

Cabinet Member for Strategic Communities

Date of Meeting: 13 May 2013
Report of: Customer Service and Libraries Manager
Subject/Title: Proposal to Close Hurdsfield and Weston Libraries
Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Brown

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 A major change project has been established as part of the Council's Three Year Plan to develop a new model for sustainable library services and community hubs. The project is expected to contribute a £1m saving from the current £3.5m libraries revenue budget by 2015/16. As part of this project, it is proposed that Hurdsfield and Weston libraries are closed.
- 1.2 The Council is committed to retaining libraries in the 16 towns that they are in today. Macclesfield is the only town within Cheshire East that has more than one library. The main library is located close to the town centre and is the busiest library in the borough with 11,785 active users. Hurdsfield library has approximately 90 active users with a cost per active user of £111. Weston library has 47 active users with a cost of £210 per active user. The average cost per active user across all Cheshire East libraries is £53.
- 1.3 A consultation has been carried out which asked how the closure of the library would affect customers. The almost universal response was loss of access to books. The consultation also identified 17 elderly customers with mobility issues who would struggle to access the central Macclesfield library. If the proposal is approved the service will explore opportunities for community partners to host an informal community 'book swap' scheme and we will contact the customers that indicated they had mobility issues to establish whether they would be interested in the Books on Wheels service for house bound customers

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Strategic Communities approves the proposal to close Hurdsfield and Weston libraries.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 It is recommended that Hurdsfield and Weston libraries are closed because:
 - Demand for library services within these communities is very low and the cost of continuing to provide the library is disproportionate compared to the cost per active borrower in other communities.

- These libraries are unable to fulfil the objectives defined in the Libraries strategy due to the limited space available.
- Library provision in Macclesfield, where we provide these satellite libraries in addition to the main central library, is inequitable with other Cheshire East communities.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 Macclesfield Hurdsfield ward and Macclesfield West and Ivy ward.

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 Macclesfield Hurdsfield – Councillor Steve Carter
Macclesfield West and Ivy - Councillor Carolyn Andrew, Councillor Alift Harewood

6.0 Policy Implications (including carbon reduction and health)

6.1 Libraries provide a wide and diverse range of health and wellbeing activities, from Reading Groups to Health promotion activities to books on prescription. Activities offered at Hurdsfield and Weston libraries are very limited due to the constraints of the physical space and the low demand. Customers will benefit from a much wider range of activities if they become regular users of the central Macclesfield library.

6.2 The library closures will have a minimal impact on carbon reduction.

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

7.1 The closure of Hurdsfield and Weston libraries will deliver annual revenue savings of £20,000 from staffing and book fund savings. This will contribute to the £1m saving expected from the Sustainable Libraries change project.

8.0 Legal Implications (authorised by Borough Solicitor)

8.1 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 a local authority has a duty to provide “a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof” who live, work or are being educated in its area.

8.2 There have been a number of challenges to Local Authorities looking to change their library provision in the last two years. In the relevant cases three points were considered by the Court:

- The duty placed on the Local Authority by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964
- The need to consult
- The Public Sector Equality Duty (S149 of the Equality Act 2010)

8.3 In respect of the duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act, case law states that a LA cannot be found to have complied with this duty unless it has

assessed the needs that its library service has to meet. However, the requirement to conduct an assessment of needs does not require a LA to carry out a discrete information-gathering exercise; it is entitled to rely on the expertise and experience of its professionals and on information gathered from a variety of reliable sources. The Council's Libraries Strategy sets out the priorities for the service to meet the needs and expectations of customers; this was approved by Cabinet in August 2012. It is understood that the strategy was informed by a review undertaken by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee, a Peer review and customer insight from the Influence Cheshire East (ICE) Spring 2012 Survey which included a section on Libraries to assess residents' current library usage and to explore what their future requirements of libraries may be. It is understood that the proposals in this report are in line with one of the priorities for action within the Libraries Strategy to review the lowest performing libraries to ensure value for money.

- 8.4 There is no specific statutory duty to consult in respect of library provision. However, the Local Authority does have general duties to consult and involve the community in changes to services and recent cases in respect of changes to library services have made it clear that consultation is expected by the Courts.
- 8.5 A consultation has been carried out on the proposal in this report and details of the outcome are contained in Section 10.
- 8.6 There are four requirements of consultation:-
- (a) that consultation is undertaken when the proposals are still in a formative stage;
 - (a) that adequate information is given to enable consultees properly to respond;
 - (b) that adequate time is provided in which to respond; and
 - (c) that the decision-maker gives conscientious consideration to the response to the consultation.
- 8.7 The decision maker must satisfy themselves that the consultation has been appropriately undertaken and ensure that the results of the consultation are taken into account when making their decision.
- 8.8 In making the decision requested in this report, the portfolio holder is reminded of the need for decision makers to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty. An Equality Impact Assessment has been provided to assist the decision maker in this.
- 8.9 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty:
- "A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to –
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this act;

- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it..”

