

CABINET
11 JULY 2019**LIBRARIES RE-MODELLING**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mrs L C Hodgson

Relevant Officer

Director of Commercial and Commissioning

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities recommends that Cabinet:**
 - a) notes the feedback and findings from the public consultation held from 29 October 2018 to 28 February 2019;**
 - b) notes the feedback from the Local Government Association Peer Review held in May 2019;**
 - c) adopts the proposed updated definition of Library need as described in paragraph 14 and in more detail in the Libraries' Needs Assessment;**
 - d) agrees to use the Libraries' Needs Assessment, the findings from the public consultation, the Peer Review and discussions with the DCMS to inform the development of a Worcestershire Libraries Strategy that sets out the longer-term vision for the service across Worcestershire which continues to meet the statutory duty;**
 - e) approves the proposed plan to realise the necessary in-year savings for Libraries as outlined in paragraphs 29-30;**
 - f) agrees to use the proposed Libraries Strategy to then inform the decisions around change and resource allocation for front-line library provision from 2020/21; and**
 - g) receives a further report in Autumn 2019 to consider and approve the Libraries Strategy and implementation plan.**

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.

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

- a) of 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) of 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, two fully volunteer-run community library links based in village halls at Welland and Martley, a mobile library and a range of digital services and digital content that are accessible on the Council's library web pages.

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 wellbeing 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 (see supporting information) considered a report which set out the next phase of Libraries Remodelling. This was set out in context of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan which for Libraries is articulated in the two tables below.

	Gross Base Budget (Inc. all Hive based services) £000	Gross Base Budget (WCC Library services only) £000	Net Base budget (WCC Library services only) £000
2019/20 with The Hive	10,984	8,910	3,752
2019/20 without The Hive	3,881	3,881	2,282

	Approved MTFP Savings	Re-profiled Savings
2018/19 achieved	£200,000	£200,000
2019/20	£145,000	£395,000
2020/21	£455,000	£205,000
Total	£800,000	£800,000

10. To meet these savings targets identified for libraries, an approach is required that will substantially transform library service delivery models whilst balancing need and promoting wider engagement and use of services. Previous legal challenges to decisions made by other local authorities concerning libraries indicate that major change to an authority's library service is best made in the context of a strategic review that in turn is informed by a needs assessment. It is considered that only through the strategic review and needs assessment process, can an authority demonstrate that any proposal to fundamentally change the service delivery model would continue to secure the delivery of a comprehensive and efficient service.

11. Therefore, the report in October presented the findings of Worcestershire's libraries' needs assessment. The report also outlined a set of recommendations to help shape the County's approach to further library transformation along with draft proposals for the future delivery of front-line library provision. As a result, Cabinet agreed to launch a formal public consultation to seek feedback on these proposals as part of the Council's strategic review.

12. This report provides a summary of the feedback from the public consultation along with feedback from a Local Government Association Peer Review that was held in May 2019 and focused on Library provision in Worcestershire (see supporting information for both reports). This report outlines proposals and recommendations for how to act on the findings of the consultation and peer review and clarify the position in relation to 2019/20 savings.

Public Consultation Feedback

13. The Libraries Consultation was launched on 29 October 2018 and ran until 28 February 2019. It consisted of an online survey and face to face public meetings, which were fronted by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility at all 23 Library Delivery Points. The online survey was promoted widely through libraries, local press and social media. The consultation was used as an opportunity for the Council to share the initial options for library change with Worcestershire residents and community organisations so that people could provide their views and make other suggestions.

14. In total 1947 responses to the survey were received and approximately 800 people attended face to face sessions held in libraries. A total of 2 petitions challenging the proposals were lodged with the Council with 2476 signatures in total. The full analysis report is available in the supporting information, but in summary:

- exclusive use of home library site and library activity levels.
- Comments were received around the service isolation indicator of need and links to public transport and in response we have updated the ranking of libraries by isolation to take into account public transport journey times and availability during library opening hours.
- There was a strong response to raising the profile of libraries to promote their benefit to local communities.
- There was also a strong response in support of sharing space in libraries with other mutually beneficial services.
- 41% of respondents use public computers and 15% of respondents access the free wifi through their own devices.
- Respondents were broadly not in favour of fully volunteer-managed libraries but there was strong support for a continued offer from the Council (e.g. stock, management oversight).
- 67 respondents were willing to volunteer, and 355 respondents stated that they 'maybe' interested in volunteering.
- There was variable support for the introduction of 'open' libraries (39% Droitwich – 28% Stourport). The levels of support increased when responses from customers who visited each library most were considered in isolation, e.g. Pershore 59%, Droitwich 55% and Wythall 52%. Less than half of respondents (41%) stated that they would not be willing to use libraries in unstaffed hours, with the main concerns identified being security and safety and missing the expertise and assistance of library staff.
- Among respondents who suggested that it would be appropriate for a library to reduce their opening hours, Saturday was the most commonly mentioned preferred time for when libraries should remain open.

Local Government Association Peer Review

15. The Council was successful in its application for a peer review through the Arts Council England and Local Government Association partnership. The request was that this review took place following the completion of the public consultation to allow the findings of the peer review to inform future recommendations presented to Cabinet for decision.

