Libraries Strategy 2012-2015

August 2012

Contents

Executive Summary

- This 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.

- The Council provides libraries in 18 communities in Cheshire East, receiving 1.8 million visitors and issuing over 3 million books each year. A recent LGA Peer review concluded that Cheshire East is providing a good library service, professionally managed and delivered by highly motivated staff.

- 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 needs and aspirations, and to be flexible and responsive to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves.

- The strategic objectives for our libraries are:

    - Improve literacy
    - Support informal learning
    - Enable digital inclusion
    - Provide information
    - Promote libraries as community anchors

1. Introduction

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. This 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.

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.

The key challenge for the Library service is to continuously improve and modernise the way that we deliver the service to keep pace with evolving customer needs and aspirations. We need to be flexible and responsive to take advantage of opportunities to make the service more efficient and effective and we need to be brave to challenge existing service delivery when opportunities present themselves.

2. Cheshire East Library Service

An Overview

The Council provides public libraries in 18 communities across Cheshire East, plus the library at HMP Styal. Our libraries are a key resource within these communities providing books, music, information, learning, recreation and community spaces for residents, visitors, businesses and community groups. These are supplemented by a mobile library and books on wheels service for rural communities and housebound customers that are unable to access a static library. Specialist and support services such as the Education Library Service, Bibliographical Services and the Library Management System are shared with Cheshire West and Chester. Each year our libraries receive 1.8 million visitors and issue over 3 million books and multimedia items. 190,000 customers log on to the People's Network to access the internet. The total net revenue budget for the library service is £3.5m.

Cheshire East Libraries

Disley
Handforth
Poynton
HMP Styal
Wilmslow
Bollington
Alderley Edge
Prestbury
Knutsford
Hurdsfield
Macclesfield
Weston
Holmes Chapel
Middlewich
Congleton
Sandbach
Alsager
Crewe
Nantwich

The Library service has continued to modernise and develop during the first three years of Cheshire East. The roll out of RFID self service technology to enable customers to borrow and return books themselves is nearing completion. This has released more staff time to engage with customers and run activities for the community, as well as provided the opportunity to refurbish and refresh the layout of many of the libraries. At the same time, the Libraries have taken on the face to face customer service function for the Council in their communities, enabling net annual savings of £240,000 as stand alone Customer Service Points have been relocated into the libraries.

The service is perceived as good value for money, as a low cost and high performing service. The most recent customer survey conduced in 2009 reported that 93% of respondents rated the library service overall as good or very good. According to the CIPFA Public Library Statistics 2009-10, out of 22 North West library authorities Cheshire East Libraries had the third lowest expenditure per resident and the highest number of issues per resident.

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.

National Context

The past year has seen high profile local and national campaigns against library cuts and closures and a huge public concern about public library services. Areas such as Somerset and Gloucestershire saw library closures quashed by a legal challenge, but in Brent, the Brent SOS Libraries campaign group failed to prevent six libraries from closing. In March 2012, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) reported that it was "seriously concerned" that libraries are disproportionately bearing the brunt of cuts in government funding. The group carried out a survey of library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It found that 2,000 library workers have lost their jobs and 3,000 opening hours a week cut since April 2011. The survey also revealed that reported actual library closures are small but that the overwhelming majority of responding authorities have reduced staff. The report also challenges the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport,

to set out a "fresh vision for the 21st century public library service defining what comprehensive, efficient and accessible means."

The Future Libraries Programme was established in August 2010 to help library services during the current challenging financial climate. It aimed to ensure libraries continued to play a central role for communities, with the vision of library and other local services working better together to deliver services genuinely designed around the needs of the public. The programme initially worked on 10 innovative, collaborative projects involving 30 councils. The learning from the programme, published in August 2011, suggested that there are four emerging change models. The Cheshire East response to the Future Libraries Programme is considered in section five of this strategy.
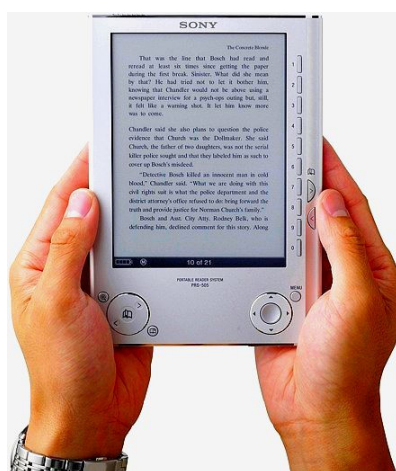
Considering and responding to the opportunity or threat that e-books presents to the traditional library service is a key priority. The e-books market is still evolving, and there are restrictions on what e-books are currently available through a library service in the UK. Amazon will not allow public library services in the UK to have access to the Kindle format, although they have recently allowed access in the United States. Book suppliers to Libraries estimate that only 25% of books that are available in printed form are currently available to libraries in e-book form with many publishers not yet signing up to the practice, and some withdrawing while the ground rules are established.

