

Cabinet - 12th September 2007

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Providing A Modern Library Service In Dudley MBC – modernisation programme

Purpose of Report

1. To present a coherent library plan for modernising the Dudley Library Service involving significant investment to deliver an excellent and more flexible service which is more customer focused and meets local aspirations as well as national library standards.
2. To propose amendments to the Capital Programme to undertake refurbishment and improvements to Council libraries across the borough, which will ensure that libraries are a modern asset at the heart of communities.

Background

3. Whilst the Library Service has many strengths it is very traditional, not cost effective and operates too many buildings with most not being fit for purpose and open for too few hours a week.
4. In 1998/1999 a Policy Committee review of libraries took place. Some review conclusions have been progressed e.g. removal of lone working; improvement of the 'Housebound' service; relocation of Sedgley as part of the PFI initiative; and IT initiatives. However, others now need to be addressed through significant re-provision and remodelling of major elements of the overall service.
5. A Peer Review of Dudley's Library Service commissioned by the Museum, Library and Archive Council, took place in October 2005. The review recognised the current strengths in the service including:
 - Staff commitment and motivation
 - High customer and partner satisfaction rates
 - Work with children including Bookstart/ rattle and rhyme
 - Improving book stock and promotion and usage
 - Improved services as a result of the Housebound review
 - Improvements in ICT provision and use

6. However it also highlighted a number of issues that the service needed to address in order to develop a modern and effective service in the future. These were:
 - Use of staff time and resources to develop services
 - Management arrangements to better support and develop services and staff
 - Lack of evidence on how the service performs which could help raise its profile and secure future improvements for service/ stock and buildings.
 - Lack of flexibility to meet the future needs of customers as they change and develop
 - Communication not always working for staff or customers
 - Need for stronger leadership and a clear vision for the service
7. Following the review, a Peer Review Improvement Action Plan was created to carry forward the improvement process and a review of the whole service was carried out. This resulted in the creation of a blueprint – *Providing a modern library service in Dudley MBC – a strategy for the future*. The blueprint was approved by Cabinet in September 2006.
8. The blueprint proposed a new vision for the library service '*Open and accessible to all*'. It also set out ten principles which would result in an excellent, modern library service. These were:
 - Services that are focused on the needs of the community offered through our own sites as well as in partnership with others as appropriate
 - Well trained and competent staff with excellent customer care skills
 - Well trained, competent managers and leaders with the right skills to work with staff and partners to develop the service
 - All staff open to, and actively seeking, innovative ways to improve the services we offer and acting as advocates for the service
 - The right stock in the right place at the right time
 - Bright, light, welcoming, flexible buildings acting as a focus for their community
 - A budget that matches clear service levels and standards
 - A service that knows what we are doing, why and whether we have achieved what we set out to do
 - A pro active service that is valued by partners and stakeholders and regularly asked to participate in, support and lead on projects, and seen as a 'can do' organisation.
 - A service that meets and exceeds standards and expectations that we can all be proud of.

9. The blueprint also sets out ten key areas which would need to be addressed if the principles were to be achieved. The outline implementation plan as referred to in the blueprint, which detailed work has taken place on since September 2006, are as follows:

- The development of alternative ways of accessing the library service, through the e-enablement of services and closer partnership working.
- Review of the provision of library buildings in the light of the condition and location of existing service points in relation to the communities they are intended to serve. The creation of minimum standards of provision and a review of opening hours, with the aim of getting closer to the Public Library Standard.
- Closer alignment of activities and services with Corporate policies to realise potential opportunities of working with partners in the regeneration of the borough and the creation of sustainable communities.
- The development of a clear identity which links the library service with the Council brand.
- Implementation of a more effective performance management regime to ensure that staff, customers and stakeholders are aware of what the library service can deliver and how far it is doing so.
- The development of partnership working to increase the library service's contribution to the priority areas set out in the Community Plan.
- Development and implementation of clear policies relating to the purchase and management of library stock to ensure that funds are used effectively and progress is achieved towards meeting Public Library Standards.
- Review of the layout and use of the town libraries, within a longer term capital programme, to allow them to fulfil their potential to offer a wider range of services.
- Creation of a library service that continues to meet and exceed the expectations and needs of its customers, and which has an effective programme of stakeholder, partner and customer engagement to inform and develop this.

Baseline for the modernisation

10. Currently the library service:

- Meets 7 out of the 10 Public Library Standards. At September 2006 5 out of 10 Library Standards were met. The service has improved on the standards relating to Adult Satisfaction rates and number of items purchased for stock. The next challenge is to meet standards relating to number of opening hours and visits and the length of time taken to replenish stock.

