

Securing a sustainable future for Swindon's Library Services

Cabinet

Date: 13th July 2016

Author: Cabinet Member for Communities
Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering

Wards: All

Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report proposes a strategy for securing a sustainable future for Swindon's Library Services. It follows previous reports in which Cabinet requested the development of a strategy for the Library Service that would continue to deliver a comprehensive library service. These reports also approved an emerging model for the service as the basis of public engagement.
- 1.2 Approval of the recommendations would initiate public consultation on the proposed Libraries strategy and delivery model and authorise further work to support its development. This would include working with ward councillors, parishes, partners, community groups and other stakeholders who might provide continued access to library facilities.
- 1.3 The proposals contribute towards the Council's Vision for Swindon, and particularly: Priority Two: offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places; Priority Three: ensure clean and safe streets and improve public spaces and local culture; and Priority Four: Help people to help themselves while always protecting the most vulnerable children and adults.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 To note the findings of the public engagement summarised in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.11 set out in full in appendix 1.
 - 2.2 To note that it is the proposed strategy's intent to:
 - 2.2.1 Sustain access to library services through the use of technology, outreach and learning,
 - 2.2.2 Support ward councillors, parishes, partners, and local communities to preserve or enhance local Library services
 - 2.3 To approve the proposed strategy and delivery model as the basis of public consultation and authorise the Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering to carry out public consultation on the proposed strategy in accordance with the approach and timetable set out in paragraph 3.27.
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- 2.4 In order to encourage and support the development of viable, community-led arrangements to supplement the Council's core provision, make available transitional funding of £500k from the Council's one-off resources to help meet the one-off costs of establishing community-led arrangements.
- 2.5 To authorise the Head of Localities, Community Involvement and Volunteering to:
 - 2.5.1 Continue, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, to engage ward councillors, parishes, partners, and stakeholders to develop options to sustain Library services, and agree the basis on which transitional funding is allocated to support the development of community-led arrangements.
 - 2.5.2 Use c£6k of the transitional funding to undertake a commercial options appraisal to develop strategies for generating additional income.
 - 2.5.3 Commence, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and the Board Director, Resources, the procurement of technology that enables Libraries to be accessible to the public beyond their staffed hours, in accordance with paragraph 5.3.

3. Detail

Background

- 3.1 At its meeting of 10th February 2016, Cabinet considered a report that set out the demographic and financial context for the future of Swindon's Cultural Assets, Libraries and Community Services (Cabinet Minute 58, 2015/16 refers). That report described the context affecting the future of Swindon's Libraries, including a detailed needs assessment, the financial context that the service is operating in, and an emerging model for the service that was approved as the basis of public engagement.
- 3.2 This report builds on that work, and sets out the findings arising from the public engagement on the emerging model that took place between February and April 2016. This report also sets out a proposed strategy for Library Services that reflects public feedback and further work that has been undertaken to develop a sustainable delivery model for Library services in the context of the Council's Vision, Priorities and Pledges and its medium term financial position.

Findings from Public Engagement

- 3.3 To inform the development of the Council's Libraries Strategy, public engagement took place between 22nd February and 29th April 2016. The process included:
 - 3.3.1 Providing information in paper form and electronically through the Council website explaining the background to the need for changes in the way the

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Library Service is provided, and describing an 'emerging model' about which views were sought.

- 3.3.2 Sessions in all Council Libraries and other community locations in which people were given an opportunity to give their views on the fundamental questions about Library services.
- 3.3.3 A questionnaire survey, made available online and on paper, through which people were invited to provide information about their use of the service, their priorities for its future, their views on the emerging model, and suggestions for other models the Council might usefully explore.
- 3.3.4 In addition, several letters and emails have been received expressing opinions on the issues raised in this process.
- 3.4 A total of 2,688 questionnaires have been submitted, 619 online and 2069 on paper. The report at Appendix 1 sets out the detailed results of the questionnaire survey and reports on the opinions expressed. The data analysis and the report have been independently prepared.
- 3.5 It is clear from the engagement feedback that respondents have taken time and trouble to provide considered and thoughtful responses. Where possible, these have been reflected in the development of strategy and delivery model proposed in this report.
- 3.6 Almost all respondents are users of Swindon libraries and the libraries most often used by respondents are Central, Highworth, North, and West (though all libraries are represented to some extent). Occasional visitors to Libraries, in particular those that might occasionally visit a Library for IT use, do not feature strongly in the responses, nor is broader public opinion strongly represented.
- 3.7 The report highlights that book lending by adults is the principal transaction undertaken by respondents or their families at libraries, well ahead of any other activity, but finding information and children's lending are also well-used services. Computers are mainly used for research and homework. A number of services are available online and a fairly substantial minority of respondents access these services using computers, tablets or smartphones, but not in a library, including using e-services, including renewals online and ordering items through the catalogue, but very few stream media or download e-books electronically.
- 3.8 Although there is some backing for the emerging model, and people recognise the financial benefits, (for example, over half of respondents see possible advantages in co-location, and half of respondents are willing to at least consider volunteering to support the service), most respondents oppose it. The main objection to the emerging model is the loss of local libraries and difficulties in accessing the Central Library, especially for less mobile users, parents with young children, and older residents. There are also questions about the capacity

