

TITLE OF REPORT: **Health and Wellbeing Group Review – Library Service**

REPORT OF: **Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health**

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval from Cabinet to commence a public consultation on proposals to change the way that some Library buildings in Gateshead are run and managed

Background

2. In February 2021, the Public Health and Wellbeing (PHWB) Group commenced a review of its services to ensure their support in delivering the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Also, in February 2021, Council agreed its budget for 2021/22, which included a £1.2million saving to be identified within the PHWB Group.
3. The inequalities faced by many families and individuals in Gateshead have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. To help meet this challenge, the PHWB Group is reviewing its services. The aim is to develop a health and wellbeing offer which improves opportunities for all and helps to maximise the wellbeing of our residents. This will require a significant change of approach so that community need, and improved equity are the main focus. This approach will support the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the Council's Vision of making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives.
4. The review covers leisure services and the statutory library services run by Gateshead Council and will develop a health and wellbeing offer that ensures equity of access and opportunity.
5. Public libraries remain a statutory service required by the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. This legislation requires a comprehensive and efficient service to meet the needs of the local population. The requirements are broad and do not specify how the service should be delivered.
6. The Library review, as part of the wider PHWB review, has highlighted that there is a need to continue to support local library services but that the existing library service model is not reaching enough residents, and services can be further developed for those most in need.
7. The statutory duty to provide a library service remains, but there has been recognition as part of judicial reviews that the service provided by Councils can be changed as a result of severe budgetary pressures. The key challenge is to ensure that service changes are reasonable and do not disproportionately impact on a specific group of residents, especially those protected by equalities legislation. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will be kept fully informed of the proposed changes.

Proposal

8. Cabinet is asked to endorse the proposal to carry out a public consultation on changing five council buildings, from which library services are delivered, into VCS managed community spaces which include library services as part of their offer. Further details are set out in appendix 1.

The Library buildings/service that will be affected are:

- Chopwell
- Crawcrook
- Leam Lane
- Pelaw
- Wrekenton

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- i. Approves a 12-week public consultation on changing five council library buildings into VCS run “community spaces” from which a library service will be provided.
 - ii. Receives a further report following analysis of the results of the public consultation to agree the next steps of the Library Review.
 - iii. Notes the Integrated Impact Assessment and Gateshead Libraries Needs Assessment as set out in appendices 2 and 3.

For the following reason:

To implement a 3-month public consultation on library services, which will be required due to the statutory nature of these services and will contribute to the understanding of future library service delivery models

CONTACT: Andy Graham

extension: 3066

Policy Context

1. In February 2021 Cabinet accepted a budget report for 2021/22, in which the PHWB Group was required to identify a £1.2million saving. This report provides an update on progress of the PHWB service review in respect of Libraries. The proposal supports Thrive Pledges and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy objectives.

Background

2. The inequalities faced by many families and individuals in Gateshead have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. To help meet this challenge, the PHWB Group is reviewing its services. The aim is to develop an offer which helps our residents to be as well as they can be. This will require a different approach which helps to ensure equity of opportunity and access. It also will support the implementation of the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the Council's Vision of making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives.
3. The current operating models need to change to focus more on communities' needs and to make the £1.2m saving required. The review covers all leisure services and the statutory library services run by Gateshead Council and will develop an offer that ensures equity of access and opportunity.
4. The service review began in February 2021, following agreement of the budget saving for PHWB offer by Cabinet, and there have been detailed discussions with Cabinet members and service leads over the last few months.
5. The library, arts and heritage service are developing a new model of operation that puts a greater emphasis on 'locality working', in the context of delivering the broad outcomes, and specific targets, of the Health and Well-being strategy, to 'help everyone be as well as they can be'.
6. A Libraries Needs Assessment has been carried out, this pulls together a range of information about the population, library usage, and benchmarking data. A Gateshead Libraries Needs Assessment has been developed. Both this and the Integrated Impact Assessment (appendix 2) will be further informed by the planned public consultation subject to approval of this report.
7. We are proposing that in the future some council library buildings will be transformed into "community spaces". A community space is a public space that brings council services, community agencies and neighbourhood groups together to offer a range of activities, programmes and services to meet the needs of local residents. The idea of a library offer being part of a community space alongside other services is not a new one. It aims to increase footfall in the building by offering a wider range of activities for local people.
8. Community spaces have an important social function bringing people together from a cross section of the community, addressing isolation, and being a safe

space where anyone is welcome. Libraries are well placed to play a role as community spaces because of their existing position of trust within local communities, the contribution they make across a range of agendas, and their ethos of partnership working.

9. In future, the arrangement of library and other services will vary from place to place and will be driven by local circumstances – success rests on reflecting and responding to local need so every community space will be different.
10. Our vision is that some of our library buildings, currently operated by Gateshead Council, will in the future be managed day-to-day by a partner Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisation. We will also continue to operate some of the library buildings directly, which will be managed and staffed by Gateshead library service.
11. Our library staff in the future will work from both council-run libraries and VCS managed community spaces, as well as delivering more library services out in the community from non-traditional library facilities.
12. We anticipate that involvement of VCS partners in a collaborative approach will allow their expertise and specialisms to expand the offer in the managed community spaces to better involve communities and to meet local need.
13. Transforming some of our libraries in this way will help us to sustain access to library resources and facilities in the long term. It will ensure that buildings are maintained as community spaces. There is no at-risk process for staff planned at this stage.

Consultation

14. A Wellbeing Survey was conducted in February 2021 to gain an understanding of health and wellbeing needs in Gateshead. The information from this survey has informed the Libraries Needs Assessment (Appendix 3).
15. Cabinet members have been consulted
16. Unions have been consulted
17. A 12-week public consultation will launch if Cabinet agree this proposal and a full Communications plan will be developed as part of this work.

Alternative Options

18. The review is considering options to deliver savings in a timely manner which will be presented to Cabinet in a future paper. A 3-year transformation plan will also be developed.

The only alternative which could deliver these savings immediately would be through the closure of buildings and release of staff.

Implications of Recommended Option

19. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that there are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. Any financial implications will be brought to Cabinet at a later date if necessary.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no direct human resources consequences resulting from this report.
- c) **Property Implications** - There are no direct property issues resulting from this report.

20. Risk Management Implication -

There are no risk management implications resulting directly from this report. A future report will detail, if necessary, options for further service review and the risk of non-compliance with statutory duties.

21. Equality and Diversity Implications -

There is evidence from previous reviews that the library service is heavily used by specific protected groups, including young people, older residents and residents with disabilities, however the change in building use, involving wider community partners has the potential to have a positive impact on equality and diversity. An Integrated impact assessment for this proposal is submitted with this report and will be revised following the results of the planned public consultation which will help us to define and understand any potential impact on service users with protected characteristics.

22. Crime and Disorder Implications –

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

23. Health Implications –

The library service contributes to well-being. The proposed model has the potential to develop new positive health outcomes to be delivered the community spaces

24. Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications -

There are no climate emergency or sustainability implications arising from this report

25. Human Rights Implications -

There are no human rights implications arising from this report

26. Ward Implications -

The views of the public and local councillors will be a part of the consultation process and will be detailed to Cabinet in a subsequent report.

The Library buildings / services that are affected are:

- Chopwell

- Crawcrook
- Leam Lane
- Pelaw
- Wrekenton

Ward councillors will be consulted, and public meetings held in the associated buildings as a part of the public consultation process.

Appendix 2.

Library Service Review – Integrated Impact Assessment (see separate document)

Appendix 3.

Gateshead Libraries Needs Assessment (see separate document)