



## **BRISTOL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

**Conclusions of the Libraries Task and Finish Group**

**October 2017**

## **BRISTOL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

### **Conclusions of the Libraries Task and Finish Group**

#### **1. Executive Summary**

The Libraries Task and Finish Group was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017 to be the method via which scrutiny engages with the process to change the Library Service. The Group is not a statutory committee, but is a time-limited specific task group.

The Group has conducted its work in the context of the current situation, where the Library Service in Bristol is facing significant budget reductions, and has conducted a public consultation seeking views on the potential closure of 17 branch libraries as well as other community services.

The key question that the Group sought to address was:

*“Are there alternative options or delivery models that would enable better outcomes for the library service than those outlined in the public consultation document, and how could these models be made feasible in Bristol?”*

The Group acknowledges that the position at this moment for the Library Service is gloomy in the medium term, due to the budget situation, but wishes to take a forward looking approach to considering alternative models that might be sustainable in the future (but will take some time to put in place). Members of the Group are not committed in the long term to keeping every single library open and understand that this is very likely to prove unfeasible as the budget cuts have to be delivered, but believe a more flexible approach to volunteering (that does not reduce the number of agreed paid staff to be retained) is essential to deliver options. Members have reached a consensus view that Cabinet should take a step back and reconsider the current proposition, to avoid potential consequences which could cause irreversible damage to library facilities in Bristol.

Members recognise that there are no easy options, and that the Group has not been able to identify a perfect solution within the timeframe, however it has agreed a recommended direction of travel and has set down a number of principles for moving forward. There are a number of options over the two year period for making constraints in some areas e.g. reducing opening hours in the Central and/or branch libraries that could be used to implement the proposals outlined in this report.

To this end, the Task and Finish Group has drawn the following conclusions.

## 1.1 Key Conclusions

**1.1.1 That the Community Resources proposal \* be adopted as a measure of interim support for as many as possible of the existing 17 libraries that are currently under threat, to enable these to become community led by community volunteers. With the proviso that the library building does not drop out of ownership of the city in the interim (by community asset transfer or other means) so this is seen as a holding operation. (\* see Appendix 3)**

**1.1.2 That the Community Resources “offer” be enhanced, on the understanding that if a greater degree of ongoing (as well as initial) community development support is not provided, this model is far less likely to succeed - and whilst accepting that this would mean that the cost of the offer will subsequently increase (which has been accounted for in the initial costings).**

**1.1.3 That this arrangement be maintained for a 2 year period, whilst an alternative delivery vehicle for the Library Service is developed.**

**1.1.4 That the Executive agrees to explore and develop an appropriate alternative delivery vehicle for the delivery of library services in Bristol taking into account the key principles as outlined in Section 1.4 below.**

The Group does acknowledge however:

- that the Community Resources proposal may not be suitable for all 17 libraries as there may be insufficient support from the community, and in such cases requests that these buildings are “mothballed” for the interim period.
- that not every locality may be asking for a formal library service – just as important may be the other facilities and services that are currently provided in libraries and could be provided in future in different settings – this thinking needs to continue and be developed further.
- that any enhancement of the Community Resources offer will mean that the cost will increase - however, it should also be acknowledged that the £5,000 package of the Community Resources proposal would not in any event cover all costs (e.g. building running costs), and this could therefore make this option unviable for some of the libraries under threat. There are three ways in which the additional cost could be mitigated:
  - Firstly, that existing Library Service staff are used flexibly to provide a limited amount of ongoing expertise and guidance to the community led services, as there would be considerable value to be gained from even a few hours support per week.
  - Secondly, that different models in terms of opening hours (for example, for the Central Library), be explored to free up additional funding for the Community Resources offer.
  - Thirdly, that Cabinet consider utilising the Council’s reserves on a one-off basis to provide a limited amount of additional community development support (i.e. not just materials but advice and facilitation to maximise use of the package) for community led library services for the two year period.

## 1.2 Other Conclusions

***1.2.1 That a commitment be given that no decisions on disposal of library buildings will be made until final decisions have been taken about the possibility of using these for libraries, whether community led or otherwise.***

***1.2.2 That the Executive undertakes to pursue a dialogue with community minded organisations, University of Bristol, UWE and schools/academies(both primary and secondary) with the aim of developing a collaborative approach to the use of library facilities.***

***1.2.3 That an explanation is provided as to why the option of alternative delivery vehicles for the Library Service was not pursued further following the Libraries Inquiry Day in January 2015 and that this change of direction was never made clear to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission that regularly asked for clarification of thinking on libraries, both before and after the budget setting of February 2017.***

## 1.3 Rationale

The Task and Finish Group considers that its recommended approach is an infinitely preferable alternative to closing 17 libraries, following a consultation where the majority of respondents rejected all the proposed options. The number of new petitions from members of the public and library user groups challenging proposed library closures is also an indicator of the strength of public feeling around this issue.

