

**BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL
CABINET
1st September 2015**

Libraries for the Future: Revised Proposals

Statement from the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission to Cabinet, presented by Cllr Anthony Negus, Chair.

The following observations were made by the Committee on the report sent to Cabinet. The figures in brackets are the original numbered points from the draft minutes of the Scrutiny Commissions meeting on 24th August 2015 (extract draft minute attached - Appendix A)

A. Resilience/Opportunities

1. (7) The issue of resilience was important. Methods for dealing with these challenges were important. It was noted part of the work that officers were doing was to see how rotas could be addressed during particular periods such as holidays.
2. (4) The importance of reaching people who do not normally use the service but could be potential new users was part of the new approach. The development of partnerships would be a crucial element of this;
3. (5) Issues of accessibility for the public (i.e. public transport) were crucial in this process;
4. (8) Despite commending maintaining all the existing libraries as a good solution, the commission remain concerned over the dearth of community facilities in parts of the city. Overall, there was a fantastic opportunity for improving the service offer, if fully grasped.

5. (14) A concern was expressed as to whether or not officers had taken into account the needs of those with English as a second language or low levels of literacy within these proposals;

B. Opening Hours

6. (26) Whilst some Councillors remained concerned about the proposed opening hours reduction of 25% across the service, the majority felt that this was the fairest way of dealing with the difficult situation faced by the service. It was also noted that the service needed to be able to take advantage of extra offers and future growth;

7. (11) The commission generally supported the approach of matching reduced hours of opening with current usage, though this term should be clearly defined early, to minimise objections.

8. (18) If the 25% reduction was adopted, this would be a big challenge for all parties. It would involve a new approach with partnerships in the community, Neighbourhood Partnerships, local tradespeople etc. There would be a very short time to bring in Local Management of Libraries. It was noted that this would be developed over time, taking account of new and emerging opportunities as they arise.

9. (3) The outcomes from reduced library hours needed to be carefully considered. In the long term, a shortened hours' service could threaten the viability of the service itself. It was noted that the core and local offers were being used as a means of meeting the wider needs of communities as appropriate; and so local and volunteer involvement is essential.

10. (22) Wider potential uses for library buildings such as extended hours for eg job clubs, local groups and digital inclusion should be considered within the overall context of reduced hours for trained staff.

C. Programme

11. (12) Whilst two of the libraries named for the swipe card pilot study (Henbury and Stockwood) were listed, it was noted that the other two had not yet been identified. This process would not start until after the Cabinet decision. Therefore the lead-time for ordering and installing the equipment and then piloting the scheme means that there is likely to be a gap between the cut in opening hours in April 2016 and the possible introduction of swipe card access some time after that. While the commission understands the causes for this delay, it considers the timing of these changes to be far from ideal.

D. Staff

12. (16) Concern was expressed that there was no justification in the report for the selection of the figure of 25% reduction in hours, rather than 30% reduction. The commission welcomed minimising reduction as favoured by members at the previous Scrutiny meeting but noted that this absence of justification was one of the reasons cited then for the needing to call a second meeting.

13. (15) The commission raised concerns about replacement of paid trained staff by volunteers who may even include ex-library staff. This could be seen as devaluing the profession and the quality of service provision

14. (17) The question was raised as to staff involvement in these proposals.

The commission members were concerned that, while staff had been involved in all Cabinet reports, the discussion across the team of the overall effect of the reduction was not to take place until after Cabinet was to make its decision. The other reason for having a second Scrutiny meeting and delaying Cabinet was to make time for this process.

15. (13) Concerns were raised regarding the use of swipe card/automated access, specifically around the safety of women in an unstaffed setting. Without special provision, there was a serious equalities issue as to how the public could be kept safe and feel safe in

such situations. This issue must be considered within the EQIA, and the pilots with automated access should seek to ensure that these concerns can be minimised or removed, and publicised.

