



Communities Select Committee
20 March 2014

The vision for Surrey Libraries

Purpose of the report: Policy Development and Review

The publication of the Arts Council England (ACE) reports “Envisioning the library of the future” and “Great Art and Culture for everyone”, and the forthcoming Department for Culture, Media and Sport report on the structure and role of English public libraries provide opportunities to explore the vision for Surrey libraries now and in the future.

The purpose of the report is to seek Member’s views on the proposed future vision for Surrey libraries and to seek a steer from Members on prioritisation of library activities in the context of reducing budgets.

1. Introduction:

1. The publication of the Arts Council England (ACE) reports “Envisioning the library of the future” and “Great Art and Culture for everyone” provides an opportunity to explore the vision for Surrey libraries now and in the future, and set priorities.
 - 1.1. The Arts Council “Envisioning the library of the future” identifies the essential elements that should define a successful public library service as having:
 - A safe, creative community space that is enjoyable and easy to use, in both physical and virtual form
 - An excellent range of quality books, digital resources and other content
 - Well-trained, friendly people to help users find out what they want either independently or with support.
 Their four priorities for public libraries for the future are:
 - Placing the library as the hub of a community
 - Making the most of digital technology and creative media
 - Ensuring that libraries are resilient and sustainable
 - Delivering the right skills for those who work in libraries
 - 1.2. In 2013 ACE updated its ten year strategic framework 2010-2020 “Great Art and Culture for everyone” The framework has a series of goals in which libraries can have a role including
 - Wanting arts and culture to thrive and be excellent
 - Wanting as many people as possible to be stimulated by arts and culture wherever they are

- Exposing children and young people to culture as audiences or potential performers

- 1.3. The framework also looks to having models of provision which are resilient, and leadership and workforces in the arts and culture which reflect the population and are truly diverse.
- 1.4. Libraries are seen as potential centres of excellence that are accessible to all and connected to the rest of the local arts and cultural infrastructure. The report proposes re-thinking the way in which library spaces are designed and used with a particular focus on encouraging artistic and cultural activity.
- 1.5. Two of the strengths of the current Surrey library service are its excellent quality of bookstock and online resources. Online resources continue to expand, most recently with the Zinnio magazine subscription, and with free access to academic research papers available in libraries as part of a national scheme. Surrey has been in the forefront in library services of presenting an e-book offer and works at national level with the publishing industry and other national bodies to improve the availability of ebooks for libraries to loan.
- 1.6. Availability of access to IT for the general public is also socially relevant and can be critical for people without their own access, as access to services are exponentially moved online including the hugely important change of Universal Credit. While libraries are involved in a number of working groups within Surrey County Council (SCC) and with external partners looking at how libraries can help people access the IT and the skills they need to claim benefits and access other services only available on line.

2. The Surrey library as “heart of the community”

- 2.1. Surrey libraries are a trusted ‘brand’ and have a respected place in the communities they serve.
- 2.2. Books and information will always remain at the heart of the Surrey public library function, the core purpose of libraries being to give people the experience of the pleasure of reading and knowledge, and reading remains one of the great cultural experiences.
- 2.3. However it is clear that there are changes in demographics and lifestyles. A larger number of people are living longer, both those who remain well and those with particular needs, more people are living alone, and the contribution of libraries to community cohesion and health and well being can be further developed. Part of the debate is how smaller community libraries can and should provide or host recreational activities, provide access to support, and opportunity for social contact, some of it perhaps more in the future through shared cultural experiences and participation.
- 2.4. The community partnered libraries (CPLs) and community links are continuing to develop their approaches to being at the heart of their communities. Bagshot is now successfully operating as the 7th CPL, and Virginia Water has re-opened in the refurbished and enlarged library providing an attractive and flexible space which provides both the library and space for meetings, learning activities and small scale cultural activities. Progress is being made on the building works at Ewell Court and Bramley as precursors to hand over.

- 2.5. Activities at the current CPLs which are pushing involvement with the community in these libraries forward include :- Byfleet and Warlingham looking at working with local care homes:- Tattenhams having a regular events programme including Knit and Natter, OAP's teas, Rhymetime, Storytime, local history talks, craft demonstrations and helping a local school improve literacy. These activities and others, like Stoneleigh's successful Age UK silver surfer sessions, are expanding across the CPLs and SCC managed libraries.
- 2.6. Shere, the first community link- a small collection of books in a community building run by local volunteers with books provided by the library service has 170 members and has begun storytimes. Beare Green is piloting a new IT based book issuing system for very small libraries, and has begun a knitting circle. These small community led book collections act as a focus for starting community activities. Work is moving forward on a collection in Old Woking.
- 2.7. For both CPLs and SCC managed libraries there appears to be a key role in the future for libraries as a community space. Against a background of economic, social and technological change, libraries can support communities by making our spaces as flexible as possible, offering or hosting or signposting an increasingly wide range of public services, and helping people to acquire new knowledge and skills, through volunteering or free accessible learning. This direction recognises the library's role in socio-economic issues such as; focussing on areas of the county which may have greater need, promoting public health, addressing the digital divide, and supporting an increasingly diverse society.
- 2.8. Health and well being in communities is also a key role for libraries. In 2013 the Surrey library service won the 2013 CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award for its work on domestic abuse. A range of high quality talks, events and workshops is now part of the events programme, covering diverse topics such as self-help, therapies, survivor experiences, bereavement, dementia and inclusive sports taster sessions for people with learning difficulties – all in libraries.