Members strongly believe that if library services are closed and lose their place in communities and in people's lives, it will be impossible for these to be resurrected and replaced at a future date, should this ever become financially feasible. That is why the Group views it as critical that services remain in some form, in at least some of the existing locations, whilst the Council seeks another method of delivering services.

The consensus of the Group is that the Community Resources proposal is an innovative idea that has real potential to maintain a library-like service, but is insufficient in its current form as it does not allow for ongoing support and to enable community led services to access and learn from the expertise of professional Library Service staff. An enhanced offer will of course cost more, however, this will mean that the Community Resources proposal becomes more viable, and therefore more likely to be successful, and members do not think that it needs to cost that much more. The Group has looked at ways in which the additional cost could be lessened in order to buy time for the necessary work to deliver an alternative model along the lines of the recommendations made by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

If Library Service staff are used flexibly to share their knowledge and provide support to community led services, this would lessen any additional financial requirement as well as benefiting from the valuable experience of staff. The final note in the 'options not considered' paper is unnecessary and the proposals to have a fully staffed service alongside any remaining libraries being outside of the municipal library service is unnecessarily stark and equally unhelpful. Members wish to make it very

clear that they do not want to cut staff numbers nor replace them with volunteers, but are looking to use the skills and expertise of Library Service staff in the most flexible and imaginative way.

#### **1.4 Alternative Delivery Vehicles - Key Principles**

As part of its first meeting the Task and Finish Group received a masterclass on alternative delivery vehicles models from a consultant with extensive experience in this area. More detail about this can be found in Section 3. The following principles were agreed to be integral to the development of an effective model:

- It is imperative that the “function” of the service be clearly defined before the identification of the appropriate “form” (delivery vehicle)
- The engagement and support of staff and elected members is crucial, from as early a stage as possible, and this should be built into the development process.
- A robust business plan is required, informed by market evidence and research and based on prudent assumptions i.e. to underestimate income and overestimate costs.
- In planning the “function” of the new service, consideration should be given to how the service is to be incentivised to innovate and how this is to be built in to the operation of the delivery vehicle.
- There are pros and cons to local authority trading companies which need to be assessed for each particular situation - for example, there is an obvious advantage in being able to avoid lengthy procurement procedures, on the other hand however the company can only generate 20% of its traded income, which can limit flexibility.
- Any model of service delivery (for example, a Community Asset Transfer) that depends on the voluntary sector can be at risk unless attention is paid to the capacity of the voluntary sector and the need to develop this with a view to current need and well as future demand. It would also be important to make clear the minimum level of service provision required and to ensure that service users are clear on what they can expect from the service.
- The timescales for developing an alternative delivery vehicle need to be built in to the planning timeline. For example, for a public service mutual, from the point of the options appraisal the process can take approximately one year, and for the whole process, two years.
- The costs involved should be clearly quantified – these will include officer time and business support – not forgetting that normal service delivery will be ongoing throughout this period and therefore business continuity could present a challenge.
- Officers should be required to demonstrate that any new service model has built in future proofing - that it has the capacity to meet the needs of future communities, not merely current demand. This should include taking into account other facilities that may become available in the local area or the city.

#### **1.5 Comments on the Public Consultation Process**

The Group’s views on the “Your Neighbourhoods” public consultation with particular reference to the Library Service can be summarised as follows:

- The Group did not concur with the proposals suggesting that only 10 libraries should remain in Bristol.
- The consultation has forced respondents to take a negative stance by presenting a limited number of options instead of being a catalyst for the generation of new ideas. Members thought that many people will have refused to participate in the consultation as they will have viewed it as a “Hobson’s choice” between an assortment of cuts.
- 61% of respondents were over the age of 45 – this means that the service is being reshaped based on the views of an ageing demographic, whereas if we are looking towards the future surely we need to elicit and incorporate more views from younger people.
- 39% of those responding chose none of the three options – given that this is the largest group of respondents, the Task and Finish Group would question the legitimacy of an Executive decision to proceed with any of the three options.
- The consultation was not designed in such a way as to allow respondents to take a citywide approach and instead appeared to lead to the favouring of one area over another.

## **2. Background**

Across the country there is a background of change for libraries - against a context of public sector cuts libraries are being reduced in number, often with curtailed opening hours. In this environment, different approaches and models are being developed to meet these challenges. In some places community groups are taking on more responsibility and a greater role in providing services, elsewhere, public sector mutual or other delivery models are being explored and set up. In Greenwich, for example, a worker-controlled social enterprise was created for delivery of the Council's leisure facilities, and has since expanded to provide services outside the borough, whilst in Devon, a public service mutual was established to take over the existing library service

Over recent years, the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission has expressed concerns about the development of the Library Service in Bristol, and has identified this as a priority area for scrutiny. Members have requested and received regular updates on progress, and have commented on proposals for change. In January 2015, a Scrutiny Inquiry Day was held in the context of an ongoing public consultation to identify priorities that should be addressed in a core offer from the Library Service.

