Leicestershire County Council

CABINET – 8 FEBRUARY 2019

PROGRESS WITH SMART LIBRARY IMPLEMENTATION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1.   The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of progress with the implementation of smart library technology in County Council libraries since the business case for this was approved in September 2017, and to seek authorisation for the Director to agree an option for the future of Melton library via redevelopment of the existing site or its relocation on the Melton Brooksby College campus.

Recommendations

2.   It is recommended that:

   a) Progress with the implementation of smart library technology at the libraries at Ashby de la Zouch, Birstall, Blaby, Broughton Astley, Coalville, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Hinckley, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Oadby, Shepshed, Syston and Wigston be noted.

   b) It be noted that smart library technology will not be installed at Market Harborough library;

   c) With regards to the ongoing discussions with Melton Brooksby College concerning Melton library, the Director of Adults and Communities following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member be authorised to carry out further engagement activity and consultation as appropriate in relation to options outlined in this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

3.   The full implementation of smart library technology across the libraries detailed in paragraph 2 a) will achieve the targeted savings of £230,000.

4.   Market Harborough library is in an open-plan building and for security reasons it is not practical to introduce a self-access system.

5.   Enabling the Director to proceed with any engagement/consultation arising from the ongoing dialogue with Melton Brooksby College and to make appropriate arrangements for Melton library once agreed with the College will expedite the

process. A further report to Cabinet would be required should there be any significant variation to the arrangements for Melton library.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. It is expected that the operational implementation of smart libraries will be complete in April 2019. A post-implementation review will take place after 12 months. The Cabinet and the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be kept appraised of any developments as appropriate.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. In July 2016, the Cabinet approved the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-20, "Providing Less: Supporting More" and authorised the Director of Adults and Communities to take the necessary action to implement the Strategy, part of which was the exploration of technology as a means of sustaining library services.

8. In November 2016, the Cabinet authorised the Director of Adult and Communities to undertake a pilot of smart library technology at Syston library to test the feasibility of a fuller roll-out across Council funded libraries.

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

10. In September 2017, the Cabinet approved the implementation of smart library technology for the libraries, in line with the business case, at Ashby de la Zouch, Blaby, Broughton Astley, Birstall, Coalville, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Hinckley, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Melton Mowbray, Oadby, Shepshed, and Wigston Magna.

11. The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the progress on implementation of smart library technology at its meeting on 6 November 2018.

Resource Implications

12. An allocation of £1.01 million from the capital budget has been made to enable the implementation of smart library technology. The current forecast anticipates that capital spend will be within budget. 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.

Legal Implications

13. The smart libraries project is a highly innovative project to maintain the delivery of statutory services in challenging economic circumstances.

14.	The project has required the Council to anticipate a broad range of risks in order to design and implement a range of technical solutions to keep users of the libraries as safe as possible. Council officers have worked closely with officers from Leicestershire Fire and Rescue to address safety concerns and to create robust plans to ensure that buildings can be evacuated quickly.

15.	The removal of a human component from the operation of a library carries the potential to increase the risks to library users when compared to the risks facing users of staffed buildings. Nevertheless, officers consider that smart libraries are safe and that any marginal increases in risk must be weighed against the substantial benefits that smart libraries offer.

16.	Smart libraries are accessible by all library users over 18 years of age but arguably do not afford the same level of access to disabled persons as that available to able bodied persons. This is because users are required to certify that, in case of an emergency, they are capable of evacuating the library without independent assistance. Despite this, the project offers the advantage of increasing the accessibility of libraries to a larger group of users due to the extended opening hours.

17.	The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

18.	A copy of this report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council via the Members Digest.

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PART B

Background

19.   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.

20.   The full business case, together with the experience collected from the Syston library 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

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

Kiosk Replacement

22.   Between February and April 2018, the 30 existing 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

23.   Between April and December 2018, smart library technology has been installed at 14 libraries (Ashby de la Zouch, Birstall, Blaby, Broughton Astley, Coalville, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Hinckley, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Oadby, Shepshed, Syston, and Wigston).

24.   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 has been agreed between LTS and the Communities and Wellbeing Service and started on 1 January 2019.

25.   Since the initial pilot of smart library technology at Syston library in March 2017, 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. Additional opening hours will be made available at the 12 other libraries over the next few months following the completion of outstanding "snagging" items and full testing.

