DERBYSHIRE County Council

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DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PLACES

WEDNESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2022

Report of the Executive Director - Place

Community Managed Libraries

1. Purpose

1.1 To update the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee about progress on the programme of work to transfer some libraries to a community management model focussing on current challenges, lessons learned and customer satisfaction.

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. Groups at Hayfield and Melbourne have since withdrawn from the process.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. Community groups weren't able to meet, galvanise around a proposal, or have any certainty about the future. In turn, this impacted the Council's ability to meet with local groups and progress any proposals, resulting in a loss of momentum and many community groups have since not re-engaged with the programme.

2.3 In August 2021, Woodville Library successfully transferred to community management via an organisation called Circularity that has wider interests in the building and the local service offer; the Library Service is continuing to provide ongoing support to the organisation.

2.4 In addition, the Library Service is actively engaged with those groups/organisations who have a successful EOI and Business Case in place - at Old Whittington and Wingerworth. There is also ongoing interest for the potential transfer of Tideswell Library.

2.5 However, despite re-launching the Library Strategy in January 2022, to date, no further groups/organisations have expressed an interest in the management and running of static or mobile libraries.

Challenges

2.6 Since, and perhaps because of, COVID there has been a decrease in the proportion of people formally volunteering as confirmed by the latest Community Life Survey 2021, which is inevitably limiting capacity in the community. For details:
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202021

2.7 Also, for some of the libraries currently being explored for transfer, unforeseen complexities around current arrangements (e.g. long standing leases and sub leases which require re-negotiation, covenants, breakdown of energy costs etc) have emerged which, whilst solvable, are contributing towards a delay in the process for some groups.

2.8 It is important to ensure all parties are satisfied with proposals as they develop to ensure long term sustainability of the arrangements - specifically because if the groups withdraw then costs revert back to the Council.

2.9 The Community Managed Libraries (CML) Programme does not have a dedicated project team in place, although there is dedicated Project Officer; this has resulted in programme delivery being absorbed into the day to day service and has meant a significant amount of staff time being allocated to the programme of work.

Lessons Learned

2.10 At its meeting on 23 February 2022, the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee noted the following 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 off site to be stored securely for the appropriate retention period. Measurers are in place (on the checklist) to ensure that any records are transferred with full regards to any General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Records are handled by Council staff who are GDPR trained and sent to Chesterfield Library to be stored securely until the retention period ends.
- Online offer: Improving the online joining system and developing an online tool, so customers could update their address and renew their library privilege themselves, was achieved working closely with IT and eContent for the benefit of all customers.

2.11 A number of planned developments were also highlighted and these have since been achieved.

- Library staff have developed a formal review process that incorporates a checklist for each stage of the transfer process to ensure a standardised approach to all future CML transfers.
- Regular contact with the CML group at Woodville has enabled feedback from volunteers to develop areas of learning that will benefit others. Volunteers initially trained by Library staff, now have had the confidence to train new volunteers at the library which is building/ extending local capacity and means pressure on the Service is reduced in this regard.
- The Service is working closely with Council colleagues to resolve and standardise lease agreements and legal documentation.
- A training package has been developed and delivered by 3D (third sector support for Derbyshire) to assist Library staff with community engagement methods and improve CML support.

Customer Satisfaction

2.12 The Service also recognised that there was a gap in customer satisfaction data and has since implemented a customer satisfaction survey which took place in July 2022.

2.13 The survey was made available in paper format from all static and mobile libraries in Derbyshire and was also delivered to Home Library customers by Home Library Assistants. The survey was also made available in electronic format via a QR code which was provided on posters to all static and mobile libraries in Derbyshire. Links to the survey were provided from the library catalogue, via a variety of Libraries web pages on the DCC website, on social and on the 'Have your say'' page on the DCC website.

2.14 In total, 915 responses were received. Of these responses, 777 were received in paper format, and 138 in electronic format. Of those responses received electronically, 82 were completed in a web browser on a computer or laptop, and 56 were completed on a smartphone.

2.15 Customers were asked overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with each of the following:

- Friendliness of staff at the library you mainly use
- Knowledge of staff at the library you mainly use
- Choice of books
- Access to computers in the library
- Online services (website, social media, library catalogue)
- E-services (including ebooks, eaudiobooks, emagazines and enewspapers)
- Activities and events
- Home Library service

 Overall, 97.6% of Library Service customers were satisfied with Derbyshire Library services.

2.16 There have been no formal comments received at Woodville Community Library. Although customers were encouraged to complete a satisfaction survey, unfortunately, there was a nil response. Circularity has been encouraged to record and share informal/verbal comments moving forwards. During the formal review process, the group highlighted development projects and successes that continue to offer improved benefit to the community:

- Santa's grotto was held near Christmas and is planned again this year.
- Children's craft events.
- Charity donations - reverse advent calendars and collections for the Ukraine.

- Worked with the local Women's Institute who has created some eye-catching displays in front of the library, plus merge with their 'GROW' projects to grow vegetables in spare areas of the grounds. Having different things happening outside has helped people to notice that things are happening/come into the library.
- Improved and maintained the outside e.g. jet washing and providing a mailbox creating a more appealing venue.
- Started a monthly Repair Café in September 2022 with 8 attendees. The Repair Café is linked into others and the group has been approached by South Derbyshire District Council for help developing a network in South Derbyshire.
- A Circularity volunteer-run music sessions for people with dementia and brain injuries.

Future Developments

2.17 The Library Service continues to work with the group at Woodville and any groups/organisations that have expressed an interest in managing and running a library. The challenges identified in 2.6 – 2.9 continue to delay process and require ongoing discussions to enable progression.

2.18 Further promotion of CMLs will continue through networking, community engagement activities and service development.

2.19 The Library Service will continue regular roll out of customer satisfaction surveys with continued benchmarking on good practice to ensure the approach being taken reflects current thinking and customer needs.

2.20 Active discussions are taking place with districts and boroughs to identify opportunities for improving the wider library estate for example, as part of town centre renewal and regeneration schemes such as Clay Cross and Killamarsh, all of which will contribute to a refreshed strategic approach.

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).

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 No further considerations since the Public Library Strategy, dated 5 April 2018.

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

6.3 Improvement and Scrutiny - Places, dated 23 February 2022.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 – Implications.

8. Recommendations

That the Committee:

a) Notes the current level of progress being made regarding the community managed library programme and specifically the current challenges and lessons learned.
b) Notes the areas of future development as set out in Paragraph 2.20.

9. Reason for Recommendations

9.1 To ensure the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee is informed of the progress being made in implementing the Community Managed Libraries programme.

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<u>**Implications**</u>

Financial

1.1   The Public Library Service Strategy from 2018 set out £500,000 savings associated with the transfer of 20 libraries to community management. This savings target is still in place.

Legal

2.1   There are no legal considerations as a direct result of this report.

Human Resources

3.1   There are no Human Resources considerations as a direct result of this report, however the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee has been advised previously that transferred libraries are to be staffed by volunteers and that any reductions in core staff will be managed through established HR processes and vacancy management

Information Technology

4.1   None.

Equalities Impact

5.1   None.

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)

7.1   None as a direct result of this report, although it is important to note that issues regarding complex lease arrangements are impacting the timescales for potential transfer of a small number of libraries.