

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 20th August 2012
Report of: Paul Bayley, Customer Service and Libraries Manager
Subject/Title: Libraries Strategy
Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Brown

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the new Libraries strategy that has been developed to define the priorities for Cheshire East Libraries to ensure the Council fulfils its statutory duty while also contributing to the priorities for action set out in the Cheshire East Sustainable Communities Strategy.
- 1.2 The strategy is not proposing radical changes to the library service. The key challenge is to continuously improve and modernise the way that we deliver the service to keep pace with evolving customer expectations, and to be flexible and responsive to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves.
- 1.3 The strategic objectives for our libraries are:
- Improve literacy
 - Support informal learning
 - Enable digital inclusion
 - Provide information
 - Promote libraries as community anchors

2.0 Decision Requested

- 2.1 That Cabinet endorse the new Libraries Strategy.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof' as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Libraries strategy defines the priorities for Cheshire East Libraries for the next three years to ensure that it fulfils its statutory duty while also contributing to the priorities for action set out in the Cheshire East Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 3.2 The strategy is not proposing radical changes to the library service. Its purpose is to provide the strategic priorities for the service against which developments and opportunities should be assessed. It does not aim to describe everything that we will do to achieve the objectives as this will be

reviewed and documented through annual service plans, but it will highlight some high profile developments or opportunities that we will proactively consider during the next 12 to 18 months, such as whether to introduce the ability to download e-books through libraries.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 All wards.

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 Policy Implications including - Carbon reduction - Health

6.1 The review of the mobile library service and the proposal to reduce the number of vehicles from three to one will reduce fuel consumption.

6.2 Libraries provide a wide and diverse range of health and wellbeing activities, from Reading Groups to Health promotion activities to books on prescription. Volunteering is also recognised as delivering important health benefits, and Libraries offer a number of volunteering opportunities such as Reading Challenge Champions, IT Buddies and Rhymetime Assistant. Cheshire East Libraries are involved in a project being jointly lead by the Reading Agency and the Society of Chief Librarians to better articulate what libraries can offer to support health and well being. The project has so far defined the Public Library Health offer as:

- A network of local community hubs
- Non-stigmatised, non-clinical community space
- Community outreach expertise, access to vulnerable people and local knowledge
- Expertise and support
- Supported on-line access
- Health related self -help reading programmes, services and resources, referral and signposting and social and recreational activity
- Volunteering and community engagement opportunities

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Director of Finance and Business Services)

7.1 The Libraries strategy does not have any direct financial implications. The financial implications of any subsequent actions will be considered on a case by case basis, and may contribute to savings already budgeted or contribute to new policy proposals in future business plans.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 The Libraries strategy does not have any direct legal implications. The legal implications of any subsequent actions will be considered on a case by case basis. There have been examples of both successful and unsuccessful legal challenges to proposals to close libraries or alter the service in other local authorities. The key lessons from these challenges are that the public consultation process to support any proposals should be thorough, and equality impact assessments that consider the impact on vulnerable groups must be produced.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 Reputational risk is the main risk associated with any proposals to change a library service. The risk to Cheshire East is low given the Libraries strategy is not proposing any radical changes to the service. Thorough consultation and equality impact assessments will mitigate the risk of reputational damage.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 An informal review of the Library service undertaken by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee in September 2011 described Libraries as an important resource to the public that are seen by many as an integral part of a city, town or village identity and aesthetic. The Committee's report stated that it is important that Cheshire East Council has a strategy in place to maintain and develop its library services for the residents of the borough.
- 10.2 A Peer review carried out by the Local Government Association in March 2012 concluded that we are providing a good library service, professionally managed and delivered by highly motivated staff. Amongst its recommendations, the review advised us to urgently focus on improving the positioning of the library service in the council, recognising that the services' corporate profile may be limited, although apparently valued politically, and potential as a major contributor to wider priority outcomes not properly understood or utilised. They advised that the production of a library strategy should seek to address this by examining the future of the library service in terms of this wider contribution as well as looking at the specific service needs to be met by libraries.
- 10.3 The strategy has considered the learning from the Future Libraries Programme that was published in August 2011. Cheshire East has already implemented or considered many of the opportunities outlined by the programme. For example, the programme recommended one of the possible models for delivering more efficient and effective library services could be to deliver the service network in different ways through co-location or new, non traditional outlets and service points. Cheshire East has already taken the opportunity to co-locate customer service points in Libraries. The Council is also currently considering the business case for developing Lifestyle Centres in some towns. The opportunity to include the library within the scope of a Lifestyle Centre is being considered in locations where it makes sense. Any proposal to include a library within a new lifestyle centre could clearly have an

impact on the location of libraries within Cheshire East, but it will not affect the core purpose or strategic objectives of the service.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

Name: Paul Bayley
Designation: Customer Service and Libraries Manager
Tel No: (01625 3) 78029
Email: Paul.Bayley@cheshireeast.gov.uk