

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

19 JUNE 2014

SUBJECT:	LOCAL COMMUNITY LIBRARY INITIATIVES COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BID PROCEDURE
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF BUSINESS PROCESSES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR CHRISTINE MEADEN
KEY DECISION	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report details the current situation with regard to Wirral's Library network with specific regard to its smaller Community Library sites. The financial pressures facing the authority sees a review of all of its services and with regard to Libraries, a number of other authorities have reduced their library network due to this ongoing loss in funding. To mitigate such impacts on Libraries Councils have the option to engage with local community groups where there is an interest in voluntarily running part or all of a library site which may be preferable to total loss. This report details a method of dealing with this as a community right to run proposal and seeks Cabinet direction for it to be progressed.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 Wirral has a borough wide library network of 24 sites, broadly split into three types. Four main centrals, five sites fully merged with our One Stop Shop service and 15 community based libraries which range in size from the larger Greasby and Bromborough sites to the smallest such as Ridgeway and the unstaffed site at New Ferry. The 15 sites are viewed as Community Libraries, smaller sites than our centrals and not merged with other services. This reflects the national view of the future shape of libraries.

2.2. Wirral's Library strategy was set on 8 December 2011 (minute 219 - Wirral Libraries, A New Chapter). The focus of which is that Libraries should be regarded as both a service and a place. Places would be accessible and welcoming meeting the needs of the local community and as a service focus on providing information, knowledge and reading. To achieve this there were a number of service targets including merging key sites as Library One Stop Shops which is well underway and included re-modelling sites to establish a more open environment.

2.2. The total cost of the combined Library One Stop Shop service is £4.79m in 2014/15. In 2012 the service was given a savings target to achieve of £1.25m savings between 2013 and 2015. This is on course to be achieved

with only £120k for the start of 2015/16 due to be implemented and has been done by merging with one stop shops allowing reduced total staff on site and currently under local consultation is a reduction in opening hours at community libraries. Total opening hours are long in Wirral and there are identifiable quiet periods at many sites. The merging of sites with one stop shops and the inclusion at sites of public service and voluntary sector partners has further enhanced them as natural community / neighbourhood focal points reflecting the authority's focus on neighbourhoods.

- 2.3. There is an ongoing role for Library areas in Health and Advice issues and as a local support for the move towards digital inclusion requirements. This has also seen an increasing role of friends and volunteers with Public Access IT volunteers.
- 2.4. By 2016 overall council funding in excess of 50% will have been lost through government grant reductions in a four year period. The Future Council project is established to help achieve £43m more savings and as all services are reviewed the breadth of the Library network of sites is inevitably under review for potential rationalisation and efficiency.
- 2.5. The expectation of fundamental changes later in 2014 will require a review of our Strategy and associated assessments such as risk, business, health and safety to all be suitably reviewed and agreed. Specifically this would see the Library Strategy reviewed to show how any changes maintain the comprehensive and efficient library service that legislation demands and to show the authority continuing to meet its statutory obligation.
- 2.6. Libraries community role is in offering activities and services such as baby bounce, reading groups and friends and user groups which are now as big a role as that of traditional book lending. Central government, the Local Government Association, the Arts Council and the Society of Chief Librarians all recognise the changing role of libraries and how community libraries will continue to play a role in localities. In the Local Government Association and Arts Council review of Libraries in 2013 they highlighted the need for every library authority to have a positive vision for and a clear statement of public library service based on assessment of local need within available resources which reflects a rounded vision of the whole library service.
- 2.7. Libraries form part of networks and so changes to individual libraries are best viewed from a strategic perspective. The role of communities within the library service should be considered within this strategic and long term framework. In any potential loss of services it is key to look at how the community can support or even replace the current service order to be ready to address any impacts of budget reductions.
- 2.8. Many of our local community groups are aware of the pressure on libraries and have asked how they may help as they appreciate libraries cannot be protected over other services. It is then important the authority agree what officers should do in responding to this community support within the context of the future for libraries.

- 2.9. Local community involvement can offer various benefits including –
- Reduced operating costs to the public sector.
 - Enabling the library to remain open when it might otherwise close or be able to retain opening for longer hours than may be within budget.
 - Community management or involvement bringing renewed energy and innovation to the service, prompting new activities and more flexible use.
 - Increased usage by the local community through an enhanced sense of ownership.
 - Provides valuable experience to the community group and helpful work for volunteers.
- 2.10. Given the likelihood of change it is proposed that officers should engage with all community library sites on a proactive basis that allows us to gauge what can be done and report back to Cabinet and Portfolio Holder. Initially consultation on this could be undertaken locally and relatively quickly as officers have regular meetings with friends and user groups.
- 2.11. This would follow the suggestions of the Arts Council England and Local Government Association to include –
- An open presentation of the financial situation and a formal documented request by the council for help from local communities.
 - The options available including a description and information on Wirral's library services the locality and our needs going forward, the models we would consider and how this would be taken forward.
- 2.12. If any areas were progressed specific public consultation would follow for residents, community groups, local businesses and organisations to work with the council in order to find lower cost ways of delivering sustainable local library services. The Council would also need to hold information meetings to this effect but we are in a strong position due to the previous work over the past two years which has led to a balanced strategic approach with newly merged refurbished facilities in key locations and busy central libraries.
- 2.13. There have been a number of approaches from community organisations to varying degrees in regard local community support and involvement at local Libraries. If these are pursued this will allow the authority to see how this can best positively support the library service going forward. Thus far as an authority we have not formally adopted the principle that we will engage with our local groups to see the level of interest, support and potential costs this may have.
- 2.14. Cabinet is asked to support this local initial engagement and then for officers to report back to be allow decisions to be made on how the authority may wish to progress further specific local community involvement and community right to run proposals.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 If active local community involvement is not engaged and encouraged potential reductions in service may be more than otherwise would be the case within remaining resources and would need to be carefully managed and supported to ensure it is a support to the statutory service or is viewed as extra to that role.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The options are that the service reviews what it can continue to provide within remaining resources and could include reviewing alternative models of delivery.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The consultation undertaken would be local to each site and to local groups.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 Depending on interest and level of commitment this could be considerable but only identified as each area is reviewed.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 7.1 Financial – The total service cost is £4.79m in 2014/15 after previous agreed budget reductions, further savings are to be achieved for 2015/16 of £120,000. Community Involvement has the potential to both help meet savings targets but potentially provide a way of further meeting additional saving targets as Council's overall budgets reduce.

- 7.2. IT – There are none arising directly from this report.

- 7.3. Staffing – Depending on the level of local engagement there is a potential loss of direct control of sites or that volunteers will be present supporting staff. This is already done elsewhere successfully in Library services but is not without significant need to be managed effectively. Initially this impact will only be on a locality level as any community group interest is identified. Local progress in an area would also involve consultation with staff representatives.

- 7.4. Assets – Dependent on the level of local interest this could include the transfer of buildings to a group. Any progress in this would be led by Asset Management.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none arising directly from this report but consequential discussions could lead to legal considerations on local agreements which would be led by the Head of Legal and Member Services.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Equality Impact Assessment is shown at the link below;

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-transformation-res>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising directly from this report but consequential discussions could lead to planning issues on a local area basis.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION

12.1 To allow officers to engage in discussion with local groups with regard degrees of involvement in supporting the running of community libraries and report to Cabinet with findings for decision on how this may be taken forward.

13.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 To allow officer to identify and report on level of community group interest in involvement of supporting library running.

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APPENDIX None

REFERENCE MATERIAL None.

SUBJECT HISTORY

Council Meeting Cabinet	Dates 8 December 2011
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