
Meeting: Executive

Date: 27 March 2012

Subject: Central Bedfordshire Council Library Service Strategy

Report of: Cllr Spurr, Executive Member Sustainable Communities - Services

Summary: The report provides an update on the Library Service Review outcomes, including the public consultation findings and presents the Library Service Strategy for endorsement.

Advising Officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities

Contact Officer: Kate McFarlane, Head of Community Regeneration and Adult Skills

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Executive

Key Decision No

Reason for urgency/ Not Applicable
exemption from call-in
(if appropriate)

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. The vision of the Sustainable Communities Strategy is “To ensure Central Bedfordshire is Globally Connected, Delivering Sustainable Growth to ensure a Green, Prosperous and Ambitious Place for the Benefit of All”.
2. The Strategy will be delivered through two underpinning key themes of creating the conditions for economic success and community prosperity and raising standards and tackling inequality in order to deliver 26,000 new homes and 27,000 new jobs by 2026. The libraries service supports this agenda and the emerging political priorities for the medium term by:
 - Offering value for money through the reduction in back office costs
 - Providing a high quality, universal service
 - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire as a place, with libraries being at the heart of communities

Financial:

3. The library service net expenditure budget for 2012/13 is £2.84M.
4. By the end of March 2012 the library service will have delivered £310,000 of efficiency savings. A further efficiency saving target of £245,000 has been set for the period 2012/13 – 2013/14. These savings will be delivered by firstly investing in radio-frequency identification (RFID) self service technology in all libraries, which will enable customers to serve themselves and improve stock flow around the service. This will deliver staff savings of £70,000 and further savings of just over £150,000 will be delivered through a service wide staffing review and staffing re-alignment. The remaining savings will come from a reduction in running costs such as printing and stationery costs.
5. In addition to revenue budgets, £850,000 of capital is proposed to be invested over the next two years to modernise the service. £450,000 is earmarked for introducing RFID with a further £400,000 to modernise buildings to improve facilities and equipment and to pilot one or two library access points in communities not currently served by a local library.
6. To support the service transformation a fixed term project manager post will be appointed for the next two years.
7. Implementing the Library Service Strategy will primarily be through the service budgets. Users have expressed preferences for the type and level of service for the next 15 years through consultation. These preferences will need to be considered in each update of the respective Medium Term Financial Plans over the ensuing period.
8. The reduction in funding will result in a library service budget of £2.8M in 2013/14, subject to any further required efficiency savings. The largest areas of spend are £300,000 on stock, £425,000 on the online virtual library and library management system with staffing accounting for approximately £1.6M subject to the staffing review. The investment in stock is comparable with Bedford Borough and Luton with whom the stock resource is shared.
9. Total spend on libraries in Central Bedfordshire at £12,837 per thousand population compares very well to the 2011 actual average spend by all English library authorities £16,176¹.

Legal:

10. Central Bedfordshire Council has a legal duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” service under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. Legal challenges may be enacted if the council fails in its duty to provide such a service. The Library Service Strategy will ensure that the Council continues to comply with its statutory duty.

Risk Management:

11. Proposed service re-modelling of this kind provides key risks to the Council. The risks outlined below will be mitigated through close management of the implementation of the strategy:

¹ CIPFA figures 2011

- (a) Reputation and customer satisfaction: Any changes to services if not communicated effectively to stakeholders and customers can result in a reduction in customer satisfaction and loss of support for the service
- (b) Shared Services: The ability to maximise efficiency savings in the shared back office requires agreement and co-operation with Bedford Borough Council and Luton Cultural Trust
- (c) Risk of doing nothing: Would lead to a salami slicing of services which could result in reduction in opening hours and increasing pressure to close libraries
- (d) Risk of the Council failing to discharge its statutory duty under the terms of the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act
- (e) Risk of failure to deliver the priorities and vision identified in the Library Service Strategy
- (f) Risk of failure to deliver the required efficiency savings

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

- 12. In order to deliver the Library Strategy and efficiency savings targets there are significant staffing implications, notably the need to reconfigure the staffing structure across the Service and to reduce the number of overall posts. In these circumstances the Council is required to undertake consultation with our recognised Trade Unions and affected employees and will be taken forward in accordance with Central Bedfordshire Council's Managing Change policy.
- 13. In order to provide a high level of HR support through this period of change additional HR capacity and support will be required.

Equalities/Human Rights:

- 14. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 15. A comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment has been completed that has taken into account recent judgements following a number of judicial reviews where Local Authorities have made decisions to close public libraries. Detail on the community engagement and public consultation outcomes are outlined in the report. In undertaking the Library Services Review the findings from the Local Economic Assessment equalities considerations and target groups have been considered alongside mosaic mapping of residents who use and do not use library services.