## **3. Alternative Delivery Vehicles**

The Group spent the majority of its first meeting in a masterclass on alternative delivery models, delivered by a consultant with experience in this area. Members learnt about the pros and cons of different models including local authority trading companies and public service mutuals, joint ventures etc, and the timescales and cost implications involved.

One of the examples discussed and also of interest, being a near neighbour, was Devon County Council, which in April 2016 established a public service mutual named “Libraries Unlimited”. This is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status and is an independent staff and community owned social enterprise. It was developed as the result of a public consultation that was carried out

in 2014, and the requirement to reduce the budget from £11m to below £7m over a number of years. A staffing restructure was carried out prior to the service leaving the Council. The new public service mutual commissioned the pre-existing library service of 50 libraries plus 4 mobile libraries. Hours in some of the libraries were reduced by mutual consent but the principle of keeping all the libraries open was partly built into the model - and although this was achieved, it proved to be challenging. An important success factor for the new mutual was that the Business Plan was developed in the spirit of prudence to ensure a robust financial model. These and other models were the subject of a day-long Inquiry meeting held in January 2017 by a visiting delegation of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, attended by BCC officers and the Chair of Neighbourhoods Scrutiny. DCMS was clearly keen to demonstrate alternative models and to assist with expertise and a toolkit.

Members' conclusions from this learning can be found in the Executive Summary Section 1.4.

#### **4. Libraries Task and Finish Group – Status and Working Arrangements**

In the current climate, where the Library Service in Bristol is facing significant budget reductions, the issue of Libraries was selected by members as one of the highest priorities for 2017/18 at an OSMB "hothouse" on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

Scrutiny members decided to take an intensive role in scrutinising and influencing the development of the Cabinet proposals for the service, following the public consultation that was held from July-September 2017, and it was agreed that the best method of dealing with this was via a task and finish group.

The Group was established by Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017 to be the method via which scrutiny addresses the proposals to change the Libraries Service. The Group is not a statutory committee, but is a time-limited specific task group.

The Group's key work phases, work plan, working arrangements and membership details are attached at Appendices 1 and 2.

The work covered by this report relates to Phase 1 of the work as set out in Appendix 1.

##### **4.1 Pathway for the Conclusions of the Group**

The conclusions of the Group will be reported to OSMB, as OSMB is the commissioning scrutiny body and also forms part of the governance framework of the Council. The next OSMB meeting is on November 1<sup>st</sup> 2017 and this report will be a substantive item on that agenda.

The conclusions of the Group will also be shared with officers at an early stage, to enable these to be taken account of in the development of the Cabinet proposals.

This report will go to the Cabinet meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> December, to be on the same agenda as the report containing proposals for the Library Service. It will be under the standing item “Reports from Scrutiny” and a formal written response from the Executive will be requested.

#### 4.2 Membership

Cllr Anthony Negus (chair)*	Liberal Democrat
Cllr Geoff Gollop	Conservative
Cllr Brenda Massey	Labour
Cllr Charlie Bolton*	Green
Cllr Martin Fodor*	Green
Cllr Paula O'Rourke*	Green
Cllr Jo Sergeant*	Labour
Cllr Peter Abraham	Conservative ( <i>not in attendance at any meetings</i> )
Cllr Richard Eddy*	Conservative
Cllr Gary Hopkins*	Liberal Democrat

\*These Members were present at the final Task and Finish Group session where the recommendations were prepared.

#### 4.3 Meetings

The Group met on the following occasions:

- Monday 11th September - meeting
- Friday 6th October - meeting (a.m.)
- Friday 6th October - facilitated workshop (p.m.)

The Work Plan can be found in Appendix 1.



**Libraries Task and Finish Group**

**Phases of Work and Work Plan**

***The key question that the Group will seek to answer is:***

Are there alternative options or delivery models that would enable more libraries to remain open than those outlined in the public consultation document, and how could these models be made feasible in Bristol?

