

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

8 JUNE 2023

UPDATE ON THE PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE REDDITCH LIBRARY

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, the Strategic Director for People and the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to progress since the Cabinet report on Redditch library relocation in October 2022 (Appendix 1) and to set out what information is still required before the Council (Cabinet decision) can make an informed decision on whether Redditch library should be relocated.

Background

2. Redditch Borough Council (RBC) have approached Worcestershire County Council (the Council) to request the Redditch library service is moved from its current location, into a new Community Hub at Redditch Town Hall, to free up the space for development of Redditch Town centre.
3. For the Council to be assured that the proposed move would not be detrimental to the library service or the county council's interests, it has stipulated, as outlined in the Cabinet paper from October 2022, that specific commercial arrangements, operational service conditions and collaboration opportunities are to be satisfied, the aim of which is to ensure that overall, the Council's costs will be no worse as a consequence.
4. The timescales on the project are ambitious as Towns Fund monies must be spent by March 2026. The library move, should approval be given, would take place in autumn 2024.
5. The October 2022 Cabinet report, set out the requirements that the Council would need to be fulfilled if the library service were to re-locate to alternative premises. These requirements are considered essential in protecting the Council's interests, both commercially and in terms of service offer/statutory responsibilities. The requirements are categorised into three areas of commercial arrangements, service conditions and collaboration opportunities.
6. These requirements were used in the preliminary discussions with RBC, which identified Redditch Town Hall as a potential alternative location to deliver the library service from. In summary, the proposed location within the Town Hall would be comparable with the space in the current library; be walking/pram pushing distance

from the existing library and suggested commercial arrangements would mean the Council was not financially worse off. With it being indicated that these requirements could be met, Cabinet agreed to commence a formal public consultation to seek opinion and views on the proposed relocation, before making a final decision.

7. RBC is already working on the redevelopment of the Town Hall and plan to go ahead with refurbishments and extension regardless of the Council's decision on whether the library will move there. RBC does this at its own risk. The Town Investment Plan states that government funding for the redevelopment of the library site is conditional on the library relocation. Tight timelines have meant that RBC have had to continue with planning activity ahead of the Council's final decision on whether to approve the relocation of the library, in order for the funding deadline of 31 March 2026 to be met. The Council has provided significant project management expertise, funded by the Council, to support the development of the project. Cabinet will consider the proposals and consultation entirely on its own merits in terms of the Council's statutory duties as a library provider.

Issues for the Panel to Consider

8. The Panel are asked to review the proposal to relocate Redditch library, which includes responses to public consultation along with progress updates against the requirements set out in the Cabinet paper of October 2022 as outlined below.

Public Consultation

9. A public consultation to understand residents' and library users' opinions, and the impact of a possible relocation of the library service in Redditch was carried out between 7 November 2022 and 24 February 2023.
10. The consultation consisted of background information to the proposals, a survey (available online and on paper), two public face-to-face meetings held at Redditch library on the 24 January 2023 and 9 February 2023 and a local history consultation meeting on 24 January 2023. The focus of the consultation was the proposed relocation of Redditch library; it did not cover the wider Redditch town centre development proposals. The consultation survey was available to complete in English, Polish and Urdu. The consultation was widely promoted in the local press and on social media channels. The full survey and resulting analysis report are attached as an appendix to this report (Appendix 2), with a summary of headline results below.
11. The initial timeline for publication of the analysis report was in line with Cabinet paper publication schedule for the meeting on 20 July 2023. Full anonymised responses to the survey will be published according to this original timeline and made available online from the 8 June 2023.
12. The independent analysis of the consultation was carried out by the Council's Business Intelligence Team and completed based on the data available, including feedback from all sources.

13. There were a total of 1467 responses to the survey. This represents 2.2% of the Redditch population aged over 19. There was good engagement and response to the survey for people aged 30 or over. There were fewer responses received for younger people aged under 30. 81% of survey respondents said they were library members.
14. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the new location for Redditch library being the Town Hall. 72.3% of respondents said that they disagreed to some extent.
15. Library members were more likely to disagree (77%) with the plans than non-library members (51%).
16. Respondents were asked to give the reasons they agreed or disagreed with the new location for the library. 1425 comments were received. Feedback fell into two broad categories:
- Factors relating to the proposed new location for the library
 - Factors relating to the wider town centre proposals
17. The three most common themes given by respondents in relation to the proposed new location for the library were:
- **The proposed location for the new library is not as good**
Comments about it being further from the town centre, bus stops, railway station and car parks were cited.
 - **Concern that there will be a reduction in the facilities offered by the new location**
Concerns that the move might lead to a degradation of library facilities and services and comments that the information provided at the consultation stage was not sufficient to reassure them that facilities will not be lost.