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of the Central Library to handle the volume of traffic the model suggests would have to go there. A large number of people note the reliance of the emerging model on e-services, and suggest that there are large numbers of older users in particular who have no internet access at home. Some add that they are in fact dependent on the local library for their internet access.

- 3.9 Many respondents highlight adverse impacts from the proposals with concerns about the loss of local facilities that act as a focal point for the community, providing social benefits for otherwise isolated people as well as formal library services. There is a widespread belief that children would be disadvantaged by these proposals, with consequences for future literacy, and that older people, who use the service extensively, would also be adversely affected. There are also concerns about the impact on well-being, and potential consequences in health and mental health.
- 3.10 Several respondents campaign for the retention of their own local library, with strongest support (but not limited to) for Highworth, Wroughton, North and West Swindon. Some people suggest a compromise which allows retention of some larger libraries, allowing others to close or become dependent on volunteers.
- 3.11 Suggestions as to alternative approaches are very limited; a large number of responses call for no change, and many admit they do not know what might work. The most frequent suggestions are key elements of the emerging model, co-location and e-service expansion - alongside reduced opening hours, or charging for some services (use of PCs are the most often mentioned, but some are willing to pay for book loans, or to pay an annual membership fee).

Proposed Strategy and Delivery Model

- 3.12 The Library Service strategy is to build communities through literacy and learning. By 2020, the service aims to be recognised nationally for the quality of its services, innovation in delivery, cost effectiveness and the outcomes it achieves for early years, for adult learners, for active citizens and for active ageing.
- 3.13 The proposed strategy would be delivered through a core provision comprising:
 - 3.13.1 A network of four Libraries of Central, West Swindon, Highworth, and North Swindon, supported by investment in self-service technology that would allow extended access to borrowers beyond staffed hours. Staffed hours will change to 47.5hrs per week in Central, to enable staffed hours of 15hrs per week to be available at West, Highworth and North Swindon Libraries.
 - 3.13.2 Professional Library services delivered by qualified Librarians and trained Library staff including service development, learning and outreach, local

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studies, information and digital literacy, stock management and volunteer co-ordination.

- 3.13.3 Support with ward councillors to develop parish, school, or community-led local Library services, including a menu of optional free and paid-for services.
- 3.14 The strategy and delivery model is founded on a principle of partnership in the design and delivery of Library services, and to secure their ongoing sustainability. The Council would fund expert, professional and innovative Library services, supported by local partnerships, co-location and income generation that help meet the costs of the service. This builds on a number of recent discussions where partners have stated their willingness to work with the Council to explore options that secure the accessibility of Library services. .
- 3.15 In developing this core provision, the Council has sought to balance competing criteria of (i) service reach and accessibility (ii) community need and (iii) affordability. The proposed core network of Libraries meet 74% of current visits, and mean that 80% of current Library users and 85% of Swindon's households are within 2 miles of a Library.
- 3.16 The Council's direct provision would include dedicated resources to support the expansion of volunteering including dedicated volunteer roles in Libraries, the Home Library Service, and any additional forms of volunteering that preserve and enhance access to Library Services,
- 3.17 Analysis of current usage also shows that Library provision has low impact on those communities in Swindon that have the highest indices of deprivation. Neighbourhood Libraries in those areas only attract a small percentage of current visits. Whilst this number is low, it is also recognised that the services delivered from these Libraries are highly valued by the relatively few numbers of people who rely on them.
- 3.18 As a consequence, as part of the Council's future core provision, the strategy proposes that Libraries outreach and learning services are repurposed to deliver targeted literacy and learning programmes – designed in partnership with communities and partners - that meet local need and make a measurable difference to lives. As examples, this could include using the summer reading challenge model and extending this type of programme to other cohorts and at other times of year, and initial discussions have already started with Citizens Advice Bureau to develop joint programmes around financial literacy. This type of provision could be delivered both in community venues other than Libraries, and in developing local solutions with communities.
- 3.19 The Council is committed to enabling parishes, schools, and community-led provision to be self-managed, resourced and operated by local communities, partners and volunteers, as part of co-located offers in public and community
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buildings. Alongside the Council's core provision, ward councillors, communities, and local groups will be encouraged and supported to maintain and develop local community venues for library and other community activities and services.

