

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

## **Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

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**Date of Meeting:** 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015  
**Report of:** Principal Manager Local Community Services  
**Subject/Title:** Sustainable Libraries Strategy Progress Update

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### **1.0 Report Summary**

- 1.1 The Council recognises the valuable role that our libraries play in their communities and is committed to retaining its libraries. It has the ambition to broaden the role of our libraries and develop community hubs that appeal to a wider audience and buck the national trend of declining library usage.
- 1.2 A new Sustainable Libraries Strategy was approved by Cabinet in April 2014, including priorities for action. Good progress is being made against the priorities for action, and the service has delivered £700k efficiency savings to date.

### **2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee endorses this progress update.

### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 Good progress is being made against the priorities for action and budgeted financial savings.

### **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 All wards

### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1 Not applicable

### **6.0 Policy Implications**

- 6.1 Our libraries directly contribute to outcome 1 and outcome 3 in the Council's Three Year Plan.

### **7.0 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The Libraries strategy supports the delivery of the financial savings of the major change project to deliver a sustainable library service in Cheshire East.

### **8.0 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 There are no legal implications from this progress update.

## 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 closing libraries. Thorough consultation and equality impact assessments of any proposals affecting individual libraries will mitigate the risk of reputational damage.

## 10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 The Council published its Three Year Plan in February 2013, setting a clear strategic direction for the authority and identifying key outcomes to improve the quality of life of local people. The Plan established major projects to focus energy and resources on areas of change which will ensure maximum value for money and build a sustainable Council for the future. This included a project to develop a new model for sustainable library services and community hubs, setting an efficiency challenge of £1m against the budget for libraries of £3.5m by 2015/16. A capital programme was established to enable investment in the service to ensure sustainability.
- 10.2 The efficiency challenge was the catalyst for a comprehensive review of the service and the long established traditional ways of working. The role of libraries in communities is evolving, but they would not exist without their traditional purpose of lending books. Our challenge was to develop a service that balances the expectations of traditional library users with the expectations of residents that visit us to seek help with finding a job, get information on benefits, develop digital skills, or participate in community activities.
- 10.3 A Libraries survey was commissioned to ensure we developed a sustainable service that met the expectations of local people. More than 7,500 residents responded to the survey, with 95% saying that they were satisfied with the library service, and a majority describing their library as very good. They told us that the service they value is a traditional one, with an emphasis on borrowing books and the changes they desire tend to be enhancements or modernisations of the current offer: Wi-Fi, eBooks, and better zoning to allow for quiet study and noisy children in the same building.
- 10.4 The service worked with Members through the Communities Policy Development Group to review the survey findings and develop proposals, resulting in the development of the Sustainable Libraries Strategy, approved by Cabinet in April 2014. The strategy set out the service priorities, and included priorities for action that are provided below, along with a progress update.

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduce free Wi-Fi for library members across all libraries</b>
A procurement process is under way to identify a solution that provides free Wi-Fi access to library members and also provides the facility to use the library's public printers. The solution is expected to be implemented by April 2015.	

<b>2.</b>	<b>Review our layouts to provide better zoning and more seating for both study and relaxation purposes and confidential meeting space</b>
A Library Design specialist has been engaged to review the layouts in five of our libraries. These designs will feed into reconfiguration and refurbishment plans to be implemented during 2015 and 2016. Work is already under way at Congleton, Nantwich, Poynton and Sandbach libraries to implement changes. Work will begin on the remaining libraries during 2015.	
<b>3.</b>	<b>Review reference collections offered in libraries</b>
A core reference stock list has been agreed, and weeding of surplus stock is in progress. Higher value surplus stock is being sold on eBay to generate income for the service. Additional digital reference resources are being explored.	
<b>4.</b>	<b>Review and modernise our local studies offer to engage more library users to learn about the history of their community</b>
Libraries are reviewing and weeding existing local studies collections with support from the Cheshire Record Office to ensure they are relevant to the local area. We have received support from volunteers in some of our libraries to help catalogue old photographs that have been donated to us over the years. We are exploring options to digitise our collections and make them accessible online rather than available only in our physical libraries. We have also started to improve and modernise the display of our local studies collections with the aim of engaging more users. For example, the reconfiguration at Sandbach will result in a display of the local transport heritage in Sandbach with the replica Foden's Steam Engine as the central feature.	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Implement pilot community hub at Nantwich library to include the Citizen's Advice Bureau</b>
Work is under way at Nantwich library to refurbish and reconfigure the space to include confidential meeting spaces that will be used by the CAB and available for other community partners. The CAB will move into the library in April 2015.	
<b>6.</b>	<b>Develop partnerships with local cafes to make it easier for library users to enjoy a coffee and cake while using the library</b>
Conversations with local cafes are ongoing in a number of locations. Some libraries are exploring options for easy to use vending machines where there are no cafes or willing partners within the immediate locality of the library.	
<b>7.</b>	<b>Improve promotion of our libraries within their local communities to reflect local priorities</b>
Libraries are making greater use of social media to engage with local communities, with each library having its own Facebook page so that residents can find out what is going on at their local library. We are making more connections with local partners, and doing more things locally to promote the library such as leafleting a new housing estate that has been built near Bollington library, membership drives at local supermarkets, and contributing to parish newsletters.	
<b>8.</b>	<b>Procure a new mobile library vehicle</b>

