Leicestershire County Council

ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20 JUNE 2017

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

FUTURE STRATEGY FOR THE DELIVERY OF LIBRARY SERVICES

PROGRESS REPORT ON COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARIES

Purpose of the Report

1   The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress with community managed libraries (CMLs) and to provide an update on the five libraries where a transfer to community management has not yet taken place.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2   In September 2014, the Cabinet approved a remodelling of the library service based on the following elements aimed at meeting its statutory responsibilities:

- 16 major market town and shopping centre libraries funded by the Council with a 20% reduction in opening hours;
- A support service enabling local communities to run their local library;
- An online library service available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to those with access to the internet;
- A mobile library service providing a regular library service to most villages without a static library.

3   In October 2014, a Scrutiny Review Panel contributed to shaping the make-up of the support package that was made available to local communities. This changed the nature of the support from five to seven years duration with a tapering of support costs after the second year.

4   The Cabinet considered several reports which outlined the business cases submitted by local groups wishing to manage their local libraries between January 2015-March 2016. To date, 30 libraries have transferred to community management.

5   In September 2016, the Cabinet noted the outcome of consultations in relation to Kirby Muxloe and Desford libraries; and particularly detailed that the existing Desford Community Group had been unable to reconcile differences over the provision of leasing arrangements to enable them to progress with their original plan.

6   In March 2017, the Cabinet welcomed the refreshed Council's Communities Strategy "Working Together to Build Great Communities". This acknowledged the need to build community capacity by encouraging people to participate in, and contribute to, their local community for example, through volunteering, connecting people,

strengthening skills and confidence. The community managed libraries project is noted as a key example of good practice in contributing to the Communities Strategy.

Background

Progress on community managed libraries that have transferred to local management

7   To date 30 libraries have transferred to community management supported by a County funded package of grants and running costs that tapers over a seven year period. An annual review takes place with each library.

8   Eight annual reviews have been completed at Barrow upon Soar, Bottesford, Glenhills, Leicester Forest East, Markfield, Newbold Verdon, Rothley and Stoney Stanton libraries. This is an opportunity for each local group to review progress made, for officers to gather lessons learned from the transition process that may inform further work undertaken as part of the Communities Strategy, and to highlight any concerns that might impact on the future sustainability of each library at an early stage.

9   In addition, across all 30 libraries, ongoing contact has been sustained through library support officers and trainers. These officers have worked peripatetically offering informal support and advice and have acted as a broker between each group and County Council departments over issues mainly relating to property, IT and legal services. Operational support and brokerage has been delivered through a small number of call-hubs where local groups can ring to enquire about routine operational library matters.

10   Through a combination of intelligence supplied through these two routes, an indicative assessment can be made as to the progress made and a summary of issues that will need to be monitored.

Summary of progress

11   Overall positive progress has been made by each group in developing their library following the transition process. Many groups established themselves with the Charity Commission as Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) and maintain active governing committees that have brought a range of skill sets to their libraries. Some Parish Councils which have Power of Competence have established library management committees, and the community library is run under the auspices of these committees. Examples include Glenhills (Glen Parva Parish Council), Kibworth (Kibworth Beauchamp Parish Council), and Quorn (Quorn Parish Council). All groups have maintained an active number of volunteers timetabled across the opening hours of each site.

12   Twelve libraries have, following a local period of consultation with residents, extended their opening hours in order to increase access to library services with an additional 106 hours per week being delivered.

13   There is evidence that a wide range of social actions through community led initiatives have been developed across the libraries, as part of their plans in establishing each library as a community hub for the local area. Examples include, the establishment of an after-school club in partnership with a local school; the

creation of a story telling garden; the adoption of the Books on Prescription Scheme and the establishment of a library lottery as an income generating device. All CMLs adopted the annual Summer Reading Challenge that encourages children in reading for leisure during the summer holidays.

14   There is also evidence of the social impact that has been made in each community coming together to sustain their local library. A range of anecdotal evidence from the annual reviews undertaken so far suggests that although difficult in early stages, once the settling in stages had concluded, managing the local library has had a positive impact in bringing people together and increased their sense of wellbeing and pride in the work that has been accomplished.