26. Discussions are ongoing with North West Leicestershire District Council regarding its 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 not yet confirmed. In the meantime, the implementation of smart library technology at Ashby de la Zouch has been completed with a view to full operation and extended hours being in place from April 2019.

27. It was originally anticipated that Melton Mowbray library would be adapted for smart technology. As part of the implementation programme, the Council was obliged to seek permission from the respective landlord for building adaptations at its leasehold properties at Glenfield, Lutterworth, Melton Mowbray and Oadby. The landlord for Melton Mowbray library (Brooksby Melton College) declined permission.

28. Melton Mowbray library is located on the Brooksby Melton College campus under a leasehold agreement. Positive discussions have been ongoing with the College to identify options for the redevelopment of the library. These options include development of the library on its existing site or relocation of the library on the campus as part of the emerging College asset strategy.

29. As dialogue is continuing, it is recommended that delegated authority is given to the Director of Adults and Communities, following consultation with the Lead Member, to make the necessary arrangements to facilitate future changes to the library. Should the proposal for the library vary appreciably at all from the approach previously agreed the Cabinet's approval would be sought. In the meantime, the current opening hours for the library will remain unchanged.

Market Harborough Library

30. The smart libraries Business Case identified that due to shared use arrangements, it would not be possible to implement the technology at Market Harborough library. The Symington Building in which the library is located is an open plan building and the library/museum is situated on the second floor. The rest of the building accommodates several organisations, including the headquarters of Harborough District Council. In addition, the museum holds collections of significant value, notably the Hallaton Treasure. It was not considered practical therefore to include self-access to the library.

31. Given that the expected savings of £230,000 per annum will be delivered by the current smart implementation programme and that this would increase public access to all libraries by approximately 30 hours per week, it is considered that to reduce opening hours at Market Harborough in order to deliver a respective level of saving at that library (approximately £14,000) would not be in the spirit of the programme. The opening hours will therefore remain unchanged.

Staff Restructure

32. To deliver the savings from the smart library implementation, a Human Resources Action Plan was launched on 2 October 2018. Following the end of the consultation period on 8 November 2018, library service assistants have been recruited to new

contracts based on the revised staffed opening hours. Work is now underway to recruit to remaining vacancies. These will become operational in April 2019.

Stakeholder Engagement

33. 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.

34. 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 (Appendix B). The questionnaire was available in print and online format and publicised within the libraries.

35. In addition, all groups using the libraries, or organisations hiring rooms from the libraries were advised how they could complete the survey and contact was also made with several county wide organisations representing various equality groups, including Royal National Institute of Blind People, Mencap, Age UK, Vista, Mosaic and the Youth Parliament. Officers also attended a meeting organised by Oadby and Wigston Residents' Forum.

36. 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 (this 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.

37. Given the outcome of the engagement, the proposed staffed and unstaffed opening hours were amended for Broughton Astley, Earl Shilton, Loughborough, Lutterworth and Shepshed libraries (these are outlined in Appendices C and D).

Conclusion

38. Based on the information within this report, the service remains on schedule to deliver the expected £230,000 savings from the implementation of smart library technology. In addition to the savings, there are a range of non-financial benefits including increased access to libraries for local communities and partner organisations by extending opening (unstaffed) opening hours, reduced incidence of kiosk failure, and compliance with the requirement to provide contactless payment.

39. Work is now underway to promote the usage of libraries whilst in smart mode so that communities can make the best use of each library. Part of this work includes investigating the installation of touchscreen technology to aid customer usage at times when the library is not staffed. It is proposed to review the impact of the implementation after 12 months.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

40. 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 negatively impacted are children and young people, and people with disabilities.

41. 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.

Background Papers

- Report to the Cabinet 18 July 2016: Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020; http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4604&Ver=4
- Report to the Cabinet 23 November 2016: Progress Report on Implementation for Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020 http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4607&Ver=4
- Report to the County Council 22 February 2017: Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18-2020/21 http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=4433
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12 September 2017: Update on the Implementation of the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020 http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=4927
- Report to the Cabinet: 15 September 2017: Progress Report on Implementation for Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020 http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4863
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 6 November 2018: Progress with Smart Library implementation http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=5358

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

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