

LIBRARY SERVICE TRANSFORMATION: RESULTS OF INITIAL CONSULTATION

To: **Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee**

Meeting Date: **2 June 2015**

From: **Graham Hughes, Executive Director: Economy, Transport and Environment**

Electoral division(s): **All**

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

Purpose: **The Committee is asked to consider the results of initial public and stakeholder consultation on the draft strategy 'Library Services in Cambridgeshire: developing our approach for the future'.**

Recommendation: **The Committee is asked to note the results of the consultation.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Following Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee's (H&CI) endorsement of the Library Service's strategy document *Library Services in Cambridgeshire: Developing our Approach for the future* on 20 January 2015 for initial stakeholder and public engagement, a two month engagement and consultation period commenced on 2nd March 2015.
- 1.2 The purpose of this was to establish whether there is general agreement that the identified priorities and approaches are the right ones, or whether there are any alternative approaches that stakeholders think should be considered. The four themes of the strategy are:
 - Building community resilience
 - Enabling more than delivering
 - Maximising the use of our assets
 - Supporting the "Digital First" agenda
- 1.3 It was recognised that the draft strategy outlines a broad approach to the future in line with current thinking about the Council's future operating model, rather than providing detailed proposals for individual library services at this stage. It was intended that the feedback received would be used to help shape a more detailed set of proposals that will then be subject to further consultation and engagement later in the year. For this reason, there was a focus on engaging with key stakeholder groups and partner organisations, whilst individuals were also invited to respond.
- 1.4 At the General Purposes Committee (GPC) meeting on 14 April 2015, Councillors agreed to refer a decision on proposals for a Central Library Enterprise Centre (CLEC) back to the Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee on 2 June. As proposals for enterprise centres in libraries, starting with Central Library, were referred to in the draft future library service strategy document, it was agreed to use the wider consultation to capture feedback on this specific proposal rather than create a separate consultation. In order to give people more time to respond, the consultation period was extended until 10 May 2015 and additional detailed information provided about the CLEC proposals both online and in Central Library.
- 1.5 This report summarises the findings of *all* the responses to the consultation as a whole. A separate report to this Committee on the CLEC proposals reports on a smaller sub-section of these responses which were primarily concerned with the CLEC proposals.

2. METHODOLOGY

An online survey form was created and added to the Council's web site alongside the draft strategy document. Printed copies of the strategy document and a leaflet summarising the key points were made available in all libraries. Local organisations were contacted encouraging them to complete the survey form and to disseminate the information amongst their networks. A key component of the engagement was meetings with these organisations to discuss in more detail the identified priority areas and how they might work with the Council to develop future plans for library services in their area.

- 2.1 A range of stakeholder groups were contacted to offer a meeting with them during the consultation period, with mixed success. Those conversations that were held (including with the Cambridgeshire Public Service Board, GET Group, Library Friends Groups AGM, District Councils, Citizens Advice Bureau and Women's Institute) proved very helpful, and engagement will continue with stakeholder groups over the summer.
- 2.2 The consultation was promoted in a number of ways including:
- On the Council's web site and via all the Council's social media channels;
 - A number of press releases;
 - Inclusion in the monthly library e-Newsletter that has over 60,000 subscribers
 - Letters to all Parish Councils
 - Poster displayed in all libraries
- 2.3 Limitations on space in the summary leaflet meant that there wasn't the scope to collect as much information from respondents completing the printed library leaflet compared with those completing the online form. This explains why there are sometimes discrepancies in the number of recorded responses in relation to the number of completed forms. By the close of consultation, 638 responses had been received of which 467 had been completed online and 172 by hand. 451 responses completed online were submitted by individuals whilst 15 responses were received by individuals responding on behalf of an organisation. A summary of the comments received have been included to illustrate the points being made. A full list of all the comments received will be published on the Council's web site.
- 2.4 The table below summarises the age distribution of respondents

Age	Responses	Percentage
Under 16	0	0
16-24	0	2.7
25-34	5	9.1
35-44	6	17.7
45-54	9	20.6
55-64	9	20.6
65-74	6	20.8
75 or over	3	6.2
Prefer not to say	1	2.25

56.8% of respondents were female, 39.2% male and 4% preferred not to say.
97.8% of respondents currently use library services.

3. RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY

Below is a summary of the responses to each of the questions in the consultation, together with a sample of the comments received. A full transcription of all comments received will be added to the Council's web site at <http://tinyurl.com/pr4yug5> by the end of May.

Q1: What do you value about the library service?

The table below records the number of times a word or phrase was mentioned in answer to this question, giving a strong indication of what people most value about the service. (Some respondents mentioned more than one service element).

Books	450
Children	114
Free	103
Staff	102
Information	93
Space	91
Community	89
Café	52
Helpful	50
Meet	44
Reference	43
Friendly	38
Study	37
Computers	30
DVDs	27
Cambridgeshire Collection	25
Music	17
Local History / local studies	11
Archives	9

Q2: Do you have any initial comments on this Strategy? For example what are your views on our direction of travel and priorities? Do you think it is deliverable, and what would you change?

Initial comments were mixed. There were a number of comments offering either unqualified or qualified support for the strategy:

- *“All four strategies are valuable aims”*
- *“Given that there has to be a cut in funds for the service, the strategy seems workable”*
- *“I am very familiar with the pressures faced by the public sector today and support the proposals to work more closely with other public sector partners to deliver services actively rather than passively and to try to engage with the community and provide a community space where residents can access a number of benefits, support and information in one location.”*
- *“I think it makes a lot of sense and, as long as you can get the right staff and volunteers, will give a better service where it is needed; one stop shopping in the local community.”*

A number of respondents saw it as an opportunity to improve access to currently under-used buildings:

- *“Please could you ensure that library facilities are available outside working hours”*
- *“Branch libraries are closed half the time. The Central Library is closed after 6. These assets are massively under-utilised”*

There were also a number of comments expressing concern about how the proposals might undermine the traditional role of the library service:

- *“There’s no place in your vision for books. This is the wrong direction. They are fundamental to any library” and “The strategy implies there will be less emphasis on physical books. I love physical books and rarely want to read on screen...”*
- *“Mostly it is a good idea but I am concerned about complete change to digital books, a lot of people myself included prefer paper books and have no means of reading e books so if libraries change to only digital lending it will cut off these people from being able to access the lending service.”*
- *“There’s no identifiable library service in the proposals. The services proposed are either vague (what is ‘community resilience?’), more effectively delivered elsewhere (care service prevention, volunteering), or redundant (community centres already exist). In 5 years’ time these services will be seen as redundant and cut; better to provide a smaller, leaner core library service if the current model is unsustainable.”*
- A number of respondents expressed concern that developing the digital role would be at the expense of books. Some expressed concern at replacing library staff with volunteers and the capacity of the community in some areas to take more on.
- *“I am gravely concerned by the view that communities can be better served by non-professional staff or volunteers, rather than people who have been trained specifically to deliver information services in all their varieties. The sole reason a library is as trusted a brand as a doctor is BECAUSE of its highly qualified, learned staff”*
- *“Strategy is clear regarding needed changes and reasons for those changes. Concern about recruitment of number of volunteers needed and that in some communities they might not have the capacity to respond.”*

Some also questioned how viable the community hub approach would be in smaller communities:

- *“A lot of the strategies are really not applicable to the small village libraries. Their buildings are small and may not suit the hub model.”*
- *“The approach around asset management may work in the main area of the city however it looks to be flawed in the small villages where the building space may not be large enough to provide for any other activities or there is no other suitable collocation locally.”*

Q 3: How far do you agree with direction of travel and future vision of library services proposed in the Strategy?

The table below summarises the responses

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	21	4.5
Agree	108	23.1
Disagree	105	22.5
Strongly disagree	161	34.5
Unsure/ don’t know	72	15.4

Q4: How far do you agree that community resilience should be a priority of our Libraries Strategy?