15   In addition, each governing group has drawn on local assets and have levered in a wide range of local expertise and skills through the various management committees that have been formed. This has included legal, property and local authority knowledge that has proved invaluable in ensuring the establishment of each group and its local plan.

16   A small number of groups have developed plans to improve physical aspects of the venue to improve car parking and internal aspects of their buildings.

Areas for continued monitoring

17   Two common areas of concern raised from local groups arising from the annual review cycle are the medium term sustainability of each library in terms of each group's capacity to raise the relevant amounts of income required and also as this applies to the ongoing maintenance and repair of the property asset.

18   The support package for most community libraries will come to an end in 2021/22 and there is an understandable concern that, although having income generating plans in place, these will not over time cover the costs of the maintenance of each property.

19   In 2015/16, provision was made for a contingency fund of £150,000 to support groups should any significant repairs be required where aspects of the property were beyond economic repair. After the first call for bids, in autumn 2016, approximately £45,000 has been claimed, with a second call to be scheduled in autumn 2017. Given the claim so far, it is likely that this fund will be exhausted within the first three years, leaving groups with up to seven years left on their leases without the availability of this safety net. The contingency fund will be reviewed before it nears its end point.

20   Officers are continuing to plan support workshops for CMLs around shared areas of interest which will include income generation strategies.

21   An unexpected issue has arisen following a technical review of printing in relation to the provision of public access to ICT. It has become apparent that the configuration of printing across those CMLs that have not moved to their own ICT infrastructure will need to remain the same for each location. Up until the review, the Council's advice to groups was that they may arrange their own printing solution as a means of saving ongoing revenue costs. A small number of groups that had sourced their own public ICT solution had access to a small grant (£3,000) to enable them to do this. This

grant is no longer available to the groups that have transferred. This has left 19 groups who had anticipated making savings to running costs through making separate printing arrangements for their PCs.

22 Officers are currently considering options for resolving this issue. These are to retain access to the £3,000 grant for those groups that may wish to source their own public IT solutions. The cost of this may be a maximum of £57,000 that could be met through the existing earmarked transformational fund. Alternatively, officers are considering absorbing the current costs of approximately £8,000 in total until 2019 when the County Council re-procures its print/scan copy solutions.

Lessons Learned

23 Generally, the support offered by the County Council has been welcomed by community groups. This has taken the form of relationship officers to guide groups to the point of transfer and library officers who have managed the operational support in running the library. In addition, support from Legal and Property Services have guided groups through the complex and detailed work associated with governance and property issues.

24 Most tensions have arisen in the period of time leading up to the point of transfer. At this stage local groups were under a considerable amount of pressure to meet deadlines for transfers and the range of officers associated with this process proved frustrating.

25 The Council needs to be continually mindful of this and make every effort to ensure that its responses remain flexible and seek to find an appropriate balance between maintaining its reputation, and protecting its legal position, whilst being open to challenging established practices and being more flexible in its procedures as it develops its role as an enabler rather than a provider.

26 Development of the CML network has challenged the library service to reflect on how it will create a different conversation with the retained library estate in future, comprising elements of service that are both county funded and volunteer managed.

Update on libraries scheduled to transfer to community management

27 Five libraries remain that have not yet transferred to community management; Braunstone Town, Desford, Ibstock, Kirby Muxloe and Mountsorrel. A summary of the current position and timescales for transition is set out below.

Braunstone Town

28 The original transfer date for Braunstone Town was scheduled for March 2017. This has been delayed due to ongoing discussions between the Charity Commission, and Braunstone Town Community Library (the local group), over its submission for establishment as a CIO. Officers are working closely with the group to support them in progressing their plans. A revised transfer date is expected in September 2017.

Desford

29 In September 2016, the Cabinet noted that the Desford Community Group had been unable to reconcile differences over the provision of leasing arrangements with the County Council to enable them to progress with their original plan. A deadline of the end of September 2016 was set to see if an agreed position could be reached.

30 An agreement was reached, and the local group are now completing their CIO submission to the Charity Commission. Transfer is expected in summer 2017.