E. Eastville and Community

It was highlighted by some members that the community of Eastville and adjoining areas could be significantly affected by the move of their library service to Lockleaze, and the potentially reduced service at the new location. It was asked that the relevant Neighbourhood Partnership be included in forthcoming decision-making about this library

16.(1) The commission requested reassurance that, prior to closing Eastville Library there should be resolved the detail of an alternative location, following a review for library provision for the whole of the greater Lockleaze area, reflecting the loss of a community hub in Eastville. Since the proposed change was so significant, the Neighbourhood Partnerships should be involved as soon as possible in the process

17. (2) Whilst it was noted that in the report it indicated that there would be some provision in place in 2016 at the latest following the proposed closure, it was regretted that, if approved, there would be a gap in the full service between the closure and any new service opening. Members urged that discussions with community providers would be taking place as early as possible as part of this process and that no building would be left vacant during this period

18. (25) A minority of the commission hoped, nevertheless that the newer resources being deployed as part of these proposals should initially be focussed on those areas where people experience more challenges and have less access to opportunities. (Note 1.4 Cabinet Report)

19. (9) The importance of community facilities was raised. For example, Eastville Library was with others being used as a location for councillor surgeries as well as some other use. Often the library building is the only such facility available. The review should grasp the opportunities to strengthen this city-wide network

20. (28) A concern was expressed at the impact of the proposed Eastville library closure on adjacent areas of South Gloucestershire (i.e. Cheswick Village) and the need for any future proposal to serve both communities in South Gloucestershire and Bristol. Whilst it was acknowledged that it was important for Bristol to remain self-sufficient in library provision, there needed to be discussion between partners in relation to local offers;

21. (23) Key groups, such as the Polish community in Avonmouth, need to be considered. There needed to be negotiations with the Neighbourhood Partnership and engagement with representative groups to put together a community plan to ensure all needs are reflected in the local offer;

22. (29) A report would be required at some point concerning how work would take place with Neighbourhood Partnerships and community groups to stimulate local collaborative working;

F. Capital Fund

23. (27) In relation to the Capital Fund, members expressed the view that officers should be aware of where spending was most needed.

24. (30) The information presented on the Capital Investment Fund was felt to be incomplete. Officers need to bring back regular reports on the progress of both the local offer development and the Capital Investment spend. It is hoped that the broadband upgrade already ordered and that the hardware upgrade in train will be rolled out to put Bristol in a good position to apply for library support grant, seen as a priority.

G. General Process

25. (21) It was noted that during the second round of consultation, the numbers of comments from those people who were not discussing the seven libraries identified as being at risk, had dropped significantly. It was noted that this second phase of consultation had been very confusing for some members of the public. Whilst the officers clarification was welcomed that the findings from both Stage 1 and Stage 2 have informed these proposals, and all comments will form part of the discussions regarding the local offers in the future, nevertheless many residents and users would feel that the decision to reduce opening hours and resources across all libraries and not just those seven seen to be at risk meant that they had not been adequately consulted. It was therefore very important to engage with these communities as soon as possible.

26. (19) The commission noted that library's names do not match their locations that they often sit near ward or Neighbourhood Partnership boundaries, and that the impact on residents on both sides of the boundary need to be considered. It was noted that in at least one case, the accuracy of the consultation process was affected by the incorrect allocation of comments on a particular library from individuals and organisations from more than one Partnership.

27. (20) The commission suggest that to support the local decision making regarding which times/days residents wanted their library to be open, it would be helpful to measure the numbers of people coming into the library. However, it was acknowledged that the term "usage" needed to be carefully defined. For example, footfall, IT use, book-borrowing and other activities all reflect "usage".

28. (24) There was a view that the 25% opening hours reduction should not be rigidly applied in all circumstances. There needed to be flexibility to take opportunities as they arose, despite officers stating that their approach in the face of budgetary pressures would be to cut current usage hours by 25% in all libraries except Avonmouth, to be clear and equitable.

29. (10) The commission voiced concern that the principal reason for most libraries not closing was due to the forthcoming elections in May 2016. It was noted that this was and would continue to be a key political issue;

DISCLAIMER

The following minute extract is DRAFT. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information, statements and decisions recorded, the status will remain that of a draft until such time as the minutes are confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting of Neighbourhood Scrutiny Commission.

DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT

**NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY COMMISSION – MONDAY 17TH
AUGUST 2015**

Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals

Public Forum – Questions and Statements Relating to this Item

Questions, together with answers from the Chair, were made available at the meeting and noted by Scrutiny Commission Members.

Supplementary Questions/Comments were made as follows:

Question 1 – Councillor Gill Kirk – Library Digital Inclusion Fund – Answer provided

Question 2 – Councillor Gill Kirk – Eastville Library – Councillor Kirk asked what other measures will be put in place to address the needs of Eastville Community.

Action: Di Robinson to provide a response

Question 3 – Steve Crawshaw – Library Service – No supplementary question was asked.