16. Those groups less likely to be engaging with library services are people living in social accommodation designed for older people, less mobile people, people living in brand new residential developments and mixed communities with a large number of single people in the centre of small towns. Children aged 0-14yrs are much more likely to be users than average, along with Mosaic groups of industrial workers, higher income families concerned with education and careers and early and middle aged parents likely to be involved in their children's education. 65% of library users are female.
17. By focusing on internal efficiencies, avoiding closures and prioritising themes such as access, skills, tailoring services and engagement the priorities contained within the Library Strategy approach will help to increase equality of opportunity for vulnerable groups across Central Bedfordshire.

Public Health:

18. Libraries are safe environments located in the heart of communities and are well placed to support and promote health and well being of local residents through both the resources and range of activities available within libraries.

Community Safety:

19. Libraries are seen as safe environments for all ages and a hub for community activities and information. Libraries offer the opportunity for people to learn, improve their skills and increase their life and employment opportunities. These are all factors identified as having a significant impact on deterring young people from becoming involved in crime and anti social behaviour, and in helping offenders make choices that take them away from criminal activity.
20. Libraries also offer the opportunity for the more vulnerable in our communities to seek help and assistance through a recognised and safe establishment. That help may come through the information available, through contact with library staff or simply having a safe place to be. The potential to share library buildings with other local services also provides the opportunity to give people greater access to support, some of which may support an increase in peoples sense of being safe.
21. The Council has a statutory duty to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area, and developing its Library Services Strategy, particularly in relation to its priority around young people by working with partners such as Youth Offending Services, Integrated Youth Support Services and Community Safety Teams, will help to fulfil this duty.

Procurement:

22. Procurement of RFID self service technology will be a priority in 2012/13. Additional procurement activity may be required for minor capital works to existing buildings and in the purchase of new equipment.

Sustainability:

23. The Library Service Strategy provides a clear over-arching framework for a sustainable future service. The strategy confirms a continued and enhanced local, easy to access service for residents through a network of libraries and Library Access Points ensuring residents do not have to make considerably longer journeys. With libraries increasingly becoming community hubs for other services and activities there is the potential to further reduce overall car usage.
24. The strategy seeks to further develop the online, 24/7 virtual library as a way of expanding the service whilst supporting the UK's legally binding target to reduce CO2 emissions by 80% by 2050. The opportunity to re-develop libraries with town centre re-developments provides an opportunity to move into new or re-modelled more energy efficient buildings.

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments:

25. The outcomes from the Library Service Review, public consultation results and draft Library Service Strategy have been considered at the 6 March 2012 Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Executive is asked to:

- 1. Approve the Library Service Strategy and library road maps as the direction for the service for the next 15 years.**

Reason for Recommendation(s): So that Central Bedfordshire Council can effectively discharge its statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act and in doing so offer value for money, support the delivery of the Sustainable Communities Strategy and our ambitions for Central Bedfordshire.

Executive Summary

26. The Library Service Strategy affirms the Council’s commitment to keep our libraries open whilst delivering over £555,000 of efficiency savings. The Library Service in Central Bedfordshire is a high performing service which currently supports 12 libraries, a Library Access Point at Arlesey, the Library Link service to housebound customers and the online virtual library.
27. The Strategy outlines how the Council will go about involving local people in making decisions about their library, how the service will be more accessible to increase usage of the library network and help children, young people and adults to improve skills and learn. It also recognises that to do this we will need to modernise our service, find new ways to provide better services and deliver efficiencies by investing in technology.

28. Extensive market research has been undertaken through the Big Library Debate and public consultation through the Libraries for the Future Consultation with over 4,400 responses received from members of the public. This has successfully raised the profile of Central Bedfordshire libraries.
29. The Library Strategy contains five over-arching priorities, is underpinned with specific actions and supported by individual library road maps outlining future opportunities and areas of development for each library and service area. The Council recognises that whilst there will be a core service not all libraries will be the same in the future and will evolve to better meet the needs of local communities.
30. The strategy will be reviewed in 2015/16 and has set ambitious targets for the library service to increase usage by 20% and maintain customer satisfaction at 93% by 2015/16.