This theme included concerns about the relocation of some archive collections to Worcester and about meeting room provision
 - **Concern that the relocation will result in a reduction in the size of the new library**
Concerns that the new location would result in a reduction in the size of the library, having an impact on how respondents use the building to read, relax, work, or attend with children.
18. Other common themes around why respondents disagreed with the Town Hall as an appropriate location for the library included:
- Concern the new location would lead to a fall in library use
 - Concern the new building might be less accessible, e.g., steps, steep ramps etc.
 - Safety of the area around the Town Hall and on the approaches to it.
19. There were several common themes as to why respondents agreed that the Town Hall would be an appropriate location for the library:
- The new location is only a very short distance away

- It is an effective use of buildings
 - They are happy to have the library as part of a hub with services all in one place
 - The idea that a move to a new location could include new, modern facilities
 - The new location could be more accessible.
20. Respondents were asked whether anything would prevent them from using the library in the new location at the Town Hall. 1204 people responded to this question. The most common response to this question, by 36% of respondents, was that nothing would prevent them from using the library in the new location.
21. Reasons given that might prevent use of the library if it were in the Town Hall included:
- The environment or feeling of the new building
 - Would not use out of principle or boycott
 - Reduced facilities of the new building (if local archives were removed)
 - Availability of parking nearby
22. Two public meetings were held as part of the consultation giving residents the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns to a panel with officer and member representatives from RBC and the Council. Just over 100 people attended these meetings.
23. Many similar themes were dealt with in the public meetings as were expressed in the survey comments such as not wanting the library to move, how it would be a waste of money and the suitability of the Town Hall as a location for the library service.
24. In response to the key themes raised through the consultation, work has begun to address some of the concerns.
25. Discussions have taken place with RBC to identify ways of addressing accessibility concerns including making improvements to the Redditch Shop Mobility service and Dial a Ride service, mapping shortest and most accessible routes to the proposed new library location from different car parks, bus stops and other locations around the town centre, highlighting covered walkways and including a blue badge car parking space at the Town Hall.
26. To address safety concerns RBC have confirmed that new LED lighting is being added to existing lamps within the Town centre as a part of public realm enhancements, along with provision of new lighting along the High Street.
27. During the public consultation, a commitment was made by the Council to collaborate with local history groups and archive volunteers on the development of a plan for Redditch Library archive collections that would ensure archive material with the highest levels of local interest and demand was retained locally. This collaborative work commenced on 30 March 2023 and a draft plan is in progress. The Council is waiting for RBC to provide indicative layouts of archive shelving and other furniture in allocated library storage areas at the Town Hall, should the library relocate there, to enable a more detailed assessment of the amount of archive material that can be accommodated at the Town Hall if the relocation goes ahead.

Progress against the County Council's Stipulated Requirements

28. The Cabinet report of October 2022 set out several requirements to be used with RBC to protect the County Council's interests, both commercially and in terms of service offer / statutory responsibilities. Progress to date against these requirements and the assurance offered in how they can be met are outlined below.

