Agenda Item 11

Leicestershire
County Council

ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 NOVEMBER 2018

PROGRESS WITH SMART LIBRARY IMPLEMENTATION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

1.   The purpose of this report is to update the Committee of progress on the implementation of smart library technology.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2.   On 18 July 2016, the Cabinet approved the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-20, "Providing Less: Supporting More" following a period of consultation. This authorised the Director of Adults and Communities to develop a strategy implementation plan, subject to further reports being made to the Cabinet and this Committee. Part of the implementation was the exploration of technology as a means of sustaining library services.

3.   In November 2016, the Cabinet authorised the Director of Adult and Communities to undertake a pilot of smart library technology at Syston library.

4.   On 22 February 2017, the Council approved a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) saving of £1.3 million for the Communities and Wellbeing Service to be delivered by 2020/21.

5.   On 12 September 2017, the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report, including the results of the Syston pilot and the full business case for smart libraries, which recommended that the Cabinet authorised the Director of Adults and Communities to implement smart library technology, where possible, within the following libraries: Ashby de la Zouch, Blaby, Birstall, Broughton Astley, Coalville, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Hinckley, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Melton Mowbray, Oadby, Shepshed and Wigston Magna. The Cabinet subsequently approved this recommendation on 15 September 2017.

Background

6.   The installation of smart library technology enables residents to "swipe" their library card to obtain entry to and exit from a library and provides self-service kiosks for borrowing, returning and renewing items (including the payment of charges) without staff support. This offers the potential for increasing opening hours, whilst enabling a reduction in staffing costs.

7.   The full business case, together with the experience collected from the Syston pilot, identified that the full implementation of smart library technology (including the replacement of existing self-service kiosks) would deliver an annual saving of £230,000, predominantly from a reduction in staffed hours. In addition, it would

increase customer access to libraries through extending (unstaffed) opening hours by approximately 30 hours per week at each library.

Progress

8.   Since September 2017, progress on the implementation of smart library technology has been as follows:

Kiosk Replacement

9.   Between February and April 2018, 30 self-service kiosks at the Council's 16 libraries were replaced and are now operational. The kiosks enable library users to borrow, return and renew books, including the payment of charges through cash and card transactions.

Smart Library Implementation

10. Between April and October 2018, smart library technology has been installed at 10 libraries (Birstall, Blaby, Broughton Astley, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Hinckley, Oadby, Shepshed, Syston, and Wigston). Installation for the remaining four libraries (Ashby de la Zouch, Coalville, Loughborough and Lutterworth) is due to be completed by the end of December 2018.

11. To support the implementation of smart library technology, a CCTV monitoring service has been established by Leicestershire Traded Services (LTS), based at County Hall, to monitor customer activity in libraries during unstaffed opening hours. A service level agreement for this service is in the process of being agreed between LTS and the Communities and Wellbeing Service.

12. Since the initial pilot of smart library technology at Syston library, provision has continued with an additional 30 unstaffed hours being provided each week. The same extended opening hours have also been made available at Birstall library since August 2018.

13. There are currently two libraries where the installation is not currently possible - Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray.

14. The smart libraries business case identified that due to shared use arrangements and an open plan layout it would not be possible to implement the technology at Market Harborough library.

15. Work is in progress to identify whether potential savings at Market Harborough library can be delivered through alternative means, for example though a reduction in opening hours, with a view to a recommendation being made to the Cabinet in January 2019 about this.

16. In addition, the Council was obliged to seek permission from the Landlord for building adaptations at its leasehold properties at Glenfield, Lutterworth, Melton Mowbray and Oadby. Of these, permission was declined by the landlord for Melton Mowbray library (Brooksby Melton College).

17. Melton Mowbray library is located on the Brooksby Melton College campus. Positive discussions have been ongoing with the college to identify options for the redevelopment of the existing site, or relocation of the library on the college campus as part of the emerging asset strategy. It is too early to determine the outcome of these discussions, but it is anticipated that further information will be available for the Cabinet report in January 2019.

18. Discussions have also been held with North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) regarding plans to develop Ashby de la Zouch library as a community/cultural hub for the town. This would bring closer together the library, museum and tourism functions shared between the two councils and volunteer organisations. These plans are currently in exploratory stages and are unlikely to be confirmed before the end of the year. Therefore the implementation of smart library technology at Ashby de la Zouch will continue.

