



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

17 SEPTEMBER 2019

Northumberland Library Service - Proposal for Public Engagement and Future Service Design

Report of: Kelly Angus, Executive Director of HR/OD & Deputy Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Councillor Cath R Homer, Lead Member for Culture, Arts, Heritage and Tourism

Purpose of report

To provide an update to members on progress to date of the redesign of the library service.

To seek endorsement of the proposed methodology and timeline for the statutorily required public consultation to inform the future design of library services within Northumberland.

To provide an update to members on the opportunities that a revised future design of library services may provide across Northumberland, particularly based on enhancing the use of technology and supporting communities across the county.

Recommendations

1. That members note progress on consideration of the findings of the internal Library Service Review which took place in late 2017 and note the recommended proposed future service model.
2. That members agree the proposed methodology and timeline of the public consultation from which the findings will be used to inform the future design and opportunities for service provision within Northumberland, and note the estimated cost of £25,000 which will be funded from forecast underspend within the 2019/20 revenue budget.

3. That members agree an allocation of up to £100,000 non recurrently from the Strategic Management Reserve to support the accelerated transformation of the service over the next 12 months.
4. That members recognise the sterling efforts and commitment of the libraries team in striving to deliver the best possible service to residents during the significant period of structural change begun in 2015, and note the ongoing improvement and innovation measures introduced from 2017.

Link to Corporate Plan

The Northumberland County Council (NCC) Corporate Plan 2018-21 has identified a number of core strategic priorities and supporting key organisational actions of which the following are particularly relevant to the library service.

- *Health and Wellbeing* - libraries offer a wide range of information which support public health and wellbeing activities as well as a programme of events and activities that promote wellbeing through social inclusion.
- *Stronger Communities and Families* - libraries offer social support networks and information to support residents of Northumberland to obtain advice/support within their communities.
- *Economic Growth* - libraries provide a hub for individuals, offering support and access to skills for those seeking employment and safe neutral space for budding entrepreneurs which directly contributes to economic growth and regeneration of communities.
- *Education and Skills* - libraries provide a significant role in the development of literacy skills across Northumberland with activities such as Storytimes and the Summer Reading Challenge being established initiatives across the county for children and families.

Key issues

Library services within Northumberland have been subject to significant structural and leadership change in recent years. This has included the transfer of the complete service to a charitable leisure trust in 2015 and a phased return to NCC during 2016-18.

Following the return to County Council management, an internal review was carried out in late 2017. This identified some examples of innovative engagement, but also opportunities to reinvigorate and improve the service whilst considering the financial impact and ongoing issues of continuing the current model of provision.

The internal review found that the changes which have been made to library services in Northumberland since 2015 have:

- had no rationale or consistency applied to them
- had a detrimental effect on the communities that they serve

- not supported the delivery of the Universal Offers as outlined by Libraries Connected (previously the Society of Chief Librarians) or the framework for the delivery of the outcomes identified in Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016- 2021 published by the Department of Culture Media and Sport
- impacted on the number of users engaging with library services which has significantly reduced
- not supported digital developments to enable customers to access library services more easily
- significantly reduced the number of staff across the service

These factors resulted in a fragmented approach to service provision which prevented the library service from moving into a consistent and stable position. Operational changes, such as removing the option to contact a branch library directly, resulted in a significant reduction in customer satisfaction.

Performance data (2015-17) shows that the library service has experienced a decline in a number of key areas;

- visitors have decreased by 11.5%
- the number of books issued is down by 31.4%
- Membership levels have declined by 12%

In 2015/16 the workforce lost over a third of staff due to compulsory redundancies, this included most of the professionally qualified librarians and a number of long standing members of staff. Spending on library book stock was also reduced from its 2013/14 level of £501,009 to £121,220 - this had a significant impact on the ability to facilitate up to date book access and develop the digital catalogue available to library users.

Since the libraries have been brought back into the Council fully during 2017-18, the service has appointed a Library Services Manager and has aimed to re-professionalise the library service and increase skills across the workforce as part of a remodelled sustainable library service for the future.

The Mobile Library service is the current method of providing services in rural areas of the County. There are two purpose built HGV vehicles in operation with the service in the west of the County provided by a transit van with an extremely limited stock of materials. The visits are timetabled but have been inconsistent due to the poor condition of the HGV vehicles, the legacy of the historic timetables and the limited availability of staff with the necessary driving qualifications.

