

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

25 January 2011

Subject: Library Review

Cabinet member: John Thomson – Adult Care, Communities and Libraries and Deputy Leader

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary

This report proposes a positive vision and strategy for the library service in Wiltshire, based on wide ranging consultation with residents. It would enable Wiltshire Council to provide a professional, comprehensive library service, using funding efficiently, keeping customer satisfaction levels high, and yet reduce operating costs.

Work on the Library Service Review began in December 2009 with the purpose of ensuring that the service was focused to meet customer needs and to help the library service deliver budget savings.

The review gathered views and key messages from respondents, through focus groups, the web, and at all Area Boards. It also takes into account feedback from library staff, statutory requirements, and what is happening regionally and nationally to inform the approach. This includes work being carried out on the Future Library Programme by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Local Government Association Group.

The consultation work carried out as part of the service review shows that, libraries in Wiltshire attain high levels of customer satisfaction and are valued as places that can be used by anyone. They help people learn new skills, read, access information, get on line and promote a love of books and reading in children

The paper sets a customer focussed vision that will enable libraries to offer the service customers want, whilst contributing to the broader goals of the council and Big Society objectives.

Rationalised opening hours based on a core offer for communities of similar size and ensuring that opening times are focused on periods of highest demand. Traditional services will be underpinned by a high quality online library service, accessible from home as well as libraries, and making use of Web 2.0 and social networking to draw in new users, widen access, and put the library service at the heart of working with customers.

There will be wide opportunities for volunteers and communities, to work in partnership with the service to operate smaller libraries, and to extend the core hours of other libraries. The library service already has considerable experience with volunteers and currently works with over 270 across the county, who support the service in a variety of ways, including assisting with the Summer Reading Challenge, and with the home delivery service for housebound residents.

The proposals depend on a new mechanism of delivery in libraries, for which a business case is provided. This would require investment of £546,500 but would then release year on year savings. An ongoing cost of £38,000 will be necessary for maintenance and support of the system and units.

Proposals

1. That Cabinet agree the proposed vision for the service, developed through consultation with users and non-users, including key groups.
2. That Cabinet approve the bid for capital investment in Radio Frequency Identification (R.F.I.D) technology, subject to the Council's capital programme setting process through the Capital Assets Committee. The council would then be in a position to provide:
 - 21 council operated libraries
 - 5 mobiles libraries including a special service mobile
 - 10 libraries operated in partnership with local communities – providing opportunities for volunteers
 - Opportunities for volunteers to extend the opening hours available at many local libraries, and for the library service to make best use of staff to keep libraries open for core/streamlined hours

Reasons for Proposal

- Maintain a professional, countywide, library service as defined in the Public Libraries Act 1964, and through the library review work with Wiltshire residents
- Involve communities in extending library service opportunities
- Improve efficiencies within the service, to achieve the required savings level of £505,000 within 2 years. This is part of the overall Comprehensive Spending Review savings requirement of 28.4%
- Reduction in staffing costs, without affecting service levels
- Place the library at the heart of the community and as the local face of the Council

Sue Redmond
Corporate Director of Community Services

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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1. Purpose of Report

This report proposes a positive vision and strategy for the library service in Wiltshire, based on wide ranging consultation with residents. It would enable Wiltshire Council to provide a professional, comprehensive library service, using funding efficiently, keeping customer satisfaction levels high, and yet reduce operating costs by £505,000 (£337,000 in 2011_12, and £168,000 in 2012_13). This is part of the Comprehensive Spending Review savings requirement of 28.4%.

2. Background

Work on a whole systems review of the library service began in December 2009. The aim of the review was to ensure that the service was correctly focused to meet customer needs.

Consultation completed with the public -

Focus groups:

These included participants from a wide range of age, abilities, ethnicity, gender and localities.

The information gathered from the focus groups have provided current, accurate information collected directly from participants, based on the existing situation, and what their priorities might be. In some cases participants were not already library users.

The main findings are summarised in Appendix 1. The key themes were:

1. Professional staff are viewed as key to a libraries' success.
2. Refreshments and washroom facilities should be provided.
3. Core opening hours across the county were often suggested.
4. Libraries to be the 'face of the council', with access to other services provided.

Area Boards:

All 18 area boards were visited, by a combination of the Service Director and members of the Senior Library team, and informed that a Library Review was taking place. Each meeting was given the opportunity to contribute to the vision, by listing their top 5 priorities for a future service.