Ibstock

31 The original date for transfer for Ibstock was spring 2016. This has been delayed due to complications in confirming a new venue for the site following the vacation of Ibstock Community College by the County Council early in 2016. Positive work has since taken place with the Ibstock Junior School and plans are underway to complete a transfer in early summer 2017.

Kirby Muxloe

32 In September 2016, the Cabinet authorised the Director of Adults and Communities, in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance, to enter formal agreements for the transfer of the library to a local community group.

33 The library was scheduled to transfer in April 2017, but this was postponed due to information received that indicated that the Charity Commission had begun a dialogue with the Recreation Ground Trust about the lease of Trust land to the County Council.

34 Officers are currently working with the Recreation Ground Trust and Kirby Muxloe Parish Council in order to understand the dialogue with the Charity Commission. In the meantime, volunteers are undertaking the operational aspects of running the library, supported by a County Council library officer. A final transfer is anticipated to take place later in 2017.

Mountsorrel

35 Constructive and positive meetings have been ongoing between Council officers and the landlord regarding plans to create a charitable trust to hold and maintain the fabric of the library building in perpetuity.

36 It is the intention of the new charitable trust to lease the building to the Mountsorrel War Memorials Trust to take responsibility for the library, and to buy back library assistant time from the Communities and Wellbeing Service.

37 Work is ongoing in completing these arrangements and a transfer is anticipated in September 2017.

Resources Implications

38   Since April 2014, the Communities and Wellbeing Service (part of the Adults and Communities Department) has implemented changes to deliver £1.6 million of savings from a mixture of efficiencies and service reductions.

39   Members will be aware of the worsening financial situation which is reflected in the 2017/18–2020/21 Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by the County Council on 22 February 2017. At the time of writing this report, a further £1.3 million saving will need to be made by the Communities and Wellbeing Service by 2020/21.

40   The annual savings from the community libraries programme remain in line with the initial estimates. For the libraries that have transferred, or are scheduled to transfer, to become community managed, annual savings are expected to be £0.3 million from staff and running costs, (net of income) following the end of the seven year tapering period when the groups assume full responsibility for the costs in question. This will also help to enable further savings from the anticipated departmental restructure that supports all libraries.

41   The County Council set aside £0.4 million to support community groups in the initial set up stage. These implementation costs are being met from earmarked transformation funds.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

42   Officers will continue to work with the remaining libraries towards achieving community management and update Members as appropriate should any further issues arise.

Conclusion

43   To date 30 libraries have transferred to community management across Leicestershire. Evidence collected so far, through a mixture of annual reviews and continued officer links, suggests that a range of exciting and innovative activities has been undertaken which has had a positive impact on local communities.

44   Common themes are emerging around challenges for the future and these will continue to be reviewed by officers in partnership with local groups and reported accordingly so that solutions can be found that support the future sustainability of each library.

45   The lessons learned from the process so far will inform the future development and implementation of the Communities Strategy.

46   Five libraries are set to transfer, but a range of complications have meant that there has been some delay in transferring each of them. Officers remain confident that the transfers will be completed in 2017.

Recommendations

47   It is recommended that:

a) The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny committee note the progress made with libraries that have transferred to community management.

b) The progress with Braunstone Town, Desford, Kirby Muxloe, Ibstock and Mountsorrel be noted.

Background papers

Report to the Cabinet on 19 April 2016 'Future Strategy for the Delivery of Library Services
http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4601&Ver=4

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

48   This report will be circulated to all members of the Council via the Members' News in Brief.

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Relevant Impact Assessments

Equality and Human Rights Implications

49   An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) for each of the 36 community libraries was appended to the Cabinet report dated 19 November 2014 and can be accessed via the following link - http://ow.ly/105GkG

50   The EHRIA process is iterative in nature and Equality and Human Rights Improvement Plans, attached to the EHRIA, outlines mitigating actions to be monitored should there be any decision to close libraries in these areas.

51   An online interactive community profile for the libraries has been established which outlines key features associated with the community from a number of criteria. This can be viewed through the following link: http://ow.ly/JmQgE

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