The procurement of the new mobile library vehicle has been completed. It is expected to be ready for service following fit out in April 2015.	
<b>9.</b>	<b>Re-align book fund expenditure in line with comparator authorities</b>
The book fund has been reviewed and reduced to contribute to the efficiency savings. We have received no direct negative feedback from customers. We are seeing a small reduction in overall numbers of issues, but this reduction is consistent with the last few years and is more likely to reflect the national trend in declining issues as a result of changing reading habits and the increase in online material. The latest CIPFA Public Library Statistics for 2013-14 reported that Cheshire East had the second highest issues per 1,000 population out of all library authorities.	
<b>10.</b>	<b>Introduce eBooks to Cheshire East libraries</b>
A 'soft launch' of eBooks took place in June 2014 to enable us to better understand demand and resolve any usability issues. More titles are being purchased, and the service will be more widely promoted during 2015.	
<b>11.</b>	<b>Review evening opening hours</b>
A review of visitor numbers comparing daytime and evening opening hours was undertaken and confirmed that demand during the evenings remains strong and so no changes were introduced.	
<b>12.</b>	<b>Implement new library management system</b>
The new library management system has been procured and will be implemented in February 2015. The new system will be more intuitive and easier to use, particularly from mobile devices for both customers and staff while browsing or working in the library.	
<b>13.</b>	<b>Introduce chip and pin payments to self-service machines</b>
This will be progressed during 2015 as it is dependent on the implementation of the new library management system.	
<b>14.</b>	<b>Seek opportunities for grants and sponsorship to support the funding of our libraries</b>
Our library teams are continuously looking for opportunities for external funding, and some examples from the last year include funding from the Tinder Foundation to help people get online, from the Home Office to increase the number of young people who volunteer for the Summer Reading Challenge, and from a local supermarket to support junior activities at their local library.	

- 10.5 The strategy also describes our ambition to extend our work with community partners to help them connect with residents and communities, recognising the role our libraries play as the 'department store' or 'market place' for information. The creation of confidential meeting space is recognised as a requirement for many partners, and our reconfiguration plans at many of our libraries will address this need.

- The Cheshire Neighbours Credit Union now have a presence in eight of our libraries to recruit new members, and recently signed up two new members in the library who each contributed £10,000 to the union.
- We have begun to host new job clubs in Macclesfield and Crewe libraries.
- Several organisations have started to use our libraries in the last year to engage with local residents, including Silverline, Cheshire Carers, Alzheimer's Society, Marie Curie, Dove Bereavement Counselling, Cheshire Community Agents, the Beanstalk Charity, St Luke's Hospice Befriending Service, the Ramblers, and the National Trust.

10.6 The flexibility and adaptability of our library staff has been critical in delivering the efficiency challenge while continuing to meet the expectations of our customers. Their roles have changed considerably from that of a traditional librarian and they now may be asked to help run a Job Club, deliver children's activities, respond to enquiries about housing benefit, or support a user get online. They may even get asked to recommend a good book. The impact of increased customer self-service, simplified stock procedures and greater staff flexibility enabled us to review our staffing levels whilst continuing to support our customers with greatest need. We have also reviewed our management structures and specialist librarian roles, empowering local libraries to provide a service that is relevant to their local community. We also seek to use volunteers where appropriate alongside our staff to support us in delivering activities and events.

10.7 The service has delivered £700k of the efficiency target to date, with the remaining £300k to be delivered for the 2015/16 budget year, and we are exploring a range of opportunities to achieve this.

10.8 We also set ourselves the goal of bucking the national trend of declining library usage. We have now installed people counters in all of our libraries to accurately measure the number of visitors to our libraries. We will set the baseline this year and then aim to increase visitors from next year. We have already received more than one million visitors through our doors since April 2014.

## **11.0 Access to Information**

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

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