- 3.20 Appendix 2 sets out the range of measures and resources the Council could use to support Members and community organisations who wish to sustain local libraries in their communities including the provision of advice, guidance, facilitation support and transitional funding that enables community-led provision to be established.

Implementation

- 3.21 It is proposed that implementation take place as follows:

Stage 1 – 2017/18

- 3.22 New arrangements for core provision to be implemented between April and July 2017. Where partners and communities wish to contribute funding that helps sustain and complement the Council's core provision, the Council would work with those partners to ensure a common implementation timetable.
- 3.23 The Council would actively seek, encourage, and support the development of local arrangements that ensure continued access to Library services. Transitional funding of £500k has been reserved to support this work, which may be used to support the one-off costs of establishing local solutions, for example, to meet equipment costs, IT investment, the temporary funding of facilities whilst local funding arrangements are sought, and the training and development of local organisations and volunteers.
- 3.24 Discussions will take place with ward councillors, local partners, community organisations, and local residents to identify and initiate local interest in establishing the provision of community-led services. This would occur in parallel to the public consultation with a view to local solutions taking effect from 1st July 2017.
- 3.25 Council funding would not extend to maintaining book stock, building costs, public network IT, or paid staff in Libraries beyond the four Libraries proposed in this delivery model. Given the pressing need to reduce costs, it is envisaged that funded services will be withdrawn from all other Libraries with effect from 30 June 2017.

Stage 2 – 2017-2020

- 3.26 For the Council's core provision, consideration will be given to different governance models, additional shared services and the generation of additional income streams to further reduce costs to ensure services are delivered within the Council's 2020 affordability limit of £1.1m.

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Consultation

- 3.27 It is recommended that public consultation on this proposed strategy commence from 1st August 2016 and run for eight weeks to 30th September 2016. This would comprise a public meeting of stakeholders, consultation events at all Libraries, and be supported by a consultation questionnaire that would seek specific feedback on this proposed strategy. It is recognised that this would include the period of the school summer holidays, which would enable consultation to include those users accessing the services during the holidays. The timetable would be managed to ensure other public events take place outside the holiday period.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to develop a new strategy. However, this would then undermine any changes to the current service that might be proposed, including those that might sustain access to Library services.
- 4.2 Public engagement generated a number of responses calling for no change to current Library services. This is not an option given the financial pressures facing the Council and in any event, the current network risks being unsustainable as Library services are spread too thin to ensure reliable access and quality.
- 4.3 A range of different options for the network have been considered. For example, provision at Central Library or the other larger libraries could be further reduced to enable additional resources to be made available to community libraries. From data relating to how users access the service, it is clear that this would not maximise service reach and accessibility for the significant majority of current users and residents overall.
- 4.4 Detailed consideration has also given to finding ways to extend the proposed core network to include Parks and Wroughton Libraries for a temporary period. Beyond the four Libraries of Central, West, North and Highworth, these are the next most visited Libraries and this options would further extend service reach. This would however restrict flexibility in the use of transitional funding to support the establishment of local community provision across all other community Library locations, so these Libraries are not included in the proposed core network.
- 4.5 Consideration has also been given to other approaches for meeting the Council's criteria of affordability. Given the scale and pace required for cost savings to be made, this cannot be achieved without reducing staffed hours, and as a consequence, reducing the size of the Library network.
- 4.6 Alternative governance and delivery models have been considered as ways of achieving financial savings. The Council already works collaboratively with other

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authorities on its IT systems and stock purchasing and whilst the service will continue to achieve efficiency savings in these areas, in themselves, these are not sufficient to generate the required financial savings.

- 4.7 Representations have been made through the public engagement to move Swindon's Libraries into a form of Trust. There are many reasons to consider a Trust model, and other Library Authorities have judged this to be appropriate to their circumstances. At this time, it is proposed that the priority focus in Swindon be to successfully establish the Council's core provision and work to support communities who wish to develop workable solutions that sustain local library services. In the short term, a Trust model in itself will have limited impact on Council budgets overall.
- 4.8 New forms of income generation have also been considered. Whilst there are opportunities to create revenue through commercial approaches to use of space, and potentially through events and exhibitions, from experience nationally it is unlikely that any one idea will bring substantial income on its own. Rather a wider commercial strategy for the service will be developed across the range of Library services, and this will not make a significant impact in the immediate short-term.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The table below sets out the financial framework for the funding of SBC's core provision and transitional funding.