Peer Review

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. The review added that they were extremely impressed by the way the service has accommodated the customer service function and made it a success. They also stated that they would be very happy to recommend other councils to see what we have achieved and learn from us. 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. The review also concluded that the service has no fundamental issues around buildings and IT, although any opportunities to improve the environment in our buildings or operate in new shared spaces should be taken, and to also continue to keep a watching brief on the e-book situation.

3. Customer Needs and Expectations

The needs and priorities of the people of Cheshire East are articulated in the Cheshire East Sustainable Communities Strategy. Libraries have an important role to play in contributing to the priorities for action from this strategy, and in particular:

- Nurture strong communities
- Support our children and young people
- Prepare for an increasingly older population

In May and June 2012, Cheshire East Council carried out a survey of their citizens' panel – the **Influence Cheshire East (ICE) Spring 2012 Survey**. The survey included a section on Libraries to assess residents' current library usage and to explore what their future requirements of libraries may be. Overall 1,945 residents responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 64%. 1,927 respondents completed the section on Libraries.

Library usage

69% of respondents had visited a Cheshire East library within the last year, with 35% having done so at least once a month. The types of respondents who were more likely to have visited a library at least once a month included the unemployed (63% had visited a Cheshire East library at least once a month).

82% of respondents were satisfied with library services.

Of those that had visited a library in the last year, the most common reasons for visiting were:

- To borrow/use books or multimedia, or buy second hand books (83% of visitors)
- Find local information (25%)
- Browse and relax (21%)
- Take children to an activity (19%)
- Use computer and internet facilities (16%)
- Read magazines or newspapers (16%)

The future for Cheshire East libraries

A majority of respondents **agreed** that:

- There will be as much need for libraries in future as there is now (74% agreed)
- Libraries should continue to store and lend paper books as their main role (77% agreed)
- Libraries should be used more as community meeting places (71% agreed)
- Libraries should offer more activities and events (61% agreed)

A majority of respondents **disagreed** that:

- Cheshire East should have libraries only in the larger towns rather than in suburban areas/villages (81% disagreed)

- Cheshire East should have fewer, bigger libraries (72% disagreed)
- Library services should become mostly digital (69% disagreed)

It should be noted that whether respondents agreed there was a future for libraries did not depend upon the age of the respondent – younger respondents were just as likely to agree libraries have a future as older respondents.

Clearly, libraries play an important role within Cheshire East communities. The nature of this community role was perhaps expressed most eloquently within the open comments respondents made about the future of library services – it is clear reading through these open comments just how important and diverse a role libraries play within communities – something that does not necessarily come through from the purely statistical analysis.

584 of the 1,277 (46%) comments made about the future of libraries stressed that they must continue, and highlighted 'community role' reasons why they should. Ultimately:

"*A library is not just a drafty old building where people read books. It is a lifeline to some, a wonderful place to escape for others and all kinds of everything to everyone! Libraries are the last bastion of social interaction outside of the digital realm. The benefits to society that a library offers far outweigh the costs. What a marvellous and precious service!*"

Conclusions

This research solidifies the position and role of libraries from a resident perspective. Residents use them, are satisfied with them, and believe they have a future.

Threats to libraries from evolving technologies do exist, however they may not be as critical as thought. It will be important to monitor trends in library usage and in technological usage, and incorporate changes as and when necessary, although any change should only be integrated gradually, and within the ethos of libraries.

Books, and the community role of libraries, are the main attributes that should be built on – the latter especially has much potential.

4. Looking Ahead – Our Service Objectives

The core purpose of Libraries in Cheshire East is to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library service that fulfils the needs and expectations of the people who live and work in Cheshire East. The strategic objectives for the Library service that we will use to assess and prioritise service developments and opportunities to ensure we provide a comprehensive service that meets these needs and expectations are:

Improve literacy - promote books and reading to people of all ages to improve children's and adults literacy and to improve life opportunities and health.

Support informal learning - provide an informal learning environment that encourages people to participate in activities that contribute to their learning and skills development.

Enable digital inclusion - support people to develop digital and information skills through free internet access and skilled support to help people that are digitally excluded to get online.

Provide information - provide simple and straightforward access to the information that local people need.

Promote libraries as community anchors - promote Libraries as local community hubs that provide welcoming, neutral and safe places, and organise and host activities and events for communities to come together to improve life opportunities, health and wellbeing.

We will measure the success of the service by monitoring usage of our Library services and regularly checking that library users are satisfied with the service. This will be supported by qualitative evidence of how our Libraries have improved outcomes for people who live or work within the borough. We will also regularly review the efficiency of our Library service by checking that individual libraries and services continue to provide value for money.

There are no plans to make radical changes to the existing library network. We will continue to operate the individual Libraries as long as we are confident that they are efficient and are meeting the needs of the local community. There are no plans to build new libraries but we will be happy to work with communities without libraries to explore alternative delivery models that could provide solutions in their communities. This may be through the provision of books in community centres, churches or other community hubs; or it may be through outreach activities with local community groups to support informal learning or address digital skills gaps.