Despite areas of decline there has been an increase in over 52% of users registering for the digital My Library services. However, there is a risk that the current budget available will not provide a range of E resources(books, audio books and magazines) to satisfy this increasing demand.

The service has continued to deliver a range of events and activities in support of Council agendas during 2018/19. Weekly storytime sessions were attended by 2,788 children; over 1,800 children participated in the Summer Reading Challenge; the service supported 58 reading groups; author events attracted 546 people with peak audiences of 32 and 35 at Ashington and Widdrington respectively. Public access IT was used on 66,681 separate occasions. These PCs are used extensively by those seeking employment and those using our digital family history resources. Digital inclusion sessions delivered by the library services staff attracted a total number of 369 people of all ages.

The service is increasingly developing its support of Council agendas such as health and wellbeing, loneliness, school preparedness through the introduction of initiatives such as Code Clubs, Knit and Natter groups and Lego clubs. This developmental work is currently constrained due to capacity.

The following form part of the library service but will not form part of the consultation:

- The Prison Library Service is delivered under contract to Sodexo. This contract is in place until 2021 and our staff continue to support inmates to the satisfaction of the company.
- The Schools Library Service provide appropriate resources and professional advice to schools to support the curriculum and literacy and encourage reading for pleasure. There are significant opportunities to link this support to the wider educational agenda.
- The Local Studies collection is a valuable collection of over 24,000 items documenting the history of Northumberland, the majority of which is in Woodhorn; available as reference to view on site or the majority for loan on request from local libraries.
- The Northern Poetry Library was established in 1968. It is the third largest collection of contemporary poetry in the UK. Part of the collection is available to the public in the Chantry in Morpeth and part is in storage, available upon request.

A number of operational changes have been implemented since completion of the review and the library service transfer back into the Council from Active Northumberland:

- the strengthening of the digital offer through the development of an enhanced user friendly 'My Library' website and app; an online payment option; a user friendly online catalogue with interactive features including the ability to post reviews and receive personalised recommendations
- the appointment of a Library Service Manager to work alongside the Head of Cultural Services to lead on the redesign of the library service in Northumberland.
- the appointment of an Administrative Assistant to increase the capacity of the library service to support the Library Service Manager and Librarians
- the reinstatement of local telephone lines at each branch library so users and volunteers can call direct as this had been removed when services were transferred to Active Northumberland and this generated a significant number of complaints
- the appointment of a Local Studies Librarian to promote and develop the Local Studies collections. This, supported by investment in technology, has improved access to resources for genealogy, local and family history research within local communities.

As determined in the MTFP, the service is required to make savings of £100k in 2020/21 and a further £100k in 2021/22. This will be achieved through a consolidated, more sustainable, network of buildings, increased collaborative provision and a wider digital offer.

The significant structural and operational changes introduced since the 2017 review have stabilised the service and built a stronger, more consistent Libraries offer. It is now possible to design a sustainable service to serve the current, and future needs of our residents and communities. The consultation provides an opportunity to reshape and develop library services for the benefit of Northumberland residents based on evident and agreed community need.

It must be recognised that Libraries do not work in isolation, they offer a 'cradle to grave' service that encourages a love of reading and a wide range of cultural and creative activities. They can help achieve the Council's strategic objectives by working with partners towards the following seven outcomes, identified by the Libraries Taskforce on behalf of DCMS and the LGA:

- cultural and creative enrichment
- increased reading and literacy
- improved digital access and literacy
- helping everyone achieve their full potential
- healthier and happier lives
- greater prosperity
- stronger, more resilient communities

The Council is demonstrating its commitment to the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service by planning the provision of new libraries in Alnwick, Morpeth, Ponteland and Cramlington. In order to maximise the impact of these new facilities and enhance the range of resources available, it is proposed to allocate up to £100,000 non recurrently from the Strategic Management Reserve to support service transformation during 2019-20 and 2020-21. This will be used to inject additional bookstock into the new

libraries to provide a compelling refreshed offer and also enhance the range of E resources (books, audio books and magazines) available to support digital inclusion across the County.

