

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

November 27 2018



Report of: Communities - Libraries

Title: Library Strategy Update

Ward: Citywide

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The significant issues in the report are:

1. Note the update on work progressing on the community engagement plans



Update on the October Cabinet paper

1. The cabinet in October 2018 approved a paper that outlined a new approach to library services engagement, now the historic savings target has been removed. A project budget was also approved. It was confirmed all that all current 27 libraries would be retained and the statutory local authority service would continue.
2. The existing Libraries savings target for 18/19 will be covered from reserves and savings targets for 19/20 and thereafter will be considered as part of the refresh of the medium term financial plan and 2019/20 budget process in February 2019. This will also include the savings target already achieved in 17/18 of £300K that contributed to the overall target of £1.4m. The budget has not increased nor have any capital funds been granted.

Library Strategy

3. Cabinet also approved the production of a Library Strategy to be coproduced with citizens and communities. The library strategy will take into consideration all the feedback from the 2017 Your Neighbourhood consultation, the subsequent meetings and conversations and ongoing interest from organisations and groups. It will also reference the ongoing conversations with academic institutions, supporters and funding bodies that have interest in Bristol and the service. As part of the strategy we will consider whether the current library sites are the most suitable in local locations, including the Central Library, looking at how best to maximise city assets. Any relocation would be subject to a proper understanding of the costs versus the benefits.
4. The strategy will have a strong element of co-production as its development will run in parallel with the proposed community engagement. The conversations will also contribute to the work on a library strategy. This is due to be published in April 2019.

Community Engagement Work

5. We proposed an extensive period of community engagement work with all 27 libraries to revisit ideas and suggestions in the two previous consultations that were presented in a period of proposed reduction (to close 7 in 2015 and then to close 17 in 2017). As all libraries are now to be retained, we want to engage again with communities about projects they can lead in a period of stability. This will build a future more sustainable service and build community confidence. This will be a period of community-led development not council-led options.
6. We are progressing with a plan to host 6 daytime and 6 evening meetings around the city in accessible, neutral venues. We are currently assessing availability and will shortly be producing a list of dates and booking details. These will be promoted via the website, in all libraries and will be sent to all community newsletters. The meetings will commence at the end of January to mid-March 2019. We will be clear which libraries will be discussed at which venue. The meetings will be facilitated by the Community Development Team. We hope the meetings will kick-start ideas and suggestions and lead to further community-led meetings.
7. We are also working with the Community Development Team to do some additional in-depth work with key community organisations around the city. These will run in parallel to the bigger

meetings and we hope the community organisations will also support individual table conversations at the bigger meetings. Some of these more local conversations will reflect the wider concerns over community assets and the best use of buildings.

8. We are also doing some targeted work with secondary schools and sixth forms and will be visiting the Youth Mayors in 2019.
9. Whilst the first phase of the community conversations will finish by April 2019, we believe conversations will be ongoing as ideas and developments are progressed.
10. The ideas and suggestions could be as simple as additional story times in another language to a much more ambitious project such as different way of running a library building. We are open to all suggestions at this stage. To help the conversations we will be producing an information pack – all the data we hold on the buildings, costs, footfall and explanations of what is leased or rented. We also have a wealth of data from the consultations and this will be summarised and we will explain what we have already taken forward. We wish to reassure our citizens that all the time they invested in talking to us about the library service has not been wasted or lost.
11. We hope that the Friends Groups, local councillors and key community organisations will promote attendance at the meetings. We will invite all individuals and groups that previously made suggestions in the 2017 consultation. We will also provide an online space for ideas and suggestions.
12. Library staff will be involved at a local library level as they have valuable professional knowledge of the service, and the needs of their local communities and citizens. These meetings will be run in parallel to the community meetings.
13. We will put all the information from the packs on the website and make the information available at the meetings and at all libraries.
14. At the close of this first phase of engagement in April 2019, we will then sift and consider the ideas and suggestions. Some suggestions will be quick and easy to implement and some will take longer and require support or funding. We will encourage and support communities to lead on 5- 8 pilot projects throughout the city. We cannot progress every idea nor can we take forward one for all 27 libraries. Some projects may be about adding extra activities, some may be about extending the use of the library building, and some will be about extending the service. Some may be about raising income and much greater community involvement.
15. We would also be considering the pilot projects in relation to how they fit the outcomes of the Corporate Strategy and national library services priorities. These will be focused on Empowering and Caring – children have the best start in life; Fair and Inclusive – improving educational outcomes and reducing inequality; Well connected – becoming a digital city, reducing social and economic isolation and working with partners; Wellbeing – improving physical and mental health and keeping Bristol a leading cultural city.
16. The library service will be able to support communities to lead some projects and there will be some financial assistance depending on the project. However there may also be support from the Community Development Team or other council departments. There may be external

support from other organisations that is more appropriate.

17. Whilst the longer term future is uncertain (as for many council services), this opportunity to explore change will lead to a more community-involved service that is more resilient and able to adapt to future scenarios. We will also use this time to understand future needs of local communities and develop a strategy to adapt to changed reading and usage habits.

Appendices:

October cabinet paper – Appendix A