



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACES

WEDNESDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2022

Report of the Executive Director - Place

Community Managed Libraries

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider usage of public satisfaction with libraries that have been transferred to community management and to consider lessons learned for future transfers.

2. Information and Analysis

Background

- 2.1 The Public Library Strategy, approved by Cabinet on 5 April 2018 (Minute No. 102/18 refers) proposed to transfer 20 'tier 4 libraries' to community management. Initially, 10 groups/organisations completed an Expression of Interest form (EOI) and subsequent successful Business Cases were received for Woodville, Old Whittington, Wingerworth, Melbourne and Hayfield libraries. The group at Hayfield has since withdrawn from the process.
- 2.2 Active roll out of the Strategy was on hold for 18 months during 2020 and 2021 due to the impacts of the pandemic, meaning that libraries could not be transferred, and this, alongside the delay and changing environment due to Covid-19, has resulted in the loss of some interested groups.
- 2.3 In August 2021, Woodville Library successfully transferred to community management and the Library Service is continuing to

provide oversight and management to the community group to ensure successful transition.

- 2.4 The Library Service is also actively engaged with those groups/organisations with a successful EOI and Business Case at Old Whittington, Wingerworth and Melbourne. There is also ongoing interest for the potential transfer of Tideswell and Etwall libraries.

Mobile Libraries

- 2.5 During the pandemic, mobile users were offered Home Library Service visits as an alternative. A 'Book & Borrow' offer was also put in place while customers were unable to enter mobiles.
- 2.6 There has been no interest from the public in the Community Managed Mobiles offer. Mobile library drivers require HGV qualifications and there is a shortage nationally of HGV drivers. The Library Service has four mobile library vehicles, two in use and two spares. The two spare vehicles are overdue replacement, with the two main vehicles being due replacement in 2023. There are also costly regular maintenance and checks.

Risks

- 2.7 The Public Library Service Strategy identifies one high level risk:
- 2.8 A risk that communities are unable or unwilling to support local libraries and the Mobile Library Service, which may increase the impact of the proposed service re-design process.
- 2.9 If there is a lack of customer/community support for the proposals outlined within this paper, the Library Service would need to review all aspects of current service provisions, with a potential requirement to make further significant reductions to opening hours, staffing, the materials fund and mobile library provisions (this would be subject to a further period of public consultation). This could result in some libraries being open for less than one day a week with few, or no new books or resources added to stock. The Library Service may also need to dramatically reduce the offer available in all libraries and would be unlikely to deliver the range of additional services outlined in the 'Libraries for Derbyshire' Strategy.

Customer Satisfaction

2.10 Whilst the Library Service does not currently collect customer satisfaction surveys, it is recognised this leaves a gap in data. A customer satisfaction indicator is currently under development and will be implemented across all libraries with effect from April 2022.

2.11 There were many elements of the transfer of Woodville Library to community management that went well and remain positive. These were:

- Communications – internal and external: Woodville Library users were kept informed; staff understand the differences when working with Community Management Libraries (CMLs) and Council-run libraries; and more potential volunteers came forward.
- Training for CML group and volunteers: Mix of in-person training (some formal, e.g. asbestos, and some hands-on, e.g. the Library Management System); written guidance, training checklists and crib sheets; and ongoing/ad hoc support and guidance has worked well.
- Legal documentation: the service level agreement, Lease (with additional licence in this case) were developed with solicitors/estates, library staff and the CML group's input to negotiate contracts.
- The closed period: to enable Council staff to get the site ready; to train the volunteers; and for the CML group to be able to decorate was longer than expected, partly due to Covid, but proved necessary.
- The process of developing a simplified version of the Library Management System (LMS) for CMLs (allowing no access to personal information) was smooth. ICT supported testing and improving. The CML group has found the LMS easy to use and has informally fed back that it is pleased to just have this simple version to get to grips with.
- Building a relationship with the Trustees has been important and is working well, especially with one key point of contact.

Lessons Learned

2.12 The following are the key areas of learning:

- The need for nominated project resources to help drive and provide oversight for the transfer – and maintain good working relationships with the community groups.
- Clear need for dedicated project management resources.
- Training needs for community groups to support smooth handover – including their establishing 'ways of working' (e.g. advanced notice). -.

checklists and training packages will be updated to reflect this for future transfers.

- Lead in time to support the handover process – including legal, facilities management and property processes.
- Time needed to transfer records - the 'pause' in the process due to Covid was a challenge, and the service did need to refresh and regroup on matters that had already been covered. This is something the Service will need to bear in mind for the next CML transfers.
- Online offer: Improving the online joining system and developing an online tool, so customers can update their address and renew their library privilege themselves, was achieved working closely with IT and eContent for the benefit of all customers.

