Libraries and Cultural Services Transformation Consultation Report Tuesday 29 January 2019

Purpose of report:

This report summarises the consultation response received regarding the new libraries and cultural services strategy and the five proposed strategic principles. The report also outlines proposed changes to the five strategic principles, resulting from the consultation and puts forward recommendations for the way forward to be agreed by Cabinet.

Recommendations:

1. To note changes, italicised, to the five strategic principles of the proposed Libraries and Cultural Services Strategy, reflecting consultation feedback. These are:

    - Libraries and Cultural Services provide and enable opportunities for everyone to learn, access information, acquire new skills, literacy and be involved in their communities.

    - There *will be* a focus on the wellbeing and strengthening of communities, particularly the most vulnerable, to enable them to be resilient, *providing touch points and safe spaces.*

    - Libraries and Cultural Services are most effective and efficient when they work in partnership with the public, voluntary, community and private sectors, including through the creation of shared spaces *creating a model of financial sustainability.*

    - New technologies, including digital, enable libraries and cultural services to reach new audiences, and existing audiences in new ways, and offer 24/7 access.

    - Volunteers are crucial community advocates and assets in libraries and cultural services, who also gain valuable skills and relationships through the work they do.

2. To note the Executive Director for Children's, Families, Life Long Learning and Culture will prepare detailed proposals with partners, including District and Borough councils, for a proposed future model for library and cultural services in Surrey based on the five newly adopted strategic principles.

3. That a second public consultation is carried out setting out the detailed proposals.

Consultation Proposals and Approach:

4. The libraries and cultural services consultation was carried out between Tuesday 30 October 2018 and Friday 4 January 2019 and was based on seeking views and comments on the following 5 strategic principles:

    - Libraries and cultural services provide and enable opportunities for everyone to learn, access information, acquire new skills, improve literacy and be involved in their communities.

- There is a focus on the wellbeing and strengthening of communities, particularly the most vulnerable, to enable them to be resilient.

- Libraries and cultural services are most effective and efficient when they work in partnership with the public, voluntary, community and private sectors, including through the creation of shared spaces.

- New technologies, including digital, enable libraries and cultural services to reach new audiences, and existing audiences in new ways, and offer 24/7 access.

- Volunteers are crucial community advocates and assets in libraries and cultural services, who also gain valuable skills and relationships through the work they do.

5. Through the consultation, residents and users of the services have been asked whether they agree/disagree on the principles and, whether, with each principle there will be a positive or negative impact on themselves. This has been done quantitatively through a tick box exercise. People have also been asked for their individual ideas and comments relating to each of the five principles to provide a qualitative response to the consultation.

6. There have been 7,901 consultation responses received with over 50% providing a qualitative response which is highly encouraging.

7. Cabinet are recommended to agree that this consultation will lead to a second public consultation on firm proposals concerning the future model for libraries and cultural services, developed on the basis of responses received in the first consultation.

Summarised Consultation Analysis

8. 7,901 people responded to the consultation. Asked about each of the five strategic principles, of those who expressed a view the proportion who either strongly agreed or agreed with each principle was 65% or more. This ranged from 97% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the first principle (opportunities to learn), to 75% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the fifth principle (role of volunteers), to 66% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the second principle (wellbeing and strengthening of communities).

9. This is highly encouraging and shows that the proposed principles put forward that could shape the future of libraries and cultural services in Surrey are very well supported by people who responded to the survey.

10. There was also a level of disagreement to all of the principles. For three of the principles, the number of respondents either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the principle fell between 8 and 13%. Less than 2% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the first principle (opportunities to learn), but more significantly, 16% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the second principle (targeting the wellbeing and strengthening of communities, particularly the most vulnerable). This corresponds with some of the qualitative feedback presented by respondents who felt that libraries and cultural services should target particular communities but should still continue to be a universal service for all.

11. However the overwhelming majority of respondents were supporting of all the principles which provides a strong blueprint for developing detailed proposals for the second public consultation.

12. Just over 50% of respondents to the consultation provided qualitative feedback which has provided the council with a huge amount of information and ideas for taking libraries and cultural services forward into the future. To help analyse the data and to also cross reference with the other consultations which have been undertaken, the information collected has been grouped under the following themes. Each theme was then broken down further, as shown below, which allowed a thorough analysis of all the responses to be covered and all views taken into account:

Strengthening communities:
- **Shared spaces** - comments relating to libraries and cultural services being located and integrated with other services in the same building.
- **Community involvement** - suggestions around libraries and cultural services working with local groups or individuals.
- **Access for all** - comments relating to the universality of library and cultural services.
- **Vulnerable people** - comments relating to user who are vulnerable or who struggle to use services.
- **Wellbeing** – comments relating to libraries and cultural services supporting people's wellbeing.
- **Learning** – comments relating to the learning opportunities provided by libraries and cultural services.
- **Children** - comments specifically relating to children & families' use of services.
- **Cultural Services** – comments relating specifically to the value of cultural services, rather than libraries.