The responses from the Area Boards are attached [Appendix 2 and Appendix 3]
Examples of responses include:

1. Continued investment in the book stock is viewed as essential.
2. The library should provide a wide range of information, particularly local.
3. Investment in technology is required, including free access to the internet.
4. Events and activities to be organised around reading and literacy improvements, for children and adults.

Comments and views received online:

Information concerning the review, and the response card proforma, was also available on the Wiltshire Council web site. Responses are included within the information contained in Appendix 2.

Comments:

Discussions with individuals and customer groups indicate that people felt that:

“A library is a place which provides space both for reading and work. The environment should be attractive, welcoming, clean, modern, bright, safe, and comfortable. The library should reflect all that is currently being published, and the best of what was published in the past” – Points raised at a discussion following the Chippenham Area Board presentation.

“By providing a sense of its locality and its history, a library should play a central role in the local community. It should be open for as long as it is safe and cost effective to do so” – Comments received following the library review presentation at the Pewsey Area Board

“Library staff are knowledgeable, approachable, friendly and interested” – Library user focus group

“Customers of a library should be able to find what they seek, either by asking staff, or by researching catalogues and other databases on-line. Personal computers should be available - both for research and for people engaged in their own work. The library should embrace all aspects of technology” – Ethnic minority focus group

“The library should go out of its way to cater for the very young, both in the selection of material and in the help and encouragement to find books of which younger readers may not know” – Pre-school focus group

“All libraries should provide active help for anyone with a disability. They should find those who may in any way feel excluded from the service, and they should play an active role in their local community by responding to all the various needs of local people, including those with a disability”. – Learning Disabilities focus group

“Libraries would be improved if the funds they have are used efficiently. People should be able to gain access to national collections and book suppliers, and to other information databases such as property management, and to others such as those held in the national library.” – Older persons focus group

National Context

The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 sets out the statutory duty for all local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service set in the context of local needs: that is, specifically of those who live, work and study in the local area.

The Wirral enquiry in 2009 determined that the ‘comprehensive and efficient service’ that local authorities are required to provide is a balance between meeting local needs using available resources in a way that is appropriate to the needs of the community

The library service in Wiltshire

The county currently has 31 branch libraries covering every major Wiltshire town, and its fleet of 5 mobile libraries provides a service to over 280 other communities and 120 residential homes for both elderly and sheltered housing providers.

As well as books, the library service offers CDs, DVDs and talking books for hire, and all static libraries provide free public access to the internet and office software.

The service also provides access to online services, a range of items in alternative formats for the visually impaired and with learning disabilities, a home delivery service for housebound residents, and supports greater involvement with reading and literacy through an offer to local reading groups, and its programme of rhyme-times and events. [Appendix 4]

Wiltshire Council has continued to invest in the library service, recently opening a new library in Pewsey, the first with personal care facilities. In addition, development of the new library for Trowbridge, as part of the remodelled county hall, is currently underway.

Statistical analysis shows that Wiltshire Libraries enjoy high levels of customer satisfaction. According to the CIPFA Plus survey in 2009, 98% of the 8,205 survey respondents found the standard of customer care to be good or very good, this equates to 216,007 of the total library membership of 220,416. This

puts us in first place amongst our comparator authorities. Visitor numbers are also holding up, against a national trend. 48% of the population in Wiltshire are library members and this combined with its wide network of service points places it in a strong position to act as the 'face of the council'.

3. Main Considerations for the Council

The consultation work carried out as part of the service review indicates that in Wiltshire, libraries are valued as places that can be used by anyone without judgement. They help people learn new skills, read, access information, get on line and promote a love of books and reading in children.

The strategic vision for libraries:

- Promote the library service as the 'face of council'; an alternate, safe, environment where customers of the council can interact with its officers.
- Provide a wide-ranging and up to date stock of books and other materials to support reading and literacy, learning, and enjoyment.
- A strong online service offer comprising access to online information and reference services, interactive website features (Web 2.0) and social networking and downloadable E books.
- Offer space and opportunities for people to develop new skills, including getting online for the first time.
- Retain focus on excellent core library services, to deliver high customer satisfaction levels.
- The library to be part of a campus vision where appropriate - Providing a modern and welcoming building, promoting the library as key to the wider community's and council's activities. Two campuses' currently being discussed as suitable sites are at Melksham and Corsham.
- Help to deliver the 'Big Society' agenda, with greater community involvement, through the use of local community volunteers. The library service already has considerable experience with volunteers, and currently works with over 270 volunteers who support the service in a variety of ways, including assisting with the Summer Reading Challenge, and with the home delivery service for housebound residents.
- Increased automation through the use of Radio Frequency Identification (R.F.I.D.) self service units, thereby releasing staff time to improve customer interaction.
- The development of locality teams, supported by expert library professionals, delivering a first class library service.
- Rationalise core library opening hours, equalised by the size and customer use level and focused on periods of highest demand of each building [Appendix 5].