Future Developments

- 2.13 A formal annual review process is outlined in the service level agreement for the transfer, including requirements for the CML group. Library staff need to develop a plan for this, be it an agenda or checklist, to ensure a standardised approach to all CMLs.
- 2.14 The CML group at Woodville is happy for Council staff to ask for feedback from volunteers on the training, including asking what useful methods of learning was were preferred. This will help the Library Service develop the Council's offer for future groups.
- 2.15 Ensuring lease agreements/ legal paperwork for potential library service transfers is in place to smooth the process.
- 2.16 To better engage with and build capacity in communities, the Council is working closely with 3D (third sector support for Derbyshire) to develop a training package for staff and a support offer for potential CML groups.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 At its meeting on 5 April 2018, Cabinet gave approval to commence a 12 week consultation on the draft Strategy from Monday 7 May 2018 (Minute No. 102/18 refers). Detailed findings can be found in the Public Library Service Strategy Consultation report dated 20 December 2018 (Minute No. 300/18 refers).
- 3.2 A full Equality Impact Analysis was undertaken.

3.3 Any future consultations will be shaped by the Council's corporate consultation practice to ensure that input from users and non-users is secured.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 In relation to the development and implementation of the Library Strategy, a number of options were considered:

- Do nothing: A proposal for Derbyshire to maintain all 45 static libraries and mobiles in the same configuration was not considered viable, given the wide range of challenges facing the Council. It would not address the need to make financial savings and would not enable the Service to align its available resources with existing levels of use and need.
- Close a number of Libraries: Closures on a significant scale could help realise some of the required savings, however, it would enable the Service to directly align its available resources with existing levels of use and need. It could result in a patchy and uneven distribution of libraries across Derbyshire.
- Outsource Service: The Council would no longer run the Library Service and it would be run under contract by another organisation. Although an outsourced service could have offered some initial savings, e.g. in the form of reduced rates bill, it is unlikely to achieve all the savings. There are higher levels of risk with this model and the total costs of implementation and transition for Derbyshire are unknown.

5. Implications

5.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

6. Background Papers

6.1 Public Library Service Strategy, dated 5 April 2018
<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/site-elements/documents/pdf/council/meetings-decisions/meetings/cabinet/2018-04-05-public-library-strategy.pdf>

6.2 Public Library Service Strategy, dated 20 December 2018
<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/site-elements/documents/pdf/council/meetings-decisions/meetings/cabinet/20-12-2018-public-library-strategy.pdf>

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 – Implications.

7.2 Appendix 2 – Tier 4 Libraries

8. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- a) Notes the report.
- b) Notes that an annual customer satisfaction indicator is in development and will be implemented across all libraries from April 2022.
- c) Notes the risk that if there is a lack of customer/community support for the proposals outlined within this paper, the Library Service would need to review all aspects of current service provisions

9. Reasons for Recommendations

9.1 To address a gap in collecting customer satisfaction data and enable a deeper understanding of service delivery challenges which will be used to improve the future transfer of libraries to Community Management.

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Implications

Financial

- 1.1 The Public Library Service Strategy 2018 outlined £500,000 savings associated with the transfer of 20 libraries to community management.

Legal

- 2.1 Revision and alteration of the arrangements relating to library provision are subject to statutory regulation. In the event that any substantive changes are to be made to the service, then there is a regulatory process to follow including consultation. This report is to provide information rather than to seek approval for any revision to the arrangements.

Human Resources

- 3.1 Staff will be consulted as stakeholders in relation to provision of the Library Service. Any staffing implications will be the subject of a future paper to Cabinet and separate consultation with staff and Trade Unions.

Information Technology

- 4.1 None.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in 2018 and is included as part of the Public Library Service Strategy Cabinet Report.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 6.1 None.

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental, Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

Social Value Considerations

- 7.1 Libraries provide social value in a number of areas, for example:
- Providing free access to education, recreation, information and cultural resources and opportunities.

- Though their positive impact on health and wellbeing.
- By enabling people to gain and develop digital skills to enable them to participate more effectively in the digital world.
- By breaking down social isolation by providing a safe, neutral social space.
- Through their commercial and economic impact, helping to develop a literate, well-educated and skilled population.

7.2 The Strategy for the Library Service will ensure that the Service is still able to deliver social value in these key areas and the greater involvement of local communities in Service delivery will help to further develop community capacity and resilience in Derbyshire.

Property Considerations

7.3 The Director of Property will facilitate the transfer of libraries to the proposed community management model by the most appropriate method. The mechanisms for the transfers could include granting leases in return for a peppercorn rent or entering into service level agreements. There will also be the potential for the Library Service to relocate to an alternative building if it can be demonstrated to be more suitable and sustainable than the current location.

7.4 The Council will need to be reassured that any community group seeking to take over the management of a library has the knowledge, ability and governance arrangements in place to manage and maintain the property to the standard required by the Council to ensure the buildings are statutorily compliant and safe for use.