

**LIBRARIES SERVICE REVIEW: REPORT OF THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

To: Cabinet

Date: 28th September 2010

From: Reece Bowman, Scrutiny & Improvement Officer

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: N/A **Key decision:** No

Purpose: To present the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee's findings following scrutiny of the Libraries Service Review options.

Recommendation: It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet task officers with the further exploration of opportunities for revenue generation within libraries, e.g.:
 - sponsorship
 - third sector partnership
 - consideration of lessons from the private sector
2. Cabinet identify with officers a means to increase the capacity within the Libraries, Archives and Information service for as long as is necessary to deliver successfully the proposed development of the libraries service
3. Officers make full use of the research, advice and support offered by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council offering advice on the future of library services in the long term.
4. Cabinet delay making irreversible decisions, such as library closure, before there has been time for a through review of all of the options. (i.e. the timescales may need to be extended beyond January Cabinet)
5. Local good practice – such as that emerging at Rock Road Library – should be identified and shared with other county libraries

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 On 23rd September 2010 the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the options to be presented to Cabinet, as detailed in the Libraries Service Review. This report presents the Committee's findings.
- 1.2 The Committee extends thanks to the Chief Executive of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and members of Library Friends Groups that attended and contributed to the meeting.

2. FINDINGS

- 2.1 The Committee wish to commend the work undertaken to date on the Libraries Service Review. It is recognised that Libraries play an integral role in Cambridgeshire Communities, and the Committee welcomes the considered exploration of the options that has been presented.
- 2.2 However, the Committee believes that a root and branch review is required, in which the Library Service as a whole is re-imagined. This would involve a fresh look, focusing on services (and in particular the future of digital services) rather than buildings. It would draw upon the latest research, and consider the inter-related aspects of transport, access, rural facilities, local capacity for volunteering and the wider impact on community health and well being.

Revenue generation

- 2.3 The Committee is of the view that the scope of the Libraries Service Review is insufficiently broad – in terms of its approach to the issue of libraries' ongoing financial viability - and neglects to consider a wider array of options that could generate revenue, rather than just deliver cost savings.
- 2.4 It is recognised that increasing fees, for example, will deliver increased revenue to a small extent, but there appears to have been insufficient exploration of fundamental revenue generating steps that could justifiably be taken in order to preserve services. Such steps could include:
 - The introduction of catering concessions - such as coffee shops - into libraries, similar to what is on offer in some bookshops.
 - Sponsorship of library buildings and books
 - Consideration of options around the loan of E-books, subject to the evaluation of copyright and digital rights management implications
 - Examination of library funding in other countries: an example mentioned by a Committee Member was the use of chargeable wireless internet access (for non-residents), in France
 - The place of libraries as community spaces in the Big Society, contributing to social cohesion as well as working with local businesses and shops to provide sustainable services.
- 2.5 Furthermore, there appears to be no evidence in the Libraries Service Review report to suggest that there has been thorough consideration of any relevant lessons from the private and third sectors, in terms of revenue generation.

Timescales and capacity

- 2.6 The Committee has noted that the timescale for the review is extremely challenging. The report to the January meeting of Cabinet and the subsequent report to February Council leave little time for greater consideration of this very important matter. The Libraries, Archives and Information service is currently under capacity; the Committee is concerned that this will have implications for the review and eventual outcome of it.
- 2.7 As several of the courses of action outlined in the report are not easily reversed, the Committee is of the view that ensuring greater capacity within the service should be a priority of Cabinet. This would allow the development of business cases and further option appraisal to be rigorous, and would increase the likelihood of a successful outcome for Cambridgeshire.
- 2.8 The Committee were aware of the need for savings to be found urgently, but nevertheless felt that irreversible decisions (such as library closure) should be avoided in the short term. There is a danger of making hasty decisions under current timescales.
- 2.9 The Committee also felt that Officers should make full use of the assistance and expertise offered by the Chief Executive of the Museums Libraries and Archives (MLA) Council in terms of research data, evidence on Library Services' contribution to community health and well-being, the growth and future of digital services, and MLA's experience of working with other Local Authorities which were also considering joint working.

General comments

- 2.10 When assessing the viability of individual libraries, there is a need to look at the whole community around them, including community members' ability to access services, the relative need in the area, and the broader positive impact delivered by the library; for example, in terms of social cohesion and the local economy.
- 2.11 The Committee were of the view that the decision to charge over 60s customers for audio books should be reviewed in terms of numbers affected, revenue generated and impact upon vulnerable members of this socio-demographic group. The Committee also considered whether charging should be increased for the general population to enable audio book loans for the over 60s to remain free of charge.
- 2.12 The consultation questionnaire didn't ask people their views on alternatives to their current library provision. For example, views around the establishment of a Library Access Point or access to mobile libraries, as alternatives, were not elicited. This is a shortfall in the methodology which has meant that service user views on possible alternatives have not been investigated. Future questionnaires could usefully address this.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet task officers with the further exploration of opportunities for revenue generation within libraries, e.g:
 - sponsorship

- third sector partnership
- consideration of lessons from the private sector

2. Cabinet identify with officers a means to increase the capacity within the Libraries, Archives and Information service for as long as is necessary to deliver successfully the proposed development of the libraries service.

3. Officers make full use of the research, advice and support offered by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council offering advice on the future of library services in the long term.

4. Cabinet delay making irreversible decisions, such as library closure, until there has been time for a through review of all of the options. (i.e. the timescales may need to be extended beyond January Cabinet).

5. Local good practice – such as that emerging at Rock Road Library – should be identified and shared with other county libraries

4. STATUTORY DUTIES & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Some

5. CLIMATE CHANGE

None

6. ACCESS & INCLUSION

None

7. ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

Some