The “protected characteristics” are defined as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

- 9.1 Reputational risk is the main risk associated with any proposals to change a library service. The risk is low as this proposal is not proposing radical changes to the service across the Borough. The proposal affects 140 library users out of 66,000 active library users across Cheshire East. The risk has been mitigated for this proposal by consultation with customers and community stakeholders, and the completion of an equality impact assessment. The service will also explore further measures (see 10.10) to mitigate this risk if the proposal is approved and they will develop a communications plan to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the changes and alternative options.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 A major change project has been established as part of the Council's Three Year Plan to develop a new model for sustainable library services and community hubs. The project will implement a range of library operating models that enables the Council to deliver a library service that better reflects the scale of demand within each community and at a consistent subsidy across the Borough, ensuring best value for local people. The project is expected to contribute a £1m saving from the current £3.5m libraries revenue budget by 2015/16. The Council is committed to retaining libraries in the 16 towns that they are in today, but as a result of this project some libraries may move to a different building; some libraries may operate within a smaller footprint within existing buildings; some libraries will review their opening hours; some libraries will not change at all.
- 10.2 Macclesfield is the only town within Cheshire East that has more than one library. The main library is located close to the town centre and is the busiest library in the borough with 11,785 active users.
- 10.3 Hurdsfield library is located in a small building adjacent to a parade of shops in the centre of the Hurdsfield estate. It is open nine hours per week, running a weekly rhyme time on Monday afternoons. The library does not have access to the computerised library management system. It has approximately 90 active users, with a cost per active user of £111. Hurdsfield library is located one mile from Macclesfield library, with regular buses from the estate to Macclesfield town centre.

- 10.4 Weston library is located in a small room at the rear of Weston Community Centre. It is open eleven hours per week, and provides access to the internet through one People's Network computer. It has 47 active users, with a cost of £210 per active user. Weston library does have access to the library management system, and from this we can see that half of the active users also regularly use Macclesfield or other nearby libraries. Weston library is located two miles from Macclesfield library, again with regular public transport from the estate to Macclesfield town centre. The closure of the library would not affect the current operation of the Community Centre.
- 10.5 The average cost per active user across all Cheshire East libraries is £53. This must reduce to less than £40 to deliver the expected budget savings.
- 10.6 The Cheshire East Libraries Strategy, approved by Cabinet in August 2012, defines the objectives for our libraries:
- Improve literacy
 - Support informal learning
 - Enable digital inclusion
 - Provide information
 - Promote libraries as community anchors
- 10.7 Hurdsfield and Weston libraries promote literacy by providing access to books, but are unable to run any reader development activities or other informal learning activities due to the limited space available within each library. Weston library supports digital inclusion by providing one computer, but usage is very low and IT Buddy training sessions are not possible due to the space available. Neither library are able to accommodate a Customer Service Point or provide or host activities and events for the community, although Hurdsfield is taken over by a rhyme time session for half an hour on a Monday afternoon and community activities are provided from the adjacent Community Centre in Weston.
- 10.8 A customer consultation was run during January and February on the proposal to close Hurdsfield and Weston libraries. The questionnaire was available online or in person from one of the libraries in Macclesfield. 61 responses were received to the consultation questionnaire
- 26 responses were received from users of Hurdsfield library; 27 responses were received from users of Weston library; 8 responses were received from people that used neither library;
 - 34% of respondents used the library at least once a week; 46% used the library at least once a month;
 - 23% also used another library;
 - When asked how the closure of the library would affect them, the almost universal response was loss of access to books;
 - Although the questionnaire did not specifically ask for age, 17 respondents revealed that they were elderly with mobility issues and so would struggle to access the central Macclesfield library.

- A petition from Weston residents with 152 signatures and a petition from Hurdsfield residents with 48 signatures were also received.

All responses to the consultation have been made available to the Portfolio Holder.

10.9 It is proposed that Hurdsfield and Weston libraries are closed for the following reasons:

- Demand for library services within these communities is very low and the cost of continuing to provide the library is disproportionate compared to the cost per active borrower in other communities.
- These libraries are unable to fulfil the objectives defined in the Libraries strategy due to the limited space available.
- Library provision in Macclesfield, where we provide these satellite libraries in addition to the main central library, is inequitable with other Cheshire East communities.

10.10 To help mitigate the impact of closing these libraries, which is primarily loss of access to books, we are exploring the following options:

- Hurdsfield Children's Centre has indicated that it would be prepared to host a collection of adult and children's stock in an informal community 'book swap' scheme.
- We are investigating the possibility of hosting a 'book swap' collection in the foyer of Weston Community Centre which would be available on the days when the hall was being accessed.
- We are also in discussions with Broken Cross Children's Centre over hosting a collection of children's stock.
- A Librarian that has been spending time at Weston library has invited customers on a tour of Macclesfield as some Weston customers have expressed a fear of using the main library and the self service terminals. The staff member has offered to introduce them to staff, and show them around, and offer support and explain the services on offer.
- We will also contact the 17 customers that indicated they had mobility issues to establish whether they would be interested in the Books on Wheels service for house bound customers.

10.11 Peaks and Plains Housing Trust, working in partnership with the Hurdsfield Community Centre Group, have expressed an interest in transferring the Hurdsfield library building into the ownership of Peaks and Plains. The intention is to develop a community space which will incorporate all of the buildings in that block (the rest of which is already under the ownership of the Trust). Discussions on this proposal will continue.

10.12 If the proposal to close Hurdsfield and Weston libraries is approved the libraries will close during June 2013 to allow sufficient time for community book swap schemes to be established and to enable effective communication of the changes to customers that only visit the library once a month.

11.0 Access to Information

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

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