

Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

12 September 2019



Libraries and Cultural Services Transformation

Purpose of report: To present to the committee an overview of the approach to the modernisation of the services.

Background:

1. Surrey County Council Libraries and Cultural services consist of 52 libraries (including 10 community partnered libraries). The pattern of library provision in the county is historical, stemming from borough and district local authority responsibility for library provision until the 1960's before responsibility moved to the county council. Adult learning is delivered from seven centres, arts and music education services are delivered in schools and the community and heritage services are delivered in Surrey History Centre and in outreach settings.
2. The Council is developing a new strategy for Libraries and Cultural Services to take account of new developments in the libraries and cultural services sector that seek to increase engagement with communities. The development of the strategy is one component of a Council wide transformation that is about how the Council delivers services in the future.
3. The aim is to develop a future model for Libraries and Cultural services in Surrey that reflects modern expectations, is fit for purpose and provides and enables opportunities for everyone to learn, access information, acquire new skills, increase literacy, take part in arts activities, build creativity and be involved in their communities.
4. As the first step the Council consulted residents, service users and partners on five strategic principles to underpin the development of the strategy. Consultation took place between 30th October 2018 and 4th January 2019. The response to the public consultation demonstrated significant support for the guiding principles contained in paragraph 6 below.
5. As a consequence, at its meeting on 29 January 2019 Cabinet resolved that proposals be prepared with partners, including district and borough councils, for a future model for library and cultural services in Surrey, based on the five newly adopted strategic principles. It also resolved to undertake further public consultation, setting out the detailed proposals.

6. The following strategic principles form the basis of the future strategy for the services:
 - 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
7. The new strategy will encompass libraries and cultural services. The library service plays a pivotal role providing trusted spaces, increasing the reach of the arts, adult learning and heritage to library users, many of whom may not take-up these activities in other settings. Libraries and cultural services are currently supported by volunteers, adding value to the service. Their ongoing contribution will continue to be key to the delivery of the strategy.
8. The County Council has been discussing with district and borough local authorities the proposed way forward for a modernised library service. These discussions have explored opportunities to align library service provision with need, accessibility and local ambitions to improve facilities and services appropriate to the local place. The conversations have been fruitful, but more time is required to formulate the final proposals. Whilst initially planning to consult in September, it was agreed that further time was needed to refine and develop proposals and approach with districts and boroughs.

Way Forward

9. The way people want to use libraries and engage with each other and their communities is changing. Surrey's libraries are still well used and valued by communities but in common with library services across the country, over the last ten years book issues and visits to our libraries have been decreasing whilst usage of digital services have increased. In libraries where use is increasing there is evidence that factors for success include co-location and sharing of space with other service providers, increasing the number and

type of activities and services offered, enabling local communities to use the space more flexibly and matching service development to local need.

10. Whilst books, information and access to IT are still core, increasingly libraries are partnering with other service providers such as health, working more closely with local communities to shape the library offer in a locality, running a programme and more activities in addition to existing activities such as rhyme time, story time, book clubs etc. These programmes could include heritage, arts activities, performances, creative play for children and more Code Clubs and activities to build digital literacy.
11. People are also increasingly recognising that modern technology and people's increasing use of it provides a wealth of opportunities to access information and books but more importantly how people engage with the world and each other. We wish to make the best of the emerging and new opportunities this creates in our libraries and cultural services.
12. In line with the broad support expressed in the public consultation feedback, we are exploring opportunities to provide library services in multi-purpose community settings where feasible, shared with other agencies and services and to deliver an enhanced outreach service in addition to the service we deliver to housebound residents.
13. In Surrey our two most recent library improvement projects have included some of these elements. In Merstham we have co-located the library with other services in the same building. In Horley, we have created spaces in the new library that can be used by other service providers and the community to deliver activities and events.
14. Across Surrey libraries and cultural services there are examples of good public engagement, partnership working and programming to meet local need. In shaping our proposals we are seeking to build on such examples, drawing on best practice from elsewhere so that our proposals for Surrey reflect the latest thinking and technology to support resident's changing needs and aspirations.
15. Whilst not an exhaustive list, best practice examples include: - from within the UK -The Hive, Worcester; America - State of America's Libraries report 2018; Australia - Wyndham City and Europe – Aarhus, Denmark. We are also continuing to gain advice and support from professional, advisory and regulatory bodies including but not exclusive to; Chartered Institute of Library Information Professionals, Department for Culture Media and Sport including the recommendations of the Library Taskforce.
16. The Equality Impact Assessment carried out at the time of the consultation identified that there are potentially positive impacts for all groups from a potential future service model, based on the five strategic principles, that provides libraries and cultural services

through a new digital platform and multiuse library, cultural and community buildings.

17. However, it was recognised that there may also be impacts on service users who may struggle to get access, or have the skills to use, an enhanced digital platform proposed as part of a future libraries and cultural services offer. To mitigate these we plan to ensure there is geographical spread of libraries and cultural services located in community settings across the county according to need.
18. We are exploring with district and borough councils the potential to develop libraries alongside co-located services and an outreach offer with a view to working up detailed proposals for each locality.
19. The model we are proposing seeks to:
 - strengthen the role of libraries as focal points for community activity
 - enable communities and partners to develop and deliver events/activities in addition to the 'traditional' library programme
 - use assets more effectively
 - ensure that each site is responsive to local needs in terms of books, activities and community access
 - deliver library activities such as books, activities and programmes in community settings. Examples are rhyme time in areas where under 5s participation in the library service is low, reminiscence activities with older people, Makerspace carts (mobile collections of new technology products and programmes) to support digital skills, science, technology, engineering, mathematics and entrepreneurship.
20. Subsequent consultations on the proposals will endeavour to reach as many sections of the community as possible, including current and non-users of library and cultural services,(and in particular young people who were under represented in the earlier consultation), as we wish to create a service model that will meet community needs and is also sustainable for future generations. In order to do this we will be developing with partners an extensive communications and engagement strategy.
21. It is intended to present to the committee, in the form of a PowerPoint presentation which will focus on describing the principles of a modern library service (inclusive and accessible, visible and connected, flexible and adaptable), an overview of the placed based approach and emerging delivery model that is being developed to deliver the service's vision, along with examples of such models being successfully delivered elsewhere (Annex 1).

22. Finally the presentation will share the approach being developed to progress the programme of work.

Conclusions:

23. This report and its accompanying PowerPoint presentation highlight the potential of a transformed service and outline the actions being taken to progress the transformation of Library and Cultural Services.

Recommendations:

24. It is recommended the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee considers the information presented at the meeting and offers support and challenge to the service to drive forward the transformation of libraries and Cultural services in Surrey.

Next steps:

25. Any changes to the provision of library service will need to be the subject of full consultation and EIA in accordance with the council's duties to do so. Documentation for future consultations as will be prepared for sign off by the Executive Director and Portfolio Holder.

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Sources/background papers:

Report to Cabinet 29th January 2019 and Corporate Overview Select Committee 25 January 2019; Part A) "Transformation proposals –

Delivering better services for residents" and accompanying

Annex 3: Libraries and Cultural Services Consultation Report, 29th January 2019 and

Annex 3a: Libraries and Cultural Services Equality Impact Assessment, 29th January 2019.

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