The following statements were submitted to the meeting: (attached)

S1. Steve Crawshaw – UNISON – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S2. Mary and Malcolm Neave – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted

S3. Councillor Gill Kirk – Proposed Closure of Eastville Library. This was noted

S4. David Redgewell, Ian Beckey and Jenny Raggett (South West Transport Network and Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance) – Library Service Proposed Reduced Hours of Opening. This was noted

S5. Susan and Adrian Fry – Libraries Proposal. This was noted

S6. Vickie Hirst – Library Service. This was noted.

S7. David Moore – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S8. Professor AW Preece – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S9. Charles Thompson – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S10. Paul Mugford – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S11. Rosanne Carwardine – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S12. Councillor Clare Campion-Smith and Councillor Glenise Morgan – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S13. Jill Kempshall – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S14. Sheila Preece – Libraries for the Future – Revised Proposals. This was noted.

S15. Friends of Bristol Central Library (Jill Richardson) – Revised Library Proposals.

S17 (Late). Councillor Tim Leaman – Lawrence Weston Library.

Libraries for the Future: Revised Proposals

The Chair opened discussion for this item and explained that the intention was to formulate a response which would go forward as a statement from the Scrutiny Commission to Cabinet.

The following comments were made from members of the Scrutiny Commission, together with responses from officers as appropriate:

- (1) Rather than agreeing to close Eastville Library prior to working out the detail of an alternative location, a review for library provision for the whole of Lockleaze was required to establish a community hub in Eastville. Since the proposed change was so significant, the Neighbourhood Partnerships should be involved in the process;
- (2) Whilst it was noted that in the report it indicated that there would be some provision following the proposed closure, it was noted that, if approved, there would be a gap in the full service between the closure and any new service

opening. It was noted that the proposal was for the new provision to be in place by 2016 at the latest. It was noted that in point 7.2.2 in the report officers have stated that some provision will be in place before the closure of the Eastville library building. Officers acknowledged that there are some concerns because they are not yet in a position to be specific as to what will be provided where.

- (3) The issue of reduced library hours needed to be carefully considered. In the long term, a shortened hours' service could threaten the viability of the service itself and could cause services to "wither on the vine". It was noted that the core and local offers were being used as a means of meeting the wider needs of communities as appropriate;
- (4) The importance of reaching people who don't normally use the service but could be potential new users was part of the new approach. The development of partnerships would be a crucial element of this;
- (5) Issues of accessibility for the public (ie public transport) were crucial in this process for the relocation of Eastville Library services;
- (6) It was noted that the words "to a level" in Paragraph 7.1.2 of the report should read " by a level";
- (7) Concerns were expressed that reducing the hours may make the service less resilient. In the case of Stockwood Library, this had closed three times recently due to a lack of staff. It was noted that the rota arrangements for a library service were already extremely complex and part of the work that officers were doing was to see how this could be simplified and made stronger;
- (8) Whilst the overall approach adopted in the report was a very good solution, there remained a concern over the dearth of community facilities in parts of the city. Nevertheless, there remained a fantastic opportunity for the service;
- (9) The importance of community facilities was raised. For example, Eastville Library was now being used as a location for councillor surgeries as well as some other use, such as meetings of the Community Land Trust. There was a concern that the closure of this library could result in this being lost. It was also noted that out of hours community use at this library amounted to approximately 300 hours in 30 months;
- (10) There remained a concern that the principal reason for most libraries not closing was due to the forthcoming elections in May 2016. It was noted that this was and would continue to be a key political issue;
- (11) It was important to ensure that those libraries with smaller footfalls should receive the most support in order to increase their current offers;
- (12) Whilst two of the libraries named for the pilot study (Henbury and Stockwood) were listed, it was noted that the other two had not yet been identified;
- (13) Concerns were raised regarding the use of swipe card/automated access, specifically around the safety of women in an unstaffed setting. There was a serious equalities issue here as to how the public could be kept safe in such situations. This issue has been raised within the EQIA, and is in part why the automated access will be piloted initially, to check that these concerns can be minimised or removed.
- (14) A concern was expressed as to whether or not officers had taken into account the needs of those with English as a second language or low levels of literacy within these proposals;