The table below summarises the responses

	Responses	Percentage
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Strongly agree	68	14.6
Agree	178	38.1
Disagree	72	15.4
Strongly disagree	83	17.8
Unsure/ don't know	66	14.1

There were a number of responses in favour of this priority such as: *“This seems to be a very important part of the role of libraries”*.

However concerns were expressed about how this might impact on the traditional role of libraries: *“In theory great, but at what cost to book lovers?”* and *“Library as community hub and safe place? Yes... as long as the atmosphere and ambience is maintained by the presence of many books and is a quiet place to browse and read”*.

There were a number of comments questioning whether this could be achieved using volunteers without the appropriate training.

- *“Libraries do offer a resource where vulnerable people can go, mix and communicate with other people. Those suffering mental ill health for example find libraries to be the only place where social interaction might happen. Thus lifting the anxiety and depression and increasing their resilience. Staffing libraries with inexperienced volunteers with no or little commitment or understanding to the needs of our most vulnerable is a risky strategy and one which does not support the priority it purports to.”*
- *“Importance that there is core of trained staff to provide advice, guidance and signposting. There is always a danger that people may set up groups or networks to promote a certain viewpoint. Care has to be taken to ensure vulnerable people are not taken advantage of.”*

Q5: How far do you agree that library services can be central to preventative and early help provision which supports the work of many other services, both within the council and in the wider community?

The table below summarises the responses

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	70	15.4
Agree	197	43.3
Disagree	68	14.9
Strongly disagree	56	12.3
Unsure/ don't know	64	14.1

Support for this approach included: *“As the population ages and people live longer, it is vital that we all remain as physically and intellectually independent as possible. Prevention is the name of the game and the library service can offer social, learning and participative opportunities as well as information and support to enable people to make the best choices for them. The service can help combat isolation and offer volunteering roles to those who have lots to give.”*

Others gave qualified support for this proposal but expressed concerns about how it would impact on the traditional library role:

- *“The appeal of using libraries as a source of early help and prevention, is that there is no stigma attached to entering a library. This might well encourage people to come for help if they are made aware that it will be available there.”*
- *“Fine to a point – but how disruptive will this be to the atmosphere of the library?”*

- *“I think we are expecting too much of libraries here. I’m not convinced this is realistic beyond the general assistance around finding information.”*

Some concern was expressed about duplicating the efforts of other organisations:

- *“There is no point in duplicating what is already provided by the voluntary sector e.g. Care Network Community Navigators or the Health & Wellbeing Network. It would be better to signpost to these organisations or show people how to self-refer via the Internet.”*
- *“This is a welcome sentiment and something we are all struggling to achieve, but as with previous comments it must be in tandem with existing provision and not in competition.”*

Concerns were also expressed as to whether staff or volunteers had the necessary skills to deliver the appropriate service especially if moving from information and signposting to more of an advice role:

- *“Library staff and volunteers should have access to appropriate training to support vulnerable people. Important to have access to skilled staff. ‘Advice’ giving is very different from information and signposting.”*
- *“Training staff about other services and things out there does, in itself, sound good but are these the same ‘skilled staff’ that you want to be more ‘generic’? I don’t understand how they can be both. Also again, with fewer of them will they have time to provide such targeted support to people?”*

Q6: How far do you agree that enabling more than delivering should be a priority of our Libraries Strategy?

The table below summarises the responses

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	27	5.8
Agree	108	23.1
Disagree	124	26.6
Strongly disagree	128	27.4
Unsure/ don’t know	80	17.1

Concerns were expressed about community capacity in some areas to respond and to take more on. Comments included:

- *“Works often nicely in strong communities, not so good in struggling ones. Capacity building through knowledgeable staff will be needed”*
- *“This could lead to a ‘post code lottery’ in the delivery of services. The level of delivery will be dependent on the demographic of any one area and may be very low in areas where there is less volunteer resource available.”*
- *“Whilst I think libraries are a vital part of our community, I’m not sure that others in the local area would feel the same. If a library was to be run purely on donations and locally found funding I’m not sure how long it would remain open in the current climate.”*
- *“How will you cope with apathy? What if there are not enough volunteers in a dormitory village? A small community will have as many important different issues as a larger one, but with less people/resources.”*
- *“The idea of using more volunteers is unsound - the pool of volunteers in our communities is shrinking as people live longer and retire later. Where will you find them?”*