Staff Restructure

19. In order to deliver the savings from the smart library implementation, an HR Action Plan was launched on 2 October 2018. Following the end of the HR Action Plan consultation period on 8 November 2018, library service assistants will be recruited to new contracts based on the revised staffed opening hours. These will become operational in April 2019.

Consultation

20. As part of the implementation, stakeholder engagement activity was undertaken from 16 July to 12 August 2018 regarding the proposed staffed and unstaffed (smart) opening hours for each of the 14 libraries.

21. The engagement took the form of 14 individual questionnaires (one for each of the affected libraries) detailing the proposed staffed and unstaffed opening hours for the library. The surveys then asked members of the public to answer questions about their current use of the library and how the proposed changes to opening would affect this (see Appendix A to this report). To assist in the completion of the questionnaires a Frequently Asked Questions document "What is a smart library" was provided (see Appendix B to this report). The questionnaire was available in print and online format and publicised within the libraries.

22. In addition, all groups using the libraries, or organisations hiring rooms from the libraries were contacted and informed of how they could complete the survey. Contact was also made with a number of county wide organisations representing various equality groups, including RNIB, Mencap, Age UK, Vista, Mosaic and the Youth Parliament. Officers also attended a meeting organised by Oadby and Wigston Residents' Forum.

23. A total of 457 responses were received with varying response rates across the libraries. Overall 50% of respondents said that the revised hours would either make no difference to their use of the library or make them more likely to use it (includes 'a lot more likely' and 'a little more likely'). 38% of respondents said they would be 'very' or 'somewhat' likely to use the library during unstaffed (smart) opening hours.

24. As a result of the outcome of the engagement, the proposed staffed and unstaffed opening hours were amended for Broughton Astley, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Loughborough, Lutterworth and Shepshed libraries (see Appendix C to this report).

Resource Implications

25. An allocation of £1.01 million from the capital budget has been made to enable the implementation of smart library technology. Current forecast anticipates a spend of £800,000. This will enable revenue savings of approximately £230,000 per annum to be achieved via reductions in staffing and kiosk support and maintenance costs, offset against increased property related costs (utilities, CCTV monitoring) and additional costs for support and maintenance of smart library technology.

Timetable for Decisions

26. A report regarding progress on smart library implementation together with recommendations for Market Harborough and Melton Mowbray libraries will be submitted to the Cabinet on 15 January 2019.

Conclusion

27. Based on the information within this report, the service remains on schedule to deliver £230,000 savings from the implementation of smart library technology. This is in addition to a range of non-financial benefits including increased access to libraries for local communities by extending opening (unstaffed) opening hours.

28. The Committee is invited to comment on the progress of the implementation of smart library technology.

Background Papers

- Report to the Cabinet to County Council, 18th July 2016 "Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020" - http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s120759/Communities%20and%20Wellbeing%20Strategy%202016-20.pdf
- Report to the Cabinet to County Council, 23rd November 2016 "Progress Report on Implementation for Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020" - http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s124248/Communities%20and%20Wellbeing%20Strategy%202016-20%20Progress%20FINAL.pdf
- Report of the Cabinet, 22nd February 2017 "Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 – 2020/21" - http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s126527/MTFS%202017%20-2021.pdf
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12th September 2017:
- Report to the Cabinet to County Council, 15th September 2017 "Progress Report on Implementation for Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020" - http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s131563/Comms%20and%20Wellbeing%20Strategy.pdf

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

29. This report has been circulated to all Members.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

30. An Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment has been completed for smart library implementation and is attached as Appendix D. This indicates that the protected groups most likely to be affected are children and young people, and people with disabilities.

31. Improvement plans are being completed for each library which will identify mitigating actions that reflect local circumstances and need. To assist in this, the service has met with Vista, Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group and the Adult Learning Curriculum Manager for students with learning disabilities to understand the impact and investigate potential mitigating actions.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Stakeholder Engagement Questionnaire
- Appendix B – FAQ document "What is a Smart Library?"
- Appendix C – Current and Revised Library Opening Hours
- Appendix D – Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment

Officers to Contact

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