- Has most library buildings in need of modernisation and refurbishment and some which are not fit for purpose.
- Has limited opening hours (see Appendix 1) which are not consistent across the borough e.g. libraries next to each other closed at the same time and no library opens after 5pm on a Wednesday evening.
- Has five underused libraries Amblecote, Dudley Wood, Quarry Bank, Wall Heath and Woodside which between them contribute to less than 6% of library issues and 5% of library visits. (see Appendix 1)
- Uses outdated barcode and computer technology to manage library stock and loans to customers

Modernisation programme

11. Improving Access to Library services through:

- Libraries organised in 5 localities (as shown on the map in Appendix 2) to match the area committee structure, which are more responsive to local communities and link more effectively with other community based services. Each locality to have up to 3 fully staffed libraries with improved opening hours:
 - o open in a pattern that ensures that there is at least one library open in each locality Monday – Friday 9 – 7, Saturday 9 –5 and Sunday.
 - o every library is open at least 2 evenings a week
 - o Provide a full range of services and activities to encourage and support readers; learners and users of computers and information.
 - o Are accessible and large enough to provide space for activities and other groups to use to work with local communities
 - o Have the appropriate range of stock to clear standards which are regularly reviewed and renewed according to customer requirements ensuring the right stock is in the right place at the right time.
 - o ‘Library Links’ in the area of need with 1,500 stock items suitable for the community served and online direct links to the main libraries; with 10 hours library staffing per week; partners/ volunteers to support their use; to act as a base for outreach work with communities to encourage reading, learning and access to information and the fuller library service. The request service will be available through a computer to access the Borough’s stock of ½ million books, DVD’s and CD’s with next day delivery for items available. Library Links may be located in any suitable community resource e.g. community centres, children’s centres or neighbourhood learning centres. In the context of Dudley’s Extra Care Housing Strategy consideration will be given as to whether we can include a library link in priority areas.

- Recognising the contribution of libraries to regeneration initiatives and the advantages of co-location to strengthen links with local communities.
- Embracing and contributing to e-government an e-access to services including 24 hour access.
- Develop an implementation plan over the next five years to introduce Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) systems in libraries to use computer technology to speed up the service for customers, enabling them to serve themselves and releasing staff to support customers who need help and assistance.

Staffing

12. The senior level staffing structure has been implemented with all posts appointed to ensure effective management and leadership of the modernisation programme, authorised by decision sheets signed on the 19th January 2007 and 2nd March 2007.

A staffing structure for the remaining staff is being developed with a more clearly defined career structure including progression routes for Library Staff based on the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) framework of qualifications. It will be made up of:

- an operational team with a flatter, less hierarchical structure that emphasises team working within localities and consistency across the Borough including the creation of five apprentice posts.
- a strategy and development team which will increase the strategic capacity for developing and delivering library services throughout the community and create capacity for developing partnerships and raising the service's profile within the community.

There has been an ongoing programme of consultation with library staff and the Unions on the proposed structures and this will continue throughout implementation. Protocols agreed with the Union will be followed.

Asset management plan for library buildings

13. This report proposes a modernisation programme with a total of £1.935m investment in libraries over a three year period providing light, welcoming, flexible libraries acting as a real focus for their community.

In addition to this £2m Cabinet have already approved £100,000 to undertake feasibility and minor improvements to Dudley's libraries and that a £750,000 bid be made for Big Lottery funding to extend and remodel Kingswinford Library under the Community Libraries Programme which will accommodate more stock, ICT facilities and self issue. It would also have facilitated the provision of a range of community activities in conjunction with the Brierley Hill Community Partnership, including the provision of a Library Link in Pensnett. The

Council learned at the beginning of September that The Big Lottery Bid has been unsuccessful, but will develop alternative bids to progress these plans.

Whilst there has been some recent investment in libraries at Sedgley, Lye and Netherton the Peer Review of libraries and subsequent Action Plan recognised that many other libraries had suffered from a lack of investment over the years. The estimated cost of bringing the Council's libraries at Woodside, Quarry Bank, Dudley Wood and Wall Heath up to a reasonable condition, including meeting Health and Safety standards, has been estimated to cost in excess of £2.6m. The disposal of these sites, is expected to generate funds that will contribute towards the modernisation programme in addition to the external Big Lottery bid and existing approved resources.

In total the £2.035m library modernisation programme provides for:

- Remodelling of Wordsley Green library, which will provide the community with an exemplar library service and buildings during 2008/9 and would also serve Amblecote where the current library is less than a mile away, is underused and not accessible.
- A significant contribution to Brierley Hill regeneration plans, which will enhance momentum through the replacement of the current Brierley Hill library with a new purpose built library in partnership with Stourbridge College. This new joint library, learning resource and performing arts centre is planned to be completed by late 2010.
- The extension of opening hours at Kingswinford, which would also serve Wall Heath.
- Re-provide Quarry Bank, Woodside and Dudley Wood as Library Links in local community facilities ensuring continuity of library provision; and create a new Library Link at Pensnett.
- Undertaking minor improvements and using cyclical maintenance programmes to libraries across the borough to create a stronger, clearer identity for Dudley's libraries.