- Increase collaborative ways of working, and sharing services, across the council and its partners. And collaborative working with neighbouring authorities.
- Continue to review the mobile library service provision, to deliver the best possible service to rural areas, and to those who cannot access a library building.
- Investigate means of income generation with outside agencies.
- Work with local people to ensure that libraries are the community based centres of the future, accessible to all its customers, and which provides a wide range of services for all.

To achieve the vision, make the savings required and open up a wide range of opportunities for volunteers and communities to extend provision from a standard set of hours, requires the introduction of self service using RFID technology, the set up costs of which are outlined below. Ongoing maintenance and servicing costs totalling £38,000 will also be necessary.

As a consequence of the investment in R.F.I.D. technology, Wiltshire Council would be in a position to provide:

- 21 council operated libraries – accounting for 97% of current physical visits [Appendix 6]
- 5 mobiles libraries including a special service mobile
- 10 libraries operated in partnership with local communities with funding provided by Wiltshire Council for buildings, stock, ICT and support and training – providing opportunities for volunteers. Wiltshire council will maintain ownership of the buildings, services and management systems, and will work in partnership with community organisations such as Parish Councils to operate the service with community volunteers.
- Opportunities for volunteers to extend the opening hours available at many local libraries, and for the library service to make best use of staff to keep libraries open for core/streamlined hours
- 12% budget savings of £505K achievable in 2 years, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- Increased opportunities for financial transactions between the Council and its customers
- The library service intends to start work with communities and GROW in March 2011 by enhancing Community Support on volunteering projects. GROW is a Community Voluntary Service organisation who, as well as offering support services to local charities, provide a volunteer centre service for Wiltshire. The centre helps anyone who is looking for a volunteering opportunity as well as helping charities with advertising their volunteer roles

and offering good practice advice. Anyone interested in volunteering for the library service can contact:

Wiltshire Library Service:

Tel. no. 01225 713706 web: www.wiltshire.gov.uk

GROW:

Tel. no. 01249 654089 web: www.developecs.ning.com

- In the event of communities being unable to take up the opportunity of operating a library, the mobile service provision could be provided from within the existing service. The mobile service would ensure that all sections of the community would be catered for, including where appropriate, use of the Home Services mobile vehicle which delivers books to residential care homes. The mobile service would provide a 3 hour stop per week, at each site unable to sustain a community operated library.
- Data for the 10 smallest libraries in Wiltshire is listed in Appendix 7
- A location map for libraries which will be operated in partnership with local communities can be viewed in Appendix 8
- The proposals for Wiltshire libraries service compare well with the proposals of neighbouring library authorities of similar size, all of which are also facing significant budget reductions.
 - Somerset propose withdrawing funding from 20 of its 34 libraries, including 6 medium sized market town libraries and reducing their fleet of mobile libraries from 6 to 2 vehicles. The 14 remaining libraries account for 80% of Somerset's library visits.
 - Gloucestershire's proposals are to reduce the county network of 38 static libraries to 9 hub libraries open 6 days a week, with only Cheltenham and Gloucester central libraries offering some late opening till 7pm and Saturday afternoons, 11 express libraries open 3 days a week and Saturday mornings. In addition there will be 7 link libraries in shared premises operating largely on a self service basis with a short period of staffing. The remaining 11 will not be funded; communities will be offered the building on an asset transfer basis and will have the option to buy in library service support and stock. The mobile library service currently operated through 5 vehicles will end. The remaining service points account for 70% of the current library visit per annum.
 - Dorset's proposals are to continue to provide services from 14 main town libraries and to consult with up to 20 communities where there are currently library buildings on a standard offer of other ways of securing access to library services such as the provision of a mobile library service. This proposal may mean that county funding for up to 20 communities will cease and result in the closure of the building.