***Main Phases of Work:***

- *Phase 1 (Sept-Oct 2017 - as part of the process to achieve the level of savings required)*
  - Consultants to attend as expert witnesses to brief members on alternative delivery models
  - Scrutinise the findings of the public consultation
  - Scope any alternative options for service delivery (this would need to be done over the period Sep-Oct 2017 in order to be able to accompany proposals to Cabinet
  - Scrutinise Cabinet proposals as they go forward
  
- *Phase 2 (post Cabinet decision on 5/12/2017)*
  - Scrutiny involvement in the implementation of the Cabinet decision
  - Scrutiny overview into decisions regarding surplus land, buildings, asset transfer issues, use of capital (NB. Issues relating to surplus buildings resulting from the Libraries review, whilst aligned to the work of this Task and Finish Group, will be referred to the Council Assets Task and Finish Group.)
  - Exploring options for the remaining libraries estate and alternative models of delivery
  -

## Work Plan

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Contributors</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>			
1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting: Monday 11/9/17 at 2.00pm- 4.30pm	2.00pm 2.20pm 2.30pm 3.30 - 4.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement of Proposed Working Arrangements and Proposed Work Plan (drafts) - <i>20 mins</i></li> <li>• Update on progress of current DCMS bid (verbal briefing) - <i>10 mins</i></li> <li>• Masterclass on Alternative Delivery Models - Mark Bandalli, Mutual Ventures - <i>1 hour</i></li> <li>• Questions and discussion - <i>1 hour</i></li> </ul>	Romayne de Fonseca Kate Murray Mark Bandalli
2 <sup>nd</sup> Meeting: Friday 6/10/17 at 10.00am - 1.00pm	10.00am 10.20am 11.00am 12.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for final conclusions and timescales</li> <li>• Outcomes of the public consultation including general themes + overview of proposals from the community</li> <li>• The thinking so far (taking into account the consultation outcomes )</li> </ul> Contextual information including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of all existing service costs</li> <li>• Interactive spreadsheet for modelling costs of different options</li> <li>• Explanation of the statutory requirements for library services and definition of a community library (with examples)</li> </ul>	Romayne de Fonseca/Lucy Fleming John Toy Bridget Aherne Di Robinson Kate Murray Cllr Asher Craig
3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting: Friday 6/10/17 at 1.30- 4.30pm	Date TBC	Facilitated workshop to discuss findings and agree conclusions - see next page for proposed format	Declan Cooney, Independent Facilitator Romayne de Fonseca/Lucy Fleming

## **Libraries Task and Finish Group**

### **Working Arrangements**

#### **1. *Status of the Task and Finish Group***

The Group was established by OSMB and will therefore be the method via which scrutiny deals with this topic, however the Group itself is not a statutory group. Any information from officers relating to this topic will be passed through this Group.

The final report/recommendations of the Group will go to OSMB, as this is the commissioning scrutiny body and forms part of the governance framework of the Council.

#### **2. *Meetings***

Meetings will be informal, unless otherwise agreed by members of the Group, and will not have formally published papers or minutes. All papers will be circulated electronically.

Any other methods of working are to be determined by Group members as appropriate, but within the available resource.

Meetings will be convened by Romyne de Fonseca, Policy Advisor.

#### **3. *Membership***

Canvassing for membership is underway. It is intended that membership will reflect political balance but the Group is not required to be politically proportionate.

Chairing arrangements for all the task and finish groups were discussed at OSMB on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017.

Due to the time critical nature of the work, until final membership was been confirmed, the councillors who attended the scoping meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> July were invited to the first meeting, for the purposes of moving forward with the work of the Group. These members were:

Cllr Anthony Negus (LD) - Chair

Cllr Geoff Gollop (C)

Cllr Brenda Massey (L)

Cllr Charlie Bolton (G)

Councillors who subsequently expressed an interest in being part of the Group and were therefore also included are:

Cllr Martin Fodor (G)

Cllr Paula O'Rourke (G)

Cllr Jo Sergeant (L)

Cllr Peter Abraham (C)

Cllr Richard Eddy (C)

Cllr Gary Hopkins (LD)

#### ***Lead Officer(s) and Relevant Executive Member***

The departmental lead officer is Kate Murray, Head of Libraries.

The Executive Member for this service area is Cllr Asher Craig.

#### ***4. Other Attendees***

Relevant departmental officers will be required to attend meetings. Others (egg. expert witnesses) may be invited to attend meetings depending on the context.

The Group may wish to consider whether to invite representatives of local service user groups to participate in specific parts of the Group's work, although members need to take into account that this could impact on subsequent discussions.

As the main agenda item for the first meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September will be a session on alternative delivery models, it is proposed that the Library Management Team and Executive Member be invited to attend as this would be a useful learning opportunity for all.

#### ***5. Reporting Progress***

Progress updates will be provided to the monthly OSMB meetings. Updates will also be published on the Scrutiny webpages, and included in a regular e-briefing which will go to all members.

**Bristol Libraries - Community Resources Proposal**

The Community Resource proposal is a package of resources that could be housed in an ex library building or a new community space that would provide a low key, low technology but locally accessible way for residents to still have access to library books in particular. It would help enable communities to provide local resources.

The cost of each package to the Library Service would be £5,000 per year.

**NB. This is an option that is still under development by officers and is being shared with the Task and Finish Group at an early stage to assist the Group in reaching its conclusions.**