Minor improvements will be carried out where possible by Building Services Apprentices as part of an innovative, structured training programme. This project will allow the Apprentices to develop core construction skills, providing invaluable experience for local people since this kind of opportunity for construction on non-housing / domestic dwellings does not arise often. Consequently labour costs can be met from within the Apprentices training budget and there will only be a need for the Capital budget to finance materials and plant used.

Customer Service Standards

14. Improving the experience of customers using libraries through:

- Services which are easy to find and use.
- Well trained library staff that support customers effectively and professionally.

- More self service provision to release staff to provide more support for customers in locating the books and finding the information they require.
- Uncluttered modern library layouts including computers; and areas to sit and read, study or meet with friends in a comfortable environment.
- Stock that includes a good range of new and backlist titles.
- An efficient inter library loan service
- Working with Basic Skills and English Spoken as an Other Language (ESOL) partners to support the improvement of literacy levels in the borough.
- Easy access to information and reference facilities supported by informed staff, including information on the local community including local group activities and local history.
- Free access to computers and the Internet including support in using them.
- A flexible service which is able to change to meet the future needs of the community in Dudley.

Performance Management

15. A robust management information and performance system needs to be developed for the library service which will ensure that the modernisation programme achieves excellence and a library service of national acclaim.

Consultation

16. The modernisation programme is on the forward plan for the meeting on the 29th October of the Select Committee on Regeneration and Adult Education.
17. Consultation on the implementation of the modernisation plan will be carried out with library users, partners and stakeholders from October to December 2007. Determination of the location of Library Links will be part of the consultation.

Finance

18. The work has been carried out within the Library budget to date together with additional funding of £50,000 from the Museum, Library and Archive Partnership (MLA) to support the Peer Review Action Plan.
19. £100,000 has been committed from Capital funds for building improvements in 2007-08 as identified in the asset management plan. Further work would be financed from the capital released by the implementation of the asset management plan.

20. The programme will be financed from efficiency savings in operating and staffing costs flowing from the revised structure and the disposal and re-provisioning of libraries that are in need of significant investment. Capital receipts from the disposal of sites at Woodside, Quarry Bank, Dudley Wood and Wall Heath are envisaged to generate £710,000. The revised library structure and reduced operating costs could be used to generate further resources through prudential borrowing for funding capital works.
21. Work to extend opening hours to meet standards can be achieved within existing revenue budgets of £4.6m provided that the modernisation programme is approved in full.

Law

22. Under the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council is a Library Authority with a requirement to provide 'a *comprehensive and efficient library service*' as defined by the setting of Public Library Service Standards. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Partnership (MLAP) set these standards on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). A revised performance management framework for public libraries, drawn up by the Museums, Libraries & Arts Council, is currently out to consultation. A revised performance regime, is expected to be in place for 2008-09.


Equality Impact

23. The service enhancements discussed above will enable Dudley Library Services to improve its current performance in providing services for children and disadvantaged communities in Dudley through the provision of service focussed on geographical communities, and the releasing of staff to better provide for communities with more specific requirements across the borough.
24. The pursuit of the vision and principles set out in this report will result in a library service which addresses the needs of all communities and takes positive steps to encourage use amongst them all.
25. All staff appointments will be made in accordance with agreed council policies and procedures.

Recommendation

26. That Cabinet:
 - Approves the plans for modernising the Dudley Library Service and supports their implementation.
27. That the Council be recommended:
 - That the disposal of the Council's assets identified in paragraph 20 be approved, and that the capital receipts from such disposals be used to contribute towards financing the library modernisation programme; and

- That the additional expenditure for the library modernisation programme be approved, and the Capital Programme be amended accordingly as set out in paragraph 13.



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List of Background Papers

Leisure and Development Committee Paper *Best Value Review of the Library Service – the final report* 9th February 1999
 Cabinet Paper *Providing a Modern Library Service in Dudley MBC – a strategy for the future* 13th September 2006
 Corporate Board Paper *Providing A Modern Library Service In Dudley MBC* 25th April 2006
 Decision Sheet *Dudley Libraries Blueprint for the Future Remodelling of staffing structure* 19th January 2007
 Decision Sheet *Dudley Libraries Blueprint for the Future Remodelling of senior management team structure* 2nd March 2007
 IdeA/MLA *Library Service Peer Review Benchmark* 2005.
 DCLG *Developing the local government services market to support a long term strategy for local government* 2007
 DCLG *Stronger and prosperous communities* 2007
 DCMS *Framework for the Future; Libraries, Learning and Information in the next decade* 2003
 MLA *Community engagement in public libraries: a report on current practice and future developments*
 MLA *A blueprint for excellence* 2007
 MLA *A new libraries performance management framework* 2007