4. Environmental and climate change considerations

- Retaining the current network of library service points will avoid customers having to travel further than at present, to access library services.
- With the community operating 10 libraries, there would not be the requirement to increase the mobile fleet, with the associated increase in vehicular activities and pollution, in order to access these rural areas.
- Whilst the proposals outlined in this report should not result in a significant change to the carbon footprint of the Library Service, continued efforts should be made to become more energy efficient. This will help the service to reduce the amount of money that it spends on energy, an issue that is becoming increasingly important with the rising cost of energy sources. To achieve this, the Library Service will continue to work with the Council's Climate Change Team to identify "invest to save", energy efficiency projects.
- Libraries will continue to be locations where residents can access the internet. This, coupled with the fact that residents will be able to access virtual services from their homes, requires reliable broadband provision, at a suitable speed. To ensure that adequate broadband provision is available throughout the County, officers from Library Services should continue to assist in the development of a business case to improve broadband provision in the County.

5. Equalities Impact of the Proposal

a) Service specific implications:

- A successful bid will help to ensure that the library service continues to offer the same geographical coverage.
- Rural communities will continue to have access to a service.
- Increased participation in localism, and the empowerment of rural communities.
- An increasing role for the voluntary sector and local community inclusion.
- Possibility of an increase to existing opening hours within the service by involvement of the voluntary sector.

b) Customer access issues:

Mobility:

- R.F.I.D. units must be accessible for wheelchair users.

Visually impaired:

- R.F.I.D. units may not be easily operated by this group. Staff will be available to assist in the manual 'loan and returns' procedure.

Older and disabled people:

- Assistance / training in the use of R.F.I.D. units may be required to include this group of users.
- c) Staff:
- Possible redundancies if there are insufficient redeployment positions.
 - Loss of positions within the service will predominantly have adverse affects on female staff, as the current workforce composition at that level is largely female.

6. Risk Assessment

- Adverse public reaction to volunteer operated services, if the service levels become unacceptable to local communities through the lack of volunteers

Action – Close the library building and incorporate into the mobile service

- Investment proposal is rejected by cabinet

Action – Efficiency savings can be achieved by the closure of further library buildings

- Union objects to the proposed changes in the workforce

Action – Unions have been engaged and continue to be consulted.

7. Financial Implications

To deliver the vision as outlined in the paper will require capital investment in R.F.I.D Technology of £546,500 in 2011/12. This will be subject to approval through the capital budget setting process through the Capital Assets Committee. The borrowing required to fund this capital investment will require funding from the revenue budget and will be considered as part of the overall capital budget setting process. An ongoing cost of £38,000 will be necessary for maintenance and support of the system and units.

The above capital investment is also required to deliver the efficiency savings identified for the libraries service of £0.505m during 2011/12 and 2012/13. Assuming this level of saving, the payback period for the above capital investment is circa 1.5 years, after which the savings will be annual recurring savings.

8. Legal Implications

- The strategy for the delivery of library services from 2011 is reliant on engagement by community organisations on a voluntary basis. The Council's legal department will be supporting the Library Service in achieving its vision by ensuring that engagement with community organisations complies with the Partnership Protocol and the Contract Regulations within the Council's constitution.

- The use of volunteers by community organisations is not without risk from an employment law perspective. However, provided that there is a clear boundary between the works that core paid staff are required to perform and the activities undertaken by volunteers the risk to the Council is minimal and the Council's legal department will be providing further support and guidance to minimise any risk to the Council.
- Possible governance issues with community managed libraries

9. Options Considered

- Closure of library buildings:
 - Not in line with Council objectives for local and easily accessible services
 - Would be against strong community support for the library service
- Replacement of some smaller library buildings with a mobile service:
 - This option could be considered as a replacement service for a building closure, where the local community does not wish to participate in the operation of a building.

10. Conclusions –

Cabinet is invited:

- to support the vision for the future library service in Wiltshire outlined in this paper.
- to support the bid for investment in RFID service units

Support for these will preserve a professionally operated and comprehensive library service, allowing the cost savings to be achieved, with minimal disruption to the existing customer service levels, and increases the inclusion of local communities.

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Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices

1. Customer focus group summary
 2. Area Board responses summary
 3. Area Board response themes
 4. Current service offer
 5. Opening hours
 6. Proposed library network
 7. Community libraries status
 8. Level 2 libraries location map
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