Commercial Arrangements

29. The following explains how the "same cost" and best value for disposal requirements are met:

- a) The existing library (including accommodation leased to third parties) consists of approx. 1763sqm. The current area proposed to be leased to the Council within the Redditch Community Hub will provide 1773sqm, therefore providing an equivalent area. Based on these floor areas, an open market value of the accommodation to be leased to the Council has been assessed to be of similar open market value to the existing library. An agreement in principle on the areas is expected to be finalised by 2 June 2023. Slight changes will not impact overall valuation.
- b) The Council will be granted a 125-year lease of the accommodation for the library at the Hub and have proposed that this comes with the ability to sublet the whole or part and at the end of the lease the Council or its successors will have the rights to be granted another lease. In return the Council will grant RBC a 125-year lease of the Redditch library.
- c) The Council currently receive an income from letting space within the existing library plus a proportional contribution to the running costs. If the Council moves services to Redditch Town Hall, RBC will lease equivalent space to the Council to provide for the library and its current tenant. The Council would then lease equivalent accommodation to its tenant and therefore still receive similar rental income which is guaranteed until 2028 when the lease ends. Conversations are ongoing with the Council's tenant on their occupancy of the proposed new space, noting the Council's right within existing lease to relocate them.
- d) The Council have proposed a mechanism within the heads of terms for the lease of the accommodation within the Redditch Community Hub, which will protect the Council from increased net premises costs which would not otherwise be incurred. It is proposed that the total of service charge must not be more than budgeted for the existing library for equivalent services, and this figure will rise annually on an appropriate price index but will never be more than the actual proportional costs. The Council will have direct responsibility for electric charges as these will be separately metered to reflect actual use which we will have control of. The fact that the Town Hall building has new windows, solar panels and an air source heat pump installed is expected to support reducing running costs. Net budget position for Redditch library was included in the Cabinet report of October 2022, and further detailed budget information has been shared with RBC. An outline of updated service charges is expected from RBC by 2 June

2023 as well as written confirmation that it agrees that any charges within the lease will meet the requirement that the Council be no worse off.

- e) Subject to satisfactory agreement being reached on the implementation/ relocation costs as per the below, and providing an agreement can be reached in line with the principles above that the net costs to the Council are equivalent to current net costs at the existing library in respect of both the capital assets, ongoing running costs, and income generate, in aggregate, the requirement for the Council's overall costs/income position to be no worse will be met.
- f) The Council are waiting for RBC to confirm the proposed heads of terms and to provide an indication of what the actual likely proportional costs will be and the detail on the services to be covered under this cost. At the time of writing this has yet to be received from RBC.
- g) RBC provided a cost plan in August 2022 outlining the overall project funding to be provided for building works including fixtures and fittings. Since October 2022, further detailed planning has taken place to build the detailed scope of the requirements for internal and external plans, including a specific focus on Information Technology set up requirements. The provision that RBC will fund all costs associated with the relocation and the detail of specific works covered will be included in the contract to enter into a lease between RBC and the Council once the heads of terms have been agreed across all parties. The contract will make it conditional that these works are completed before the Council are bound to complete the agreement to take the lease of the accommodation at The Hub and to lease the Redditch library to RBC. The principle of a 'no worse' position for the Council financially and operationally has been agreed with RBC and the Council are waiting for a 'letter of comfort' to provide the assurance they are working towards the same principles as set out in the Cabinet report of October 2022. An updated cost plan incorporating all further developments such as IT set up costs, installation of CCTV provision, fit out of the areas is expected by 2 June 2023.
- h) The Council have been asked to provide a detailed furniture audit of the current library and an assessment of which specific items of furniture can transfer to the proposed new location, reducing fixtures and fittings costs. However, until the floor plans for service delivery areas are finalised, it is not possible to confirm which items of furniture can be transferred. It will be a requirement that RBC will cover the costs of any new furniture required directly because of the move, for example, where wall space is limited in the new design, existing wall mounted shelving cannot be re-used, and new freestanding items will need to be procured. Written confirmation from RBC on this principle is being sought. The Council have committed to funding any items of furniture which will require replacement or upgrade for service delivery reasons.
- i) Should the request to move library services be approved, further support requirements from the Council are yet to be costed including ongoing project management and other support services such as IT, property and library services. The Council's resources from a range of service areas have been allocated to RBC's project for the last 12 months at no cost to RBC. Ongoing

support cannot be confirmed until the Council have received an updated project plan outlining the requirements and timeline.

- j) Finalisation of heads of terms for lease agreement, noting all the above points, is expected by 2 June 2023. The Council will need time to review this and undertake due diligence on it so unlikely to be able to give a firm statement at the time of this report.

Operational and Service Conditions

30. The Council confirmed in March 2023 that the sqm calculations for the current library space were accurate, as used for comparison to space in the proposed new area. Updated square metre calculations for the Community Hub were received in May 2023. As floor plans are currently being updated to reflect feedback from the library service, at present, the final breakdown is not available. Table 1 outlines the latest totals – though it should be noted that these are subject to change when updated floor plans are available.