3. The Surrey library as “destination” and “cultural space”

- 3.1. The full impact of on-line shopping is yet to be fully realised but clearly it will have an impact on the high street – and their function may progressively change from retail to leisure / lifestyle. Given the right level of investment, and creative use of space, the importance of the larger libraries as a destination and focal point in the town has the potential to increase, and can be helped to increase by continuing to develop the cultural programme. It is already known that by attracting footfall libraries help sustain retail, but in the future this dynamic may subtly change with a post-digital transformation of the High Street into the centre for leisure and social facilities and the library a key destination for a whole range of activities.
- 3.2. The library service already has a high profile literary events programme, children's festival and book award. In new libraries, and those which have been refurbished such as Dorking and Woking, the service has been able to create large flexible spaces for at present mainly literary events and talks. These have been very well received but there is great potential to develop a cafe culture, art and craft exhibition and display spaces, and cultural “challenges”- displays and events aimed at library users who would not necessarily engage. The high quality literary events programme provides

opportunities locally to see and hear people like the crime writer Peter James, the novelist Salley Vickers, presenter Nicholas Owen and impresario Simon Parkes. Within the latest programme March-July 2014, the library service has arranged for significant authors to take part in the Banstead, Caterham and Guildford festivals as part of developing links with local festivals.

- 3.3. Working with local cultural partners would be key to this, along with organisations such as the Arts Council. Currently the library service is planning a major bid to the Arts Council for a series of linked cultural events around World War 1. Exploiting digital technology such as live streaming, events in these larger libraries could be simultaneously streamed to audiences in smaller libraries across the network.
- 3.4. A key role for larger libraries could be library as a cultural space - supporting the Surrey cultural economy and helping people to explore, develop and express their creativity, by working with partners, offering space for showcase events and innovation, and hosting a wider range of cultural experiences. This would help enhance Surrey's reputation as an area of creativity and innovation, and the library service's role as part of SCC's family of cultural services. The library service provides a range of business information and has been working hard to extend knowledge of this in the business community by attending business breakfasts, seminars and workshops across Surrey and through this can support the growth of the cultural economy.
- 3.5. In this goal it is critical that main libraries retain or achieve wherever possible highly visible High Street locations with attractive and modern interiors with flexible spaces and that interior design is refreshed to make new use of spaces for cultural events. In some towns, libraries are well placed in potential "cultural quarters" which could be developed, in others links and synergy could be developed.

4. How would we achieve the ACE goals through these two key roles for libraries?

4.1. Advocacy

The library service will prioritise developing its local cultural contacts, involvement in local cultural events and national events reflected in Surrey programmes, and extend its current literary programme to include other art forms. It will continue its current project to make the Performing Arts Library more well known and accessible

4.2. Income

The library service will pursue a greater mix of revenue and funding from various sources for resources to put on excellent events and cultural programmes.

4.3. Buildings

The library service will work with Property to ensure library buildings are highly visible and well placed and will seek over time to continue to refresh and update libraries to meet changing needs and cultural objectives. The network needs to retain physical libraries which are fit to meet changing needs. The interiors will be changed as resources allow, to include flexible spaces that support and encourage creativity, collaboration, and social connection. We will maintain appropriate and flexible opening hours for these

buildings, including virtual access to services, exploiting technology wherever possible.

4.4. **Events**

The library service will work to ensure an enjoyable and relevant range of services and events that meet the community's changing expectations, supporting community cohesion and encouraging creative development. The service will work towards seamless integration of core libraries, community partnered libraries and community links in this aspiration.

4.5. **Engagement**

The service will continue to develop its early work on developing relationships and channels which will give local communities and individuals a greater say in their library services, from involvement in the choice of stock to an active part in developing services.

4.6. **Staff and volunteers**

The service will develop a flexible and inclusive culture that attracts and retains people with the right skills and attitude, and which encourages engagement, co-production, and the ability to adapt to changing expectations

4.7. **Digital services**

The service will continue to recognise the changing way that residents use IT for information, learning and recreation, and develop services to meet their expectations and need. Finding the funding to update IT in libraries as the industry and technology changes will be a significant financial challenge.

4.8. **Children and young people**

Children and young people will continue to be a priority, recognising how important libraries can be in supporting learning and literacy and the enjoyment of cultural activities.

All these activities are currently present in the service but there will be an increase of focus around culture and community. However, given reducing resources, areas where effort is reduced will also have to be identified.

5. Conclusions:

- 5.1. There is considerable synergy between ACE's view of the role of libraries and the overall direction in which Cultural Services wishes libraries to travel.
- 5.2. The activities to achieve these goals are currently present in the service but there would be an increase of focus around culture and community.
- 5.3. Given a reduction in resources, areas where effort is reduced and resources re-allocated within the service will have to be identified.
- 5.4. The views of the Select Committee on these goals and actions, and on priorities, is sought.
- 5.5. Achievement of some of these goals, e.g. the right libraries in the right places, and sufficient, up to date IT, is dependent on these needs being recognised as a priority in overall SCC strategies.

6. Recommendations:

- 6.1. Members approve the overall direction of travel for SCC libraries in relation to the ACE goals and aspirations for libraries.
- 6.2. Members advise on their priorities within these activities.
- 6.3. To seek a steer from Members on prioritisation of library activities in the context of reducing budgets.

7. Next steps:

- 7.1. Libraries will take forward into business planning and 'business as usual' activities the priorities proposed by Members of the committee from this discussion.
- 7.2. The library service will review and model its property requirements in line with these two themes - culture and communities; and continue to work with SCC Property to achieve suitable provision.
- 7.3. The library service will raise with IMT how changing community needs and technological changes e.g. RFID (electronic book tagging) will alter the requirements of IT provision in libraries in the future and open a dialogue about future needs

8. Report contacts:

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9. Sources/background papers:

"Great Art and Culture for everyone" Arts Council England 2013
"Envisioning the Library of the Future" Arts Council England 2013