16. The peer team considered the following three core questions applicable to all library peer reviews:

- Is WCC getting best value from its library assets?
- How does the service contribute to the corporate agenda?
- What is the role of the council and service in the local community

and at the request of the Council, these specific questions:

- Are the current (transformation) proposals and approach the right ones?
- What relevant good practice could be learned from other authorities?
- Do the current proposals stand up to the rigour of the Council's statutory duty to deliver a library service?

17. The peer team prepared for the peer review by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent two days onsite in Worcestershire, during which they spoke to more than 20 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.

18. In summary the review concluded that the Council should build on the existing needs assessment and consultation feedback and invest more time in developing and setting out a vision for the future of libraries in a new library strategy which can be delivered within the current financial envelope. This should be developed in collaboration with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) with the process requiring leadership, innovation and further involvement of the public, both library users and non-library users. It is suggested that this vision will need to set out what libraries will look like in Worcestershire in the medium to long term, and for the strategy to articulate how this ambition will be achieved, and its efficacy measured.

19. As part of the development of the Strategy, the Peer Team also suggested the Council continues to build on more innovative service solutions. For example, further consider the role the Hive can play in supporting the wider offer e.g. joining the British Library Living Knowledge network; revisiting the concept of Open Libraries and doing more to convince the public of its benefits; strengthening the marketing and communications work to increase the usage of libraries and considering single staffed libraries to enhance the community managed library concept.

20. The peer review acknowledged the tremendous efforts to date to keep transformation on track and achieving remodelling on time and to budget. They stated that staff should be congratulated on their obvious commitment to the library service and time taken out to mark this success. However, they did suggest refocusing attention on relevant networks and getting out more to see good practice exemplars of a modern and effective library service to more inform future options in Worcestershire's Library Strategy.

21. The peer review reinforced the national 'Libraries First' ambition and challenged Worcestershire to think more creatively around how Libraries are positioned as part of broader corporate agenda. They also provided challenge as to how the Hive could take on more of a leadership role across library provision and how operational delivery models, such as open libraries, single staffed libraries and community support libraries could be embedded into operational delivery.

22. It is important to note that the peer review is not an inspection. Peer reviews are

improvement-focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. Therefore, it is recommended that the Council notes the findings of the feedback from the peer review and uses it to help inform future plans.

Proposed recommendations

a. Libraries Needs Assessment

23. Taking on board the feedback from the public consultation, changes have been made to the methodology to defining library need. Whilst keeping with the four characteristics of need as deprivation levels; service isolation; exclusive use of home library site and library activity levels, changes have been made to the way the service isolation factor has been calculated to include availability of public transport.

24. Along with the changes to the social isolation characteristics there have also been updates to the home site usage and the activity levels based on 2018/19 data. These updates have meant some movement in the overall ranking of libraries including Wythall moved into the top 6, Upton moving out of bottom 6 and Bromsgrove and Hagley move into bottom 6. The full needs assessment can be found in the supporting information.

25. Based on these changes Cabinet are asked to agree the latest needs assessment and adopt the refined definition of need to be used.

b. Development of Worcestershire Libraries Strategy

26. In early June 2019 the Council met with library policy advisors from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, who strongly re-enforced the LGA recommendation that the county's library transformation proposals be underpinned by a library strategy that articulates a medium and long-term vision for the service.

27. In response to advice from DCMS and LGA, Cabinet are asked to approve the development of a library strategy which links libraries to the Council's corporate strategy; reflects local need as identified in Libraries' Needs Assessment and demonstrates how changes to service provision will reflect feedback from residents and communities.

28. It is anticipated that with appropriate prioritisation of resource, a library strategy can be ready for review by Cabinet in October 2019.

c. Implements proposed savings plan 2019/20

29. Savings in 2019/20, which are greater than agreed in the original plan (see paragraph 9), have been delivered with measures that do not directly impact frontline library service provision. These include:

- a. the deletion of five surplus, vacant Library Support Assistant posts at the Hive,
- b. reductions in IT licence fees from the re-procurement of a new Library Management System,

- c. full year effect income from the re-location of Wychavon Customer Service Hub to Evesham Library in February 2019 and the delivery of face-to-face support for County Hub services in libraries from June 2019.

30. In addition, Worcester City Council have agreed to contribute towards the running costs (£157,000) of both St John's and Warndon libraries. This contribution is most welcome, and work will now commence with Worcester City Council on how these two libraries continue to operate to meet local resident needs and future operating model forms part of Worcestershire's Library Strategy.

Financial and HR Implications

31. 2018/19 savings were met in full and the plan for 2019/20 is to achieve £395k savings which comprises the MTFP savings target of £145k plus £250k of early delivery of the 2020/21 target. This leaves £205K to be delivered in 2020/21 which will be identified through the development and implementation of the Libraries Strategy.

Privacy, Public Health, Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments

32. The potential Public Health and Equality Impacts of both Proposed strategic direction and of specific proposals (whether or not included within a medium/long-term strategy) are being jointly assessed and recorded. 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. A joint assessment will enable the Council to identify and better understand the combined impact of proposals.

Supporting Information / Appendices

- Appendix 1 Libraries Needs Assessment
- Appendix 2 Consultation Feedback Report
- Appendix 3 Libraries Peer Challenge
- Appendix 4 Public Health Impact Assessment

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763

Specific Contact Points for this report

Hannah Needham, Assistant Director of Families, Communities and Partnerships

Tel: 01905 843658

Email: hneedham@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

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

Agenda and background papers for the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18 October 2018