Table 1: Space Comparisons (sqm) existing and proposed Redditch Hub for Library and Library Tenant

Occupier	Existing Library	Redditch Hub	+/-
Library	1018	934	-84
Library tenant	466	494	+28
Shared	279	345	+66
Total	1763	1773	+10

NOTE: These figures are subject to change when next iterations of floorplans are available in May 2023

- 31. The Council are awaiting detailed floorplans from RBC that indicate how the space and shared space are allocated across the lower ground, ground and first floors of the Town Hall (expected by 2 June 2023). These updated plans are required to enable finalisation of commercial arrangements outlined above, and to assure the Council that allocated space within the Town Hall is equivalent to the service delivery area of the current library building. As with the other information that is anticipated for 2 June 2023, it is again noted that the council officers will require time to review this information and undertake due diligence therefore, it is unlikely that a firm statement will be able to be made at the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8 June 2023.
- 32. The Council requires that alternative premises for the library are in a location that retains current footfall levels or where mitigation of a less central location is provided through an increase in the number of co-located service providers. The Community Hub at the Town Hall provides a single building for a range of agencies, including NHS and RBC services (confirmed) and other services (yet unconfirmed). However, it has been confirmed by RBC that NHS space and services will only be accessible by a separate entrance to the Town Hall. Separate entrances at the Town Hall for co-located partners may discourage use of library services and reduce library footfall. A review of methods for measuring footfall may be required to ensure data post-move can be directly compared if entrances are separated.

33. RBC have verbally committed to inclusion of a blue badge parking space in the Town Hall car park for library customers, in addition to short stay pick up and drop off spaces. This would enable customers with blue badges to park directly outside the library in its new location. The current Redditch library building does not have allocated blue badge parking spaces. The Council have requested written confirmation from RBC that accessible and short space spaces will be available for library users in the Town Hall car park. Further accessibility concerns raised through public consultation are noted in the consultation section above and are also addressed through the Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment completed for the Cabinet report due for consideration in July 2023 (Appendix 3).
34. All plans reviewed by the Council to date show the library service arranged predominantly on the ground and first floors of the Town Hall, with archive and storage space on the lower ground floor. The proposed extension to the Town Hall to accommodate the Community Hub includes a new 2 storey glass entrance and rear glass 4 floor extension, with highly visible signage and increased glazing throughout (Appendix 4). Planning permission for these external works has been submitted to RBC and is currently live on the public planning portal for comment. The proposed plans provide assurance that the requirement for a high profile, visible, glazed entrance to provide an attractive 'shop window' from the street can be met, subject to planning application approval.
35. RBC have confirmed that the Libraries Unlocked service delivery model can be implemented when a decision is made on the timeline for Redditch. The cost of implementing Libraries Unlocked will be covered by the Council as a part of that programme budget. Confirmation on a timeline for implementation of Libraries Unlocked in Redditch is subject to the Cabinet Decision on Redditch library.
36. The Council requires that there will be no reduction in the library service offer because of the relocation. Initial library layout plans were prepared following discussions in 2022. The Council are awaiting the next iteration of layout plans from RBC to reflect library feedback provided in January 2023 (expected on 31 May 2023). These plans are required to provide assurance that there will be no reduction to the current library service offer or customer experience. RBC have verbally agreed that the library services will have priority access to three meeting rooms on the ground and first floor of the Town Hall to ensure all library service delivery requirements are met. This will need to be confirmed in writing and forms part of the Heads of Terms.

Collaboration Opportunities

37. RBC have provided verbal assurance that the Council's requirement for the design of the public realm space to incorporate clear design links and directional links to the proposed new library site to promote visibility of the library and mitigate risk of reduced footfall is being addressed. The Council are awaiting confirmation from RBC on this matter. It is noted that the proposed location is close to the proposed Innovation Centre development. The Council has requested additional signage, way marking and other features to be included in the public realm developments to encourage footfall to the new location.

Purpose of the Meeting

38. The Panel is asked to:

- consider and comment on the contents of the report
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member; and
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 Cabinet paper October 2022 – Relocation of Redditch Library
 - [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 27th October, 2022,](#)
- Appendix 2 Redditch Consultation Analysis Report
 - Appendix 2A Redditch Library Consultation Survey
 - Appendix 2B Redditch Library Consultation Supplementary Questions
- Appendix 3 Equality and Public Health Full Impact Assessment (prepared for Cabinet Decision on 20 July 2023)
- Appendix 4 Latest exterior imaging of Redditch Community Hub – fly through video containing artists impressions of the vision and ambition for all Redditch Regeneration Projects: [Regeneration projects | Redditch Town Deal](#)

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 27th October, 2022,](#)

All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.