Outline Proposal For Future Service Model

The internal review provided proposals to strengthen and improve the reach of the Service through establishing a stronger 'digital core' with designated hub libraries in each Locality area. The hub libraries would coordinate service provision across their locality through supporting a network of satellite facilities which may be NCC operated, community supported, community led or independent.

Community supported libraries are: council-led and funded, usually with paid professional staff, but given significant support by volunteers; part of the public library network and included in the statutory service. There are currently no libraries of this nature operating in the County.

Community managed libraries (CMLs) are: community led and largely community delivered libraries, rarely with paid staff (but with some professional support) and some form of ongoing council support; part of the library network but these libraries may or may not be included as part of the statutory provision. Haydon Bridge and Heddon are examples of this type of provision operating within the County.

Independent libraries are not part of the public library network nor part of the statutory library service.

There are different levels of staff and asset implications between these approaches. Within the two community models there could be varying levels of Council support as there is no nationally specified structure or requirements. The hub libraries would provide the full range of services, activities and events in line with the Universal Offers framework and support a needs led coordinated approach across the locality areas covering Culture, Digital, Health and Wellbeing, Information, Learning and Reading. This integrated service offer with digital at its core will be supported by area based specific services such as home and mobile services where required.

The Library Service already has a small number of dedicated volunteers, providing support with our digital and Home library service offers. There could be a wide variety of opportunities for volunteers within the service, thereby supporting and extending our delivery of the Universal Offers, providing individual volunteers with work experience to increase employability or a means of combating loneliness.

Consultation

As a statutory service, it is essential that any proposed significant changes to library services are shared in the first instance with DCMS Libraries team. Dialogue has already commenced to ensure an appropriate approach is achieved.

Department for Communities and Local Government advice and recent court rulings suggest that if an authority has not consulted on proposed significant changes to its library service, this would be a predominant factor in considering whether to hold an enquiry.

Decisions on new service delivery models are open to challenge through the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, both from the Secretary of State and from the public, on whether the changes offer a comprehensive and efficient library service.

It is proposed to carry out a consultation of up to twelve weeks duration to capture the opinions of library users and non users on the proposals. It will identify the most valued aspects of the service and the barriers to library use across the county; consider the effectiveness of and potential for further co location of services; inform the designation of hub libraries, test the suitability of different models of service delivery across the county and the role of the mobile library service; and include opportunities for community groups and individuals to propose ideas on future delivery.

Views will be captured via an online survey with paper copies available at libraries with large print and audio format being available. A representative sample of residents will be required, thereby ensuring feedback is obtained from those who may be less likely to respond to the online and paper questionnaires. The sample size will give an acceptable level of robustness.

A communications strategy will raise residents' awareness of the consultation through website, print and social media channels. There will also be a drop in session at each library for residents to ask questions or provide verbal feedback in addition to focus groups for both library staff and stakeholders.

This exercise will be carried out by an independent commercial company to ensure the process stands up to scrutiny and produces a robust report. The brief for the consultation is attached (Appendix One). The commission is estimated to cost £25,000 and will be funded from existing resources.

The proposed consultation would begin in the Autumn. It is anticipated an initial findings report could be received in January 2020. A final report for consideration by Cabinet in March 2020 would allow implementation to begin Spring 2020.

This process of public engagement followed by the adoption of a new library strategy, will ensure that the Council will continue to meet its statutory obligation to deliver a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service as required under the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Background

The Department of Culture Media and Sport has measured the public's usage of libraries since 2005. Despite the proportion of non working adults using library services remaining stable, there has been an overall decline in library use in the previous decade.

The Northumberland Residents survey (2015) showed that 51% of respondents had used their local library in the past 12 months and 30% of respondents described themselves as frequent users. Overall 59% of respondents were satisfied with the Library Service provided in Northumberland, this has decreased from 63% in 2012.

The Universal Offers (Society of Chief Librarians, 2017) cover the four key areas of service which customers and stakeholders, including DCMS, see as essential to a 21st century library service. These are Reading, Digital and Information, Culture and Creativity, Health

and Wellbeing. They were informed by customer research; tested and developed with stakeholders and customers including Arts Council England and The Reading Agency. They provide a framework of shared national programmes which have the flexibility to keep library services relevant and accessible at a local level.