Library Service Strategy

31. The Library Service Strategy attached at Appendix A has been informed by a comprehensive library service review and full public consultation. The strategy outlines the direction of travel for the Library Service for the next 15 years and is built on the vision to deliver a “vibrant, high quality, relevant and sustainable library service for the people of Central Bedfordshire for the 21st Century”.
32. The vision is under-pinned by five priorities, each of which is supported by a number of specific actions outlined below:
 - (a) Involving local people in making decisions about their library:
 - (i) support and encourage people to get involved in the delivery of library services
 - (ii) Ensure people have opportunities to tell us what they think about the service
 - (b) Be accessible when, where, and how people want:
 - (i) keep our libraries open and find new places and ways to offer services
 - (ii) provide better services for people who find it hard to get to a library or to use a library
 - (iii) Improve the online ‘virtual library’ which can be accessed at any time
 - (iv) be better at telling people what the library offers
 - (c) Help children, young people and adults to improve skills:
 - (i) to read and to enjoy reading
 - (ii) to develop skills that will help them get a job

- (iii) to use the latest information technology
- (d) Modernise the service and find new ways to provide better services and save money:
 - (i) ensure the service is run efficiently and provides value for money
 - (ii) use new technology like self service and e-books
 - (iii) share library buildings to provide other services that people want locally
 - (iv) look for opportunities to create modern libraries when town centres are being re-developed
- (e) Deliver a tailored service to local people:
 - (i) provide individual plans for the development of each library and service

33. **Service Actions**

The specific actions arising from the strategy are that:

- (a) Central Bedfordshire Council will not be closing any libraries, we value our libraries and want to maximise the use of our library assets
- (b) We will invest £850,000 of capital in libraries over the next two years to support the implementation of RFID self service technology, modernising buildings, equipment and piloting library access points in rural communities
- (c) We will maintain a paid workforce to deliver the core service but look to increase the use of volunteers to increase the availability of activities within libraries and outreach into communities
- (d) We will better promote what the service delivers and look to maximise e-communications as a key tool to achieve this
- (e) We will look at opportunities to re-locate libraries as part of large town centre re-developments. We will also explore options as they arise for other services to be delivered from libraries and library services to be co-located in other locations
- (f) We recognise that not all libraries are the same across Central Bedfordshire and seek to locally tailor library services to the needs of local communities
- (g) We will further develop the virtual, online library and continue to increase the interactive functions to enable a greater personalisation of activities
- (h) We will maintain a high quality service for housebound users but will look to find less costly ways of delivering the service

34. The strategy will be reviewed in 2015/16 and has set ambitious targets for the library service to increase usage by 20% by 2015/16 and maintain customer satisfaction at 93%.
35. Supporting the strategy is a road map for each library which summarises the feedback of local residents, considers equality implications, where we can improve our offer and future opportunities to deliver the strategy. These can be found at Appendix B.

Library Service Review

36. Like many services across the country the library service in Central Bedfordshire faces the significant challenge of delivering efficiencies whilst ensuring services better meet the needs of existing and future customers. These twin challenges prompted the need for the service wide review which commenced in summer 2011. The aims of the review were to ensure:
 - (a) we deliver our statutory duties whilst providing a high quality service in the most effective manner, in order to meet local needs
 - (b) make the best use of assets and increase their impact for the benefit of all
 - (c) that the service is flexible, adaptable and fit for the future
 - (d) that the service is accessible to all, supports the most vulnerable and individuals as required throughout their lives
37. The review has successfully delivered the above aims through five broad inter-related strands of work outlined below. Further detail on each area is available at Appendix C.
 - (a) Market research through 'The Big Library Debate' conducted over the summer of 2011 enabled the Council to better understand what residents and stakeholders liked about the service, thought could be improved and what we ought to start or stop doing in the future. Over 2,000 contributed to the Big Library Debate
 - (b) Information gathering and needs analysis in order to understand which residents are using the service, who is not accessing libraries, how the levels of satisfaction, usage and value for money compare with other library authorities
 - (c) Review of best practice and options for future service delivery recognising that library authorities across the county are undertaking similar exercises and we can learn from those experiences in order to shape what is appropriate for the Central Bedfordshire library service
 - (d) 'Libraries for the Future' public consultation which ran from October 2011 – January 2012 and tested thinking on over-arching ambitions and directions for the service whilst giving people an opportunity to tell us what they wanted their local library to be like. 2,200 people responded to the formal consultation

- (e) Review of systems, processes and staffing to identify how efficiencies can be best delivered through improved business systems and capital investment in technology and staffing best deployed to deliver the library strategy priorities

Appendices:

Appendix A - Library Service Strategy

Appendix B – Library and Service Road Maps

Appendix C – Summary of Work Stream Activity

Background Papers:

All papers relating to the Library Services Review can be found online at <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/default.aspx>

These include:

- Consultation Documentation
- Big Library Debate Executive Summary Report
- Libraries for the Future Executive Summary Report
- Library Services Review Summary Report
- Equality Impact Assessment