

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016  
**Report of:** Principal Manager Local Community Services  
**Subject/Title:** Developing a sustainable Libraries service

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### 1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 In 2013 the Council set its Library service the challenge of making £1m annual savings by 2016 while also setting the ambition to buck the national trend of declining library usage and develop community hubs that appealed to a wider audience.
- 1.2 The service set out how it would respond to the challenge in its Sustainable Libraries Strategy in April 2014. This report provides an update on progress in implementing that strategy.

### 2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee endorses this progress update.

### 3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Library service has met the challenge it was set. The £1m annual savings have been made and we are bucking the national trend for libraries, with visitor numbers increasing in Cheshire East libraries.

### 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 Corporate Plan 2016-20.

### 7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications from this progress update.

### 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 libraries strategy in April 2014. The Sustainable Libraries Strategy set out how the service would:

- Fulfil the Council's statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service;
- Meet the challenge of making £1m annual savings by 2016;
- 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

- 10.2 The Council recognises the valuable role that libraries play in our communities and is committed to them, but expectations of libraries have evolved. We want to ensure our libraries are well used, are efficient and well run, give good value for money, help individuals develop the life skills and education they need to thrive, and help communities become strong and supportive. We want our libraries to appeal to wider audiences, but we recognise that libraries would not exist without their traditional purpose of lending books, and so our challenge is to balance the traditional role of the library with modern demands and expectations such as help with finding a job, or getting information on benefits, or developing digital skills, or participating in community activities.

- 10.3 The service successfully met the challenge of making £1m annual savings by 2016. Alongside these savings, improvements to the service have also been made to ensure the service, the buildings and the infrastructure are fit for purpose and sustainable.

- We have introduced e-books and free Wi-Fi, and upgraded the software and hardware for the public access computers that make up the People's Network. We have also implemented a new library management system.
- We have refurbished and changed the layout of some libraries, and improved toilet facilities at some libraries. Further improvements are planned at other libraries later this year.
- We have purchased a new Mobile Library Vehicle, replacing three very old vehicles that were unreliable and regularly breaking down. In redesigning the routes we used route mapping software designed for transport logistic businesses to map our new routes to maximise the distance that the new one vehicle could cover.
- We have opened a new library within the Crewe Lifestyle Centre, built a new joint entrance to the library and Civic Hall in Poynton, and have welcomed the Citizens Advice Bureau into Nantwich Library.
- We have established community helpdesks for a wide range of partners to engage with local residents in their local library, including Age UK,

Alzheimer's Society, Cheshire Police, Credit Union, Cheshire Advocacy, Lifelinks, Macmillan Cancer Support, U3A, and Wishing Well.

- We have reduced our spending on books but developed a new stock policy and procedure to ensure we make the best use of fewer books across the network, recycling them and re-using them across multiple libraries.
- We have introduced a range of activities across our libraries to broaden our appeal, including Rhyme times, Lego Clubs, Coding Clubs, Work Clubs, Author Visits, IT Buddy sessions, and Tea & Story Sessions.

- 10.4 In 2013 our libraries were successful – we had high book issues, we had lots of children participating in the annual summer reading challenge, and we had 95% customer satisfaction with the service, but visitor numbers were declining.
- 10.5 In 2016, we have bucked the national trend and visitor numbers are increasing again. We have received 50,000 more visitors through the doors of our libraries in the first six months of 2016/17 compared with the same period last year. We have the highest book issues per 1,000 population of all Unitary authorities. We have the highest number of children participating in the Summer Reading Challenge across the North West. We have also seen 37 people that attended the Work Club at Crewe library within the last 12 months gain full time employment.
- 10.6 Critical to the success of our libraries are our colleagues across the service. We made it clear through the Sustainable Libraries Strategy what our ambition and goals were; we also made it clear that the expectations on our staff would change; we needed them to be flexible, adaptable, and creative – it was no longer all about the books. This gave our staff some certainty and also a clear sense of purpose to get behind and the opportunity to build something sustainable. Some colleagues chose to leave us at the outset and some have chosen to leave us along the way, and that is fine. I am very clear that our libraries would not be the welcoming, inclusive and thriving places that they are without the energy and commitment of the great teams that run them on a day to day basis.
- 10.7 Looking to the future, the Library service faces the same financial pressure as the Council as a whole, but in addition some of the traditional sources of income for the service are in decline. Income from the rental of DVDs, CDs and Games has been declining for several years as digital streaming becomes more popular. We have also made it easier for customers to avoid fines by introducing online renewals and email reminders. This drop in income means that the service must continue to look at opportunities to either increase its income or find ways to further reduce costs.
- 10.8 A new Library Survey has been conducted in 2016 to help us understand what customers think of the changes that we have made and to inform our Libraries Strategy for the next few years. The draft survey report is provided as an appendix to this report. Library members' satisfaction with the service has remained at 95% - this is an extremely high satisfaction for any service.

- 10.9 We plan to review and refresh the Libraries Strategy by April 2017 and will set out how the service will continue to develop and evolve to meet customer expectations while responding to the growing financial pressure.

## **11.0 Access to Information**

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

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