The library service currently employs 69 FTE staff with an annual budget of £1,848,450. The scope of service includes:

- delivery of 30 libraries through standalone, integrated and co-located facilities
- delivery of mobile library services
- delivery of library services to HMP Northumberland
- delivery of the Schools Library Service

There are excellent new models of service delivery already being shared by the Libraries Taskforce, whose role is to develop the vision for the future of public libraries in England and the way it will be achieved. This is outlined in their report *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021* (DCMS: March 2018) and in subsequent blogs and workshops.

It is envisaged the seven outcomes, previously listed, are delivered within the framework of the Universal Offers, a national framework of partnerships, programmes and messages that can be flexibly delivered at a local level. These have been developed by Libraries Connected, a charity that has evolved from the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), supported by Arts Council England as the Sector Support Organisation for libraries. It remains a membership organisation, made up of every library service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Opportunities

In order to provide a county wide offer, the service will work with NCC departments and partner organisations, including communities, to offer a library service using a combination of digital, outreach and hub and satellite library provision.

Libraries promote reading for pleasure through delivering a range of book related activities such as Storytimes, Summer Reading Challenge, author talks, Creative Writing groups and Reading groups. Community support to deliver activities such as these can be the first step in volunteering that leads to increased skills and confidence which can be a springboard for further communal activities or can lead to employment. These initiatives heighten enjoyment in reading, bring people together in mutually supportive groups and support educational targets such as school preparedness.

Libraries play an important role in promoting wellbeing and community cohesion by producing a range of cultural and creative activities with their communities. This can be something simple, such as a piece of artwork displayed in the library, a publication such as Amble Young Writers' recent work through to a weeklong celebration of the work of Shakespeare.

Libraries enable people to get online easily and offer support, if required, to access vital online resources and complete the online activities of their choice, be that searching for employment, health information or tracing their family tree. In partnership with colleagues delivering digital skills, to adults, children and young people through activities such as Code Clubs, libraries can help people become confident and independent online citizens. This can boost an individual's employability or support businesses to start up and grow.

Libraries provide access to a range of information accompanied by expert local knowledge; on local amenities and attractions for visitors thereby boosting the local economy and for residents, signposting the latter to agencies offering advice and further support when necessary, such as the Homelessness Duty Officer.

As hubs within communities, libraries can support other public services in their work with those communities from hosting Health Trainer sessions; drop ins with the local Police and space for Councillor surgeries. Access need not be limited to the hours staff are present. The introduction of an enhanced self service facility, as in many university libraries, could enable the use of all the facilities of the library: internet, wifi, the loan and return of books and use of study space for much longer periods.

Libraries can reach and support the whole community regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status or educational attainment. They already bring people together in safe, welcoming spaces that can host events to help build understanding between different generations and cultures and promote a shared sense of place.

The proposed way forward will ensure the delivery of a comprehensive and efficient library service and provide a sound basis for the service to meet national baselines that may be established in the future.

Implications

Policy	None at this stage
Finance and value for money	The proposed consultation will inform future approach to service delivery which will maximise the impact of Council investment in Library Service provision. The commission is estimated to cost £25,000 and will be funded from existing resources.. It is proposed to allocate up to £100,000 non recurrently from the Strategic Management Reserve to support service transformation during 2019/20 and 2020/21 for additional bookstock and a range of e resources.
Legal	None at this stage
Procurement	Procurement Services are engaged with the selection of potential contractors to undertake the consultation
Human Resources	None at this stage

Property	None at this stage. The consultation may lead to a revised future service portfolio.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	An outline EIA has been completed for the proposed consultation with support from Wellbeing and Community Health Services.
Risk Assessment	As a statutory service, it is essential that any proposed significant changes to library services are shared in the first instance with DCMS Libraries team. Dialogue has already commenced to ensure an appropriate approach is achieved.
Crime & Disorder	None at this stage
Customer Consideration	The consultation will involve both users and non users of the Library Service and provide a range of engagement opportunities.
Carbon reduction	None at this stage. The move towards increased digital access will reduce the necessity for travel to branches for some users.
Wards	All

Background papers:

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Service Director Finance & Interim S151 Officer	Alison Elsdon
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