responsibility  
Hannah Needham, Assistant Director for Communities

Carol Brown, Service Manager – Libraries and Culture  
Jennifer Edwards, Senior Project Manager

The Cabinet Member thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to attend the Panel and provide an update following the consultation process and before the Cabinet made decisions about this at its meeting on 11 July 2019. The Peer Review had been welcomed and the Cabinet Paper had incorporated some of the feedback. In addition, thanks were given to Worcester City Council for their financial contribution to the library service.

The Assistant Director reported that any future remodelling would have to be based on the Council's Corporate Agenda, which was very focussed on services for adults and children and Public Health.

It was clear that libraries should be at the heart of the community and the physical space be more than just about books, with the wider community being able to benefit.

Subject to Cabinet approval, work would start on creating a Library Strategy and likely areas for inclusion were:

- Social value of library service to Council agendas
- Pathways for improved connection with other Council services
- Skilled workforce for now and future
- Commissioners take a Libraries First approach when planning services for local communities
- Hive as 'launch pad' and 'hub' to attract investment and sponsorship for new service initiatives that cascade county wide
- Service will become 'commission ready' (service offer, pricing structure, marketing and comms plan, build network with commissioning services)
- Potential Growth
- Openness to new ways of working.

Officers and the Cabinet Member agreed that the key to the success of the ongoing transformation of Worcestershire's Library Service was a robust communication strategy which would engage with staff, stakeholders, residents and Councillors to develop it. Regular updates for these groups would also need to be scheduled.

There would be a need to convince residents of the benefits of new service delivery models, such as Open Libraries and Community Managed Libraries and the Council's web pages would need to be re-designed to highlight the vision and social impact of libraries as well as transactional services.

The Chairman invited questions and the following key points were made:

- The Panel commended the Cabinet Member and Officers and welcomed the positive consultation, peer review and subsequent reports
- Members supported the approach that Libraries should be a Council service supporting the Corporate Agenda ensuring that libraries were embedded into all of the Council's priorities. In addition, they supported the likely areas for inclusion in the Strategy
- It was clear that what had started as a cost saving exercise had become a whole system re-design for this decade and the future, which was welcomed by Members
- The Panel was pleased to hear that other services, such as commercial opportunities would be explored, ensuring that the Library was a gateway to other services
- Some Panel Members had visited an Open Library in Yate and one reported back on their observations. Members understood that if an Open Library System was to be introduced, a capital investment would be required, for example for full CCTV coverage and entry control. However, Members agreed that such a Spend to Save scheme was necessary. There would also be ongoing revenue costs, such as licence fees and heating costs. If introduced, it would also connect to other Local Authority schemes, resulting in Worcestershire residents being able to use Library services whilst away, and equally, out of County residents utilising the service whilst in Worcestershire
- A Member felt that branding was important, giving the example that Leisure Centres were often branded as a service leading to Active Bodies, so Libraries could be branded as leading to Active Minds
- The Panel felt strongly that Libraries should remain safe spaces, such as providing a safe space for children after school, or to tackle social isolation. It was reported that any changes made

would be community specific and safeguarding young and vulnerable people would continue to be a key priority by ensuring that staffing was in place at appropriate times

- All libraries were autism and dementia friendly and Staff had received appropriate training
- It was reported that more could be done with colleagues from Adult Social Care and Public Health to promote the use of libraries, either as a work space or location for activity
- In response to a question, it was clarified that there was a statutory duty to have a professional library presence and there were over 500 library volunteers offering a huge number of hours to the service
- Worcestershire was seeing a slower decline in library usage than other areas and stakeholders, such as District, Town and Parish Councils had contributed positively to this
- Worcester City Council had agreed to contribute £157,000 towards the running costs of St John's and Warndon Libraries for a period of three years, which although very welcome, Members cautioned against reliance on this
- The Panel welcomed the openness of the Cabinet Member to consider any future opportunity for library space, including commercial enterprise, charity, Post Office or not for profit venture. It was also stated that partner organisations were already located within some libraries and there was no reason why the Police could not use the space
- Members believed that The Hive in Worcester City was a vital asset, which needed to be a leader for the rest of the service but noted the partnership arrangement with the University of Worcester. It was also noted that The Hive was at the heart of the £3m Worcester Arches project
- In response to a specific question, Officers clarified that there was no plan to further reduce the Book Fund, which was £375,000 at present
- It was pleasing to hear that, subject to Cabinet approval, the development of Worcestershire's Library Strategy would involve residents, communities, partners and Local Members
- The Panel believed that an improved marketing and communication approach, which promoted the use and benefit of services delivered through libraries, was required and that innovative ways of delivering of services should be actively promoted.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked those present for an informative discussion. It was confirmed that Members would have an opportunity to contribute to the development of the Strategy.

The main comments from the meeting for the CMR were that the Panel endorsed the presentation made, it recognised the corporate strategy element which needed to be taken into account as part of developing the Strategy, the Hive was identified as the 'front window' for services and opportunities should be taken to maximise partnership opportunities. The Panel agreed that it would wish to consider a further report at its meeting on 5 November, before Cabinet considered the draft Library Strategy and Implementation Plan at its meeting on 14 November 2019. The CMR indicated that she was happy to support this approach.

The meeting ended at 3.05 pm

Chairman .....