

TITLE OF REPORT: Public Health and Wellbeing Group Review – Library update**REPORT OF: Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health**

Purpose of the Report

1. To update on the public consultation on Library buildings in Gateshead and explore the options for the future of library services.

Background

2. 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.
3. 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 the Equality Act 2010.
4. A Libraries Needs Assessment has been carried out, this pulls together a range of information about the population, library usage, and benchmarking data. The Library review, as part of the wider Public Health and Wellbeing 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.

Proposal

5. The public consultation undertaken in November 2021 specifically considered changing 5 council buildings, from which library services are delivered, into VCS managed community spaces which would include library services as part of their offer.
6. After consultation with the staff and public about the role of libraries we are proposing that the 5 council library buildings consulted on (Leam Lane, Wrekenton, Pelaw, Chopwell and Crawcrook) will at this time remain under council management. The library offer in the buildings will not vary significantly from the current offer but the buildings use as a “community space” will be increased.
7. Community spaces have an important social function of bringing people together, addressing isolation, and being a safe space where anyone is welcome. Libraries

are already 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.

8. In the future the arrangement of library and other services within council buildings 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.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that Cabinet
 - (i) Approves the continued use of the 5 Council Library buildings as currently configured.
 - (ii) Approves the transformation of the services within those buildings to support the Councils emerging locality approach.

For the following reasons:

- i. To enable officers to make changes within Library Services to align the service offer with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- ii. To conclude the public consultation process on library services.

Policy Context

1. In February 2021 Cabinet accepted a budget report for 2021/22, in which the Public Health and Wellbeing (PHW) Group was required to identify a £1.2million saving. This report provides an update on progress of the PHW service review in respect of Libraries.

Background

2. The service review began in February 2021, following agreement of the budget saving for PHW offer by Cabinet, and there have been detailed discussions with Cabinet members and service leads over the last few months.
3. The library and heritage service is 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 Gateshead Health and Well-being strategy, to 'help everyone be as well as they can be'.

Consultation

4. The Library consultation ran from Monday 15th November 2021 to Friday 4th February 2022 and information was collected across a range of sources.
 - The Council digital consultation platform received 1226 submissions
 - Consultation meetings were held with ward councillors
 - 20 focus group sessions were held with 152 local people
 - A series of open drop-in sessions were held in libraries to take customer feedback
 - Library staff across all statutory libraries were consulted
 - Volunteers and organisations involved in the Gateshead volunteer libraries were invited to contribute.
5. The wide-ranging response to the public consultation demonstrated the depth of feeling from Library users about how important Libraries are to them. Much of the service delivered in local libraries is valued and the residents who responded to the consultation would like it to continue.
6. There was a recognition from most respondents that there is a need to change the way that some library buildings are run, to increase use and in doing so try to ensure that the buildings remain a useful and viable asset in communities. The full consultation return can be accessed at [Gateshead Council - Gateshead Library Service Consultation 2021](#)
7. The Cabinet Members for Culture, Sport and Leisure have been consulted and support the proposals.

Alternative Options

8. Building closures could deliver savings through staff redundancy. This option would reduce the number of buildings and staff available for locality working.

Implications of Recommended Option

9. 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** – The Strategic Director of Corporate Services and Governance advises that there are no direct human resources consequences resulting from this report.
- c) **Property Implications** - The Strategic Director of Corporate Services and Governance advises that there are no direct property issues resulting from this report.

10. Risk Management Implication -

There are no risk management implications resulting directly from this report.

11. 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. The initial assessment has been revised following the results of the previous public consultation which helped us to define and understand any potential impact on library service users with protected characteristics.

12. Crime and Disorder Implications –

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

13. 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

14. Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications -

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

15. Human Rights Implications -

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

16. Ward Implications

The views of the public and local councillors have been a part of the consultation process. There are no ward implications.

Appendix 2

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