Library (hours it will be staffed)	Buildings	Stock, materials & IT	Staff	Income	Total
Central (47.5 hrs)	238	136	235	(77)	532
West (15 hrs)	77	27	42	(16)	130
Highworth (15 hrs)	51	25	32	(14)	94
North (15 hrs)	94	38	42	(54)	120
Professional Library Services		126	416		542
					1418
	Non-funding of buildings costs from April 18 and additional income				(318)
					1100
<i>Transitional funding of £500k to support implementation of the delivery model</i>					

- 5.2 Core provision will be funded through Council revenue funding, and is affordable within the £1.1m limit if £318k additional income or cost reduction is secured. To achieve this, the Council proposes to no longer meet building costs from April 2018, with these costs will being met from commercial opportunities and co-

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location with other partners and services, in accordance with the principles of the Council's Community Assets review. In addition, further service efficiencies will also be pursued, for example by extending partnership working with other Library authorities, and securing additional income (for example grant funding and sponsorship for specific literacy and learning programmes, fundraising and paid-for services)

- 5.3 In order to progress the procurement of technology to support public access to Libraries beyond staffed hours, initial scoping work has been undertaken to broadly assess the types of products and solutions which are available, and how other library authorities have implemented this type of solution.
- 5.4 The next steps would be to further explore and soft market test the different options available with a range of external suppliers to explore how different options would integrate with Swindon library services and sites and then develop a fit for purpose specification. A business case will be developed which will set out the whole life costs of the recommended solution and will include the costs of capital works to prepare for and enable a solution to be implemented, the estimated costs of the purchase of the solution along with the associated costs for ongoing maintenance and support.
- 5.5 The business case will also investigate implementation factors such as development of policies and procedures and training for staff and users to make best use of this. The most appropriate procurement route for a solution will be followed depending on the requirements of the specification and the relevant Procurement policies.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.6 All legal and human rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of this report are compatible with Convention rights.
- 5.7 Swindon Borough Council has a duty as a Library Authority 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), taking into account local needs and within available resources.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.8 There are no direct staffing implications arising directly from this report. Libraries staff and trade unions have been informed throughout the process of developing this strategy, and a cross-section of staff have worked to develop the vision for the service. Further staff engagement will take place through the public consultation period, and formal staff consultation will commence following Cabinet decisions anticipated to be made in December 2016.

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Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.9 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been developed to assess the effect of the proposed library strategy and a number of affects have been identified for individuals / groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.10 Users of the library service would be affected by the proposed strategy to varying degrees. The degree of impact and disadvantage would depend on a range of factors including: proximity to and ability to travel to an SBC library; requirement for staff assistance to access different facilities and services such as books and resources; ability to access alternative IT infrastructure, and skills to use IT infrastructure without staff support.
- 5.11 Particular impacts are likely for older people, children and young people; disabled users including physical disability, mental ill health, learning disabilities and visual impairment. The consultation process would seek to understand the potential impacts for these groups in more detail and explore potential mitigations.
- 5.12 Other groups have been identified who do not have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 but who may be particularly affected by the proposed strategy include users of a single library site (including the mobile library), those with a low Financial Economic Status, those communities who are facing high levels of deprivation in terms of education, skills and learning particularly around IT access. It is not known which users are would be affected by the proposed strategy or to what extent so it is proposed to consult thoroughly with users to understand what these effects might be and any mitigations which could be considered.
- 5.13 During the consultation, alongside general engagement sessions in each library, specific targeted discussions will be offered to key groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 or their representative bodies to understand any potential adverse impacts and to consider what measures could be considered to mitigate these impacts. This will include engagement with schools, pre-schools, older people's groups and various groups or individuals with characteristics of an equality protected group including; Sexual orientation, Gender identity, Race / Nationality, Older people, Religion and Disability.
- 5.14 Potential mitigations could include increasing the reach and role of the home library service to provide enhanced services and support. Whilst development of community-led local library services will be

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enabled, they will not form part of the SBC statutory provision, but could form appropriate ways for local people to access community based services and activities in their local area, including a library service offer.

- 5.15 The Diversity Impact Assessment for the proposed Library strategy will be considered as the strategy develops through the consultation process and any adverse impacts will be identified and mitigated where appropriate.
- 5.16 A Diversity Impact Assessment relating to staff has been initiated and whilst it is too early to understand what any specific impacts will be, the DIA will be updated as the strategy develops.

Risk Management

- 5.17 Any risks arising from the recommendations of this report will be managed as these are taken forward.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 Cabinet Report 10 February 2016 – Securing a Sustainable Future for Swindon's Cultural Assets, Libraries and Community Services
- 7.2 Libraries Needs Assessment – February 2016
- 7.3 Libraries Emerging Model - 2016

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Public Engagement Report – Phil Back and Associates
- 8.2 Draft Libraries Strategy and Delivery Model

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for July 2016.