Concerns were also expressed about replacing library staff with volunteers:

- *“Does this mean running libraries by volunteers? How will they understand the librarian part of their role? And how can a place consistently rely on volunteers and remain consistent in the long term”*
- *“I do not believe in using volunteers to replace skilled jobs. Volunteers are unable to provide the range of services, knowledge and expertise that good library staff can offer.”*
- *“Volunteers are important but they are not a substitute for a professional library service.”*
- *“This is another step closer to cutting library funding and staff altogether. Are we to rely on volunteers and pop-up shops in empty unviable retail units. What a crying shame.”*

A number of people pointed out that staff would be required to manage the volunteers:

- *“Volunteers provide really valuable skills and resources, but they need to be managed by appropriately skilled and qualified staff. Some communities will be less able to take ownership of their service, and should be disadvantaged as a result.”*
- *“I have seen libraries run entirely by volunteers in another local authority, in my view there needs to be paid management in place to assist, lead, support and train the volunteers. Otherwise the danger is the library deteriorates into a jumble of a library, charity shop and coffee hub (for the volunteers) running disparate self- help groups which disrupt other services (e.g. Internet access). The library I used once, in this other authority, would be very reluctant to use again.”*

Q7: How far do you agree that maximising the use of our assets should be a priority of our Libraries Strategy?

The table below summarises the responses

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	58	12.7
Agree	162	35.6
Disagree	84	18.5
Strongly disagree	90	19.8
Unsure/ don't know	61	13.4

Support for this proposal included comments such as:

- *“Sharing a site with other organisations makes sense”*
- *“Just think of all the people in the city centre who might like to drop by the Central Library after work? They cannot (currently) because you shut down this huge expensive asset and turn away the demand”*
- *“I agree that libraries should co-exist in buildings with other users. I also feel that libraries should hire out their premises more to outside groups such as book groups when the libraries are closed.”*

Some caution was expressed as to how this might work for smaller venues:

- *“I am all for maximising income but scope for sharing is limited in Great Shelford”*
- *“This would seem to work in the larger villages but smaller ones will not have suitable buildings.”*
- *“Where multiple services can be delivered from a library then this has to be supported. However not all libraries will be able to move to the hub model, so*

these should be supported to continue and provide a valuable resource to the community they serve.”

Concerns were also expressed about how this might impact on the traditional role of the library: *“Of course the use of assets should be maximised! The only question is how to do it without detriment to the primary use - the library.”*

Some comments expressed concern about the potential adverse impact of introducing a community hub on existing community facilities:

- *“Community hub is not appropriate for all communities. Some communities have a range of assets in good use already and it is not necessarily right to have a hub to replace them”*
- *“I agree that having a single building to host several services may be a good idea. However i believe this should only be implemented in cities, and certainly not at the expenses of already existing services in smaller towns and villages.”*

Q8: How far do you agree that supporting the digital first agenda should be a priority of our Libraries Strategy?

The table below summarises the responses

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly agree	49	10.5
Agree	174	37.3
Disagree	93	19.9
Strongly disagree	83	17.8
Unsure/ don't know	68	14.6

There was general support for this proposal but concerns were expressed about the danger of developing digital services at the expense of more traditional library services. Concern was also expressed about creating a faceless service and the importance of retaining face-to-face services especially for more vulnerable groups:.