- (15) A suggestion was raised as to where new volunteers in the service were likely to come from ie would they all be ex library staff? Officers explained that the purpose of the volunteer programme would be to bring in new people to the service as volunteers, from diverse backgrounds with different interests and skills to share with the service. If ex-library staff wanted to volunteer, they would of course be most welcome.
- (16) Concern was expressed that there seemed little justification in the report for the selection of the figure of 25% reduction in hours, rather than 30% reduction. Officers had noted concerns expressed by members at the previous Scrutiny Commission concerning the need to minimise cuts as much as possible and had therefore chosen the minimum percentage reduction to enable the service to be maintained at a level at which we can still have a strong base across the service in which to build our future provision.
- (17) The question was raised as to staff involvement in these proposals. Officers clarified that staff has been involved in all the Cabinet repost. Once a formal decision is made regarding the future service, the managing change process will begin to take staff through the major changes to the service and the impact on their specific roles;
- (18) If the 25% reduction was adopted, this would be a big challenge for all parties. It would involve a new approach with partnerships in the community, Neighbourhood Partnerships, local tradespeople etc. There would be a very short time to bring in Local Management of Libraries. Officers noted that change would not all happen at once but would be developed over time, taking account of new and emerging opportunities as they arise. It was confirmed that the minimum 20 hour core offer would operate as a baseline below which no library would drop;
- (19) It was raised that a comment made regarding Redland Library had not been included in the report of the consultation meeting at the Cabot Clifton Clifton East Neighbourhood Partnership. This was an oversight.
Action: Di Robinson to ensure that this is picked up by officers
- (20) It was suggested that to support the local decision making regarding which hours/days residents wanted their library to be open, it would be helpful to measure the numbers of people coming into the library. However, it was acknowledged that the term “usage” needed to be carefully defined. For example, a large number of people at Redland Library used this facility but did not take out books.
- (21) It was noted that during the second round of consultation, the numbers of comments from those people who were not discussing the seven libraries identified as being at risk, had dropped significantly. It was noted that this second phase of consultation had been very confusing for some members of the public. Officers clarified that the findings from both Stage 1 and Stage 2 have informed these proposals, and all comments will form part of the discussions regarding the local offers in the future.;
- (22) In addition to staff opening hours, there were other key issues to consider ie the potential for extended hours (ie job clubs in the early evening) and digital inclusion;
- (23) It was noted that Avonmouth Library would gain as a result of these proposals. There needed to be negotiations with the Neighbourhood Partnership and engagement with the Polish community who were putting together a community plan to ensure this was reflected in the local offer;

- (24) There was a view the 25% opening hours reduction should not be rigidly applied in all circumstances. There needed to be flexibility to take opportunities as they arose. Officers confirmed that they would always consider all opportunities that came forward. However, in acknowledgement of the budgetary pressures faced by the service, the approach taken was an equitable and straightforward one that drew a line in the “savings” sand;
- (25) There was an acknowledgement that the newer resources being deployed as part of these proposals should initially be focussed on those areas where people experience more challenges and have less access to opportunities. (Note 1.4 Cabinet Report).
- (26) Whilst some Councillors remained concerned about the proposed opening hours reduction of 25% across the service, others felt that this was the fairest way of dealing with the difficult situation faced by the service. It was also noted that the service needed to be able to take advantage of extra offers and future growth;
- (27) In relation to the Capital Fund, members expressed the view that officers should be aware of where spending was most needed.
- (28) A concern was expressed at the impact of the proposed Eastville library closure on adjacent areas of South Gloucestershire (ie Cheswick Village) and the need for any future proposal to serve both communities in South Gloucestershire and Bristol. Whilst it was acknowledged that it was important for Bristol to remain self-sufficient in library provision, there needed to be discussion between partners in relation to local offers;
- (29) A report would be required at some point concerning how work would take place with Neighbourhood Partnerships and community groups to stimulate local collaborative working;
- (30) There was a discussion regarding the Capital Investment Fund. Officers will bring back regular reports on the progress of both the local offer development and the Capital Investment spend. It was also noted that broadband upgrade was already ordered and that the hardware upgrade was also in train.

Action: Alison Comley/Di Robinson/Lucy Fleming/Romayne De Fonseca – to ensure regular update reports are brought back

The Chair thanked all parties for a very helpful and constructive contributions and thanked officers for their support in this process.

Resolved –

- (1) that a Minute Extract for this item goes forward to Cabinet on Tuesday 1st September 2015;**
- (2) that it is noted that the Chair will prepare a statement on this issue in consultation with the Scrutiny Commission which will go forward to Cabinet on Tuesday 1st September 2015.**

Action: (1) – Jeremy Livitt, (2) Lucy Fleming to co-ordinate