Resource constraints:
- **Consolidation** – comments relating to closing libraries in the context of concentrating resources to provide a better service for residents.
- **No changes to existing services** – comments relating to a desire for existing library and cultural services to be unchanged and remain as they are.
- **Staff –** comments relating to the role of paid SCC libraries staff.
- **Book stock** – comments relating to the book stock in Surrey libraries.
- **Libraries are redundant** – comments relating to the idea that libraries no longer needed in today's society.

Working together
- **Volunteering** – comments relating to the use of volunteers in the service.
- **Partnerships** – suggestions around working with external partners – e.g. health, charities, district and borough councils businesses and shops etc.

Perceptions of the organisation
- **Surrey County Council** – Comments about Surrey County Council generally.
- **The consultation process** – comments on the consultation process.

Innovation
- **Digital** – lots of comments on the use of new technology as a positive but also some concerns for people who did not have access to new technologies.

- **Improvements** – general comments relating to improvements that could be made to services.
- **Marketing** – comments relating to promotion of services, or making residents/ service users more aware.

13. The analysis of the qualitative responses identified the following key themes:

- People were hugely positive about the relevance and role of libraries and cultural services in the community.
- People like shared spaces – frequently mentioned ideas were cafes, children's centres, information hubs, general support for co-located services and partners. People evidently understood the concept of hubs and sharing spaces.
- People felt that libraries and cultural services should target particular communities but tempering this were comments stating that libraries and cultural services should continue to be a universal service for all.
- There was a general support for the idea of libraries supporting the well-being of residents, particularly that of children, the elderly and other vulnerable people including the unemployed, socially isolated, new mothers and those residents who have little or no contact with other council services.
- People like supporting and using volunteers within libraries and cultural services but there were concerns that volunteers should not replace paid staff and there was support given to the expertise provided by staff.
- On digital services there was lots of support and comments supporting new technologies and the use of it, but also concerns raised that doing everything digitally was not the only answer. Particularly libraries should still be about books and library and cultural spaces, meeting people, combatting isolation, studying, accessing cultural activities and strengthening communities generally.
- There were a considerable amount of comments that this consultation would eventually lead to a consolidation of resources and a future network with fewer libraries, including localised comments expressed around the closing of particular libraries. Thus increasing isolation and limiting access to services.

14. The full qualitative analysis report is available on the council's website. The detailed report also articulates actual quotes attributable to respondents. The full report also includes a demographic breakdown on who has responded to this consultation.

Proposals Implications and Mitigation Options

15. From the consultation and response received on the proposed strategic principles for libraries and cultural services in Surrey, it is proposed that detailed proposals be developed for further consultation with partners, stakeholders, the public and staff.

16. The strong support for the strategic principles means there is a solid foundation on which to develop a future service model for libraries and cultural services. Stakeholders understood the benefits of co-locating services in buildings as a means to both improve access and to develop a more financially sustainable model.

17. We have seen broad support for moving to more digital services for an enhanced digital platform, but recognise concerns around barriers to participation. As part of

development of a new service model, we propose to carry out targeted engagement with people who may be less able to access digital services or have the skills to do so. We will then develop mitigations to address any barriers to access.

18. The low number of responses from younger people means their views on a future model of libraries and cultural services provision is less well understood.

19. May be reductions in L&C delivered in stand-alone buildings. Could be part of future model, subject to consultation.

Changes to Consultation Proposals

20. The changes to the five strategic principles which has resulted from the first consultation carried out and the responses received are highlighted in the first recommendation of this report.

Supporting Information

21. Agreeing to these recommendations means the Council can proceed to develop a future model of libraries and cultural services in Surrey, subject to consultation, that reflects modern expectations, is fit for purpose and provides and enables opportunities for everyone to learn, access information, acquire new skills, increase literacy and be involved in their communities.

Risk management and implications:

22. There are risks that will need to be managed throughout this process which include:

   • There is a need to ensure that the feedback from this consultation is used to inform any detailed proposals that are developed for further consultation with partners, stakeholders, the public and SCC staff.

   • The findings and actions from the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) also need to be taken forwards to inform any detailed proposals that are developed for further consultation with partners, stakeholders, the public and SCC staff.

Financial implications:

23. Part of the desired outcome of the proposed new strategic principles for libraries and cultural services is to reduce the net spend on these services to the Chartered Institute of Financial Authorities (CIPFA) County Council average within the council's medium term financial plan.

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Annexes

Annex 3a - Libraries and cultural services transformation strategy consultation Equalities Impact Assessment.

Sources/background papers:

Libraries and cultural services transformation strategy consultation analysis

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