- *“It is important that new technology is available in libraries. People may not want to buy the tablets or own computer technology. It is important that the use of the internet is available for them.”*
- *“A digital first approach is sensible, but it must not be at the cost of bricks and mortar and face to face offering as well for people who require it.”*
- *“A digital first approach has its value but it can be faceless”*
- *“I am all for the increased availability of ebooks etc. but not at the expense of printed books.”*
- *“Very valuable to provide facilities and training for universal online access to services. E-book lending should certainly increase, but should not yet be thought of as a replacement for hard copy.”*
- *“It is a brilliant initiative that goes hand in hand with the development of technology and will satisfy the needs of most people. Nevertheless, it is important not to let it overshadow the needs of elderly, vulnerable people, and children who still require the face to face services.”*
- *“Yes a fine ambition but there should be as much face to face contact as possible. Libraries can provide a much needed social facility. Digital facilities should not replace personal contact.”*

Some concerns were expressed about relying on volunteers who may not have the necessary IT skills themselves to support others: *“Another good idea, but who is going to explain the new technologies to people coming into the libraries? Are you going to rely on volunteers who may not be experts?”*

Q9: Are there any other approaches or issues you feel we should be considering for the future of library services given the financial, social and demographic challenges set out in the strategy?

A number of comments were made recognising the difficult financial situation such as *"I appreciate that resources are tight and this may mean a creative approach to continue to deliver services"*.

A couple of suggestions were made to work more closely with other educational establishments:

- *"Liaise with schools to prevent overlapping services of school and library services"*
- *"For libraries in Cambridge, I think they should form an alliance with Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin, to widen the whole library service of all three institutions to all those who live in Cambridge."*

There were a number of comments suggesting seeking more funding for Libraries from within the County Council and exploring alternative sources of funding such as appointing a fundraising officer:

- *"University college alumni officers."*
- *"Exploring ways in which the library service, the county council and the districts can find additional sources of income to support libraries rather than push the responsibility onto ill-defined 'communities'"*

There was a suggestion to focus more on the mobile library service and larger service points: *"Better to close some libraries and operate a mobile service to outlying areas, while keeping central locations in good shape than trying to keep all libraries open at the cost of cutting back what they can do."*

4. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 This initial consultation on the future direction for the Library Service has yielded mixed results. It is important to note that the feedback was heavily weighted by the intense interest of Central Library users in relation to the Enterprise Centre proposals, and also the very high numbers responding from the Great Shelford area following a public meeting organised by the Friends of the Library.
- 4.2 Whilst the results indicate a significantly higher proportion of people disagreeing with the overall direction: 266 disagreed (57%) 129 agreed (27.6%) this is not replicated in the responses to the individual questions, where a significantly higher proportion agreed rather than disagreed with all the priorities *except* for the 'Enabling rather than Delivering' priority.
- 4.3 Officers will continue to engage with stakeholders throughout the summer, in particular district and parish councils, and will use the consultation results to inform the development of more detailed proposals for the future transformation of the service. It is expected that more detailed proposals will be discussed at the July meeting of Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee, followed by public and stakeholder consultation during July – September, with final proposals to be agreed at the Committee meeting in October as part of the Council's business planning process.

5.0 ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

The draft strategy strengthens the role of the library service in supporting the development of the local economy, in particular through the creation of enterprise centres in libraries, starting with Central Library, Cambridge.

5.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

The draft strategy sets out the role of the library service in helping people to live healthy and independent lives and preventing the need for people to use more expensive care services.

5.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

The draft strategy recognises the valuable role of the library service in supporting and protecting vulnerable people.

6.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Resource Implications

The draft strategy refers to the financial challenge facing the Library Service, which needs to find nearly £2M in savings over the next 3 years.

6.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The Library Service is a statutory service and there is a significant risk of judicial review if the service does not meet its duty to be 'comprehensive and efficient' or does not carry out effective consultation on proposals.

6.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

In line with Council policy, officers have been responsive to requests for alternative formats and the meeting with the GET Group in particular provided access to a number of voluntary organisations. As a result a meeting was held with the Cambridgeshire Deaf Association using an interpreter, and a large print version of the draft strategy document was supplied to the Disability Alliance.

6.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

The report sets out the results of initial consultation and engagement, and recommends further in-depth consultation and consultation once detailed proposals have been developed.

6.5 Public Health Implications

No significant implications have been identified.

6.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

It will be very important for local Members to be involved in the consultation and engagement with local communities on the detailed proposals.

Source Documents	Location
Library services: developing our approach for the future (web page including draft strategy document, consultation summary leaflet, FAQs and links to committee reports)	http://tinyurl.com/pr4yuq5