5. The Future Libraries Programme – a Cheshire East Response

The learning from the Future Libraries Programme, published in August 2011, outlined four possible models for delivering more efficient and effective library services. It was recognised that the delivery models are frequently hybrid – a combination of approaches to meet local political priorities, community needs and aspirations and the ambitions of other partners. Cheshire East have already implemented or considered many of the opportunities from these emerging delivery models.

Delivering the service network in different ways through co-location or new, non traditional outlets and service points

- The opportunity to co-locate customer service points in Libraries has already been taken, with the roll out due to be completed in all libraries by August 2012.
- The Council is currently considering the business case for developing Lifestyles 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.
- There are currently no plans to co-locate libraries in other community locations, such as shops, sports centres, village halls or churches, but these opportunities may be considered where the cost and usage of existing libraries is not representing value for money or in communities without a library where there is strong demand.

Using external providers such as Trusts and charitable companies, other councils or through the private sector

- There are no plans to explore using an external provider to deliver the Library service in Cheshire East as it is not clear what added value such as arrangement could bring given the existing service is perceived as high performing and good value for money.
- The business case for Lifestyle Centres to bring together the delivery of a range of health and wellbeing services may result in the creation of new company structures or Trust arrangements which could have an impact on the delivery of the Library service in a location where it is part of a Lifestyle Centre.

Sharing services with other councils to varying degrees of integration

- The Libraries Shared Service, hosted by Cheshire West and Chester Council, provides back office and specialist support to Cheshire East libraries, including Bibliographical Services, Library Transport, Education Library Service, Inter-lending Unit, and a shared Library Management system. The Libraries Shared Service is subject to formal review during 2012-13 to ensure that a shared service continues to represent the most efficient and effective way to deliver these functions.

- There are no plans to extend the services that are delivered through the Libraries Shared Service. The Shared Service is planning to explore the opportunities to extend their services into other neighbouring Library authorities.

Empowering communities to do things in their own way

- Cheshire East Libraries has increased the use of volunteers to work alongside professional Library staff to assist in running events and activities.
- There are no plans to transfer Libraries to a Community organisation or social enterprise. Any opportunity presented by a community based group will be properly considered to assess whether it could be a more efficient and effective way of delivering the Library service in that community.

6. Delivering the Strategy – Priorities for Action

	Priority	By Whom	By When
1.	**Improve Literacy**		
1.1	Review the business case for providing e-books through Cheshire East Libraries	Customer Service & Libraries Manager	Oct 2012
1.2	Participate in national library initiatives to promote libraries, books and love of reading, including: – Summer Reading Challenges – World Book days – National Bookstart week – Stories of the World adult reading challenge to support the Cultural Olympiad – The 6 Book Challenge for people with low literacy levels.	Librarians / Specialists	Ongoing
1.3	Offer and promote class visits for local schools in all Libraries	Library Managers	Ongoing
1.4	Offer and promote reading groups for people with mental health issues	Library Managers	Ongoing
1.5	Lead on the National Libraries Health Offer for the North West libraries cluster	Projects Librarian	Mar 2013
2.	**Support Informal Learning**		
2.1	Participate in national library initiatives including Adults Learners week	Reference Specialist	Ongoing
2.2	Establish a pilot Work Club in Macclesfield Library	Library Manager	Mar 2013
3.	**Enable Digital Inclusion**		
3.1	Participate in the Race Online 2012 to help 2000 people in Cheshire East get online by the end of 2012	Reference Specialist	Dec 2012
3.2	Provide IT taster sessions in all Libraries, and participate in national initiatives such as Get Online week, I-Tea and Biscuits week	Reference Specialist / Library Managers	Ongoing

	Priority	By Whom	By When
3.3	Review options for extending Wi-Fi provision, currently piloted in Crewe Library, into all other Libraries	Area Librarians	Apr 2013
4.	**Provide Information**		
4.1	Complete the roll out of Customer Service Points in all Libraries	Area Librarians	Aug 2012
5.	**Promote Libraries as Community Anchors**		
5.1	Provide weekly Rhymetime sessions in all Libraries	Library Managers	Ongoing
5.2	Develop a communications plan to promote the availability of Library space for community events and activities	Area Librarians	Oct 2012
5.3	Review community meeting spaces at all Libraries and submit capital bid to refurbish or create spaces in all Libraries	Customer Service & Libraries Manager	Sep 2012
6.	**Improve Efficiency**		
6.1	Review the Mobile Library Service to ensure that to ensure that it is delivers consistently across the borough and represents value for money	Community Libraries Manager	Jul 2012
6.2	Review the lowest performing Libraries (cost per issue / cost per visit) to ensure that they continue to represent value for money and identify alternative and more efficient ways to deliver Library services to affected communities	Customer Service & Libraries Manager	Jan 2013
6.3	Review all income generating products and services to ensure they continue to represent value for money and are meeting the expectations of customers	Customer Service & Libraries Manager	Oct 2012