

Local Members' Interest
N/A

**Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee
Thursday, 19th December, 2013 10.00 am**

Achieving Excellence - Libraries in a Connected Staffordshire

Recommendation

1. To discuss the proposals to adapt and reposition Staffordshire's library offer

Report of Michael Lawrence Cabinet Member for Communities & Localism

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

To discuss the proposals to adapt and reposition Staffordshire's library offer in order to make a more effective contribution to the lives of local residents based on how we live today, it is part of our wider vision that the people of Staffordshire will:

- Be able to access more jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth
- Be healthier and more independent
- Feel safer, happier and more supported by their communities

The library service welcomes comments from the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee which will be reported to Cabinet at their meeting on 15th January 2014 for them to take into account in their consideration of this proposal.

Report

Background

Under Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964, public library services are a statutory duty for local authorities who are required to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service. To comply with the act local authorities must:

- Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons in the area that want to make use of it (section 7)
- Promote the service (section 7(2)(b))
- Lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area (section 8(3)(b))

The Government superintends councils' role and has a duty to:

- Oversee and promote the public library service (section 1(1))
- Take action where a local authority fails to perform its duties (section 10)

This role is currently undertaken by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Secretary of State of the DCMS is Maria Miller. The Minister responsible for libraries is Ed Vaizey.

Staffordshire Libraries

Traditionally the library service has been a building based service – across Staffordshire there are 43 library buildings, 6 mobile libraries, 2 travelling libraries, 7 prison based libraries plus a Schools Library Service, and importantly a developing virtual library experience which enhances the traditional offer.

In 2012/13 Staffordshire libraries were open 1,087 hours per week and there were 4 million visits. During the last week 80,000 people across Staffordshire chose to visit a library (10% of the population).

Within Staffordshire County Council the library service currently works in partnership with Public Health, Adult and Community Learning, Economic Development and Transport and the Connected County to support the delivery of key economic / health and well being outcomes for communities.

Current Position

The way in which people access information and reading has changed enormously and libraries have evolved to meet these challenges.

We believe that a library continues to be a safe, trusted gateway to knowledge, culture and information which is curated, trustworthy and neutral.

It is a flexible, community space (physical or virtual) and whilst all libraries do share a common purpose, in enabling individuals and communities to access, explore and enjoy reading, knowledge and learning; their role and function should reflect and be shaped by the community which engages with them – so some do become a focus for arts activity, community memory or community narrative. Others for example support local businesses and entrepreneurial activity.

It is anticipated that within a library of the future that there will be greater emphasis on virtual resources and current levels of use suggest that there will be less need for physical resources and therefore the curation and points of access should become greater. With more co-location and co-production of services libraries will need to be even more closely attuned to the needs and aspirations of communities and the community should also have a voice in the management, development and delivery of their local service.

These assumptions were supported by the publication in May 2013 of Arts Council England's (ACE) report '**Envisioning the Library of the Future**' (see background documents)

Key Considerations

Within Staffordshire it is recognised that community need is changing and for many people how they wish to access services is rapidly changing too.

The discussion of the library offer has been placed within the wider context of national research and also what Staffordshire communities are telling SCC that they want / expect in terms of their personal outcomes. The work has also been informed by recent SCC policy documents which have explored, 'What makes a great place to live' and also the 'Think Piece' workshops which examined cross cutting themes such as technology.

However it is recognised that further insight is required and it is essential that we consult with partners and county council services to map the current Staffordshire Library Offer against the needs and aspirations of our communities.

As part of the consultation we will examine a combination of an online offer, a physical offer at a locality / town level and a physical offer at a community / village level

During consultation the library service will work closely with the Communications and Marketing Team to ensure that internal and external communication processes are effective in ensuring that key stakeholder groups and the wider Staffordshire population is engaged in a two way communication process.

Next Steps

- Internal and external partners will be engaged so that we can map community need / aspiration and expectations
- Current library use will be assessed to understand patterns of use, particularly where these have changed significantly, and then working with local communities we will consider the library offer in these areas / localities
- Recommendations will be made to Cabinet and tested with communities to gain additional information and insight to inform the next stages
- Consultation will be carried out over a 12 week period with support from the Customer Insight Team

Conclusion

During 2014 we will be looking at what the people of Staffordshire want from their libraries and how libraries are used across the county to ensure that Staffordshire's library offer makes an effective contribution to delivering positive outcomes.

Community Impact

A full community impact assessment will be completed for each community / locality where it's identified that library use is changing.

Contact Officer

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Background papers

Arts Council England – Envisioning the Library Service of the Future, May 2013