

## CABINET

23 July 2013

<b>Title:</b> A Library Strategy for Barking and Dagenham	
Report of the Leader of the Council	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes
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<b>Accountable Divisional Director:</b> Paul Hogan, Divisional Director, Culture and Sport	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Anne Bristow, Corporate Director, Adult and Community Services	
<b>Summary:</b>  The purpose of the strategy is to provide a shared vision and a framework for the delivery and promotion of Library Services over the next three years. The strategy has been informed by and will support the delivery of the priorities identified in the Community Strategy and Council Corporate Plan.	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>  The Cabinet is recommended to approve the Libraries Strategy 2013 - 2016 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report.	
<b>Reason(s)</b>  To assist the Council in achieving its key priorities: Ensure every child is valued so that they can succeed; Improve health and wellbeing through all stages of life; Maximise growth opportunities and increase the household income of Borough residents.  It is recognised that libraries have huge potential to contribute to the health and wellbeing of local communities as well as the needs of the most vulnerable within communities, who need access to good quality information and digital literacy skills to participate effectively in an increasingly online world. Public libraries also provide a unique resource to help improve literacy levels in adults and children, in particular for those residents for whom English is not their first language.	

### 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Barking and Dagenham libraries have played a key role over many years in helping to improve the quality of life of local people and supporting them to reach their full potential.

- 1.2 All councils have a duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient service', which usually means that people who live, work or study in a local authority area should have access free of charge to borrow or refer to books and other printed material. However, our libraries do much, much more than this.
- 1.3 We think that our libraries are at the heart of our community. Our libraries help people get on line and do research on the internet. We support people to look for jobs and help them find out about other services that the Council and its partners provide. Also children and adults use our libraries as safe places for quiet study and to learn new skills and improve their literacy. We also run a wide range of events and activities for families and people of all ages, which support community cohesion.
- 1.4 Some of our libraries are truly exceptional: The Barking Learning Centre is an award winning facility in the heart of Barking and is the 16<sup>th</sup> busiest library in the country. The Dagenham library on the Heathway is another modern library which opened in October 2010 and is attracting over 40,000 visitors a month.
- 1.5 We want to build on the good work that libraries are already doing but recognise that this has to be achieved in very constrained financial circumstances.

## **2. Proposals and Issues**

- 2.1 This strategy has been prepared because we want to develop a library service that is more efficient and effective and better meets the current and emerging needs of our residents.
- 2.2 Over the last couple of years our main focus has been on "getting the house in order" and along with all other council services we have had to find significant savings to bridge the funding gap now facing local government.
- 2.3 We have changed the way that libraries are managed, restructured library staffing arrangements and reviewed and amended opening hours. Councillors have also had to take the difficult decision to close libraries; however, we have worked hard to minimise the impact of this on service users.
- 2.4 We are now looking to the future. The strategy aims to improve literacy levels amongst children and adults by increasing the use of libraries by residents, making them aware of the services on offer, increase partnerships and develop the joy and benefit of reading amongst local residents.
- 2.5 This strategy is intended to provide a framework around which we will focus our efforts over the next three years to improve the quality of life of local people. In order to do this, seven priority areas have been identified:
  - Priority One: Marketing – Tell people about it
  - Priority Two: Community Engagement and Collaboration
  - Priority Three: Improving our buildings
  - Priority Four: Staff and volunteers
  - Priority Five: Stock and reader development
  - Priority Six: Technology and innovation
  - Priority Seven: Financial Sustainability

- 2.6 The final version of the strategy and improvement action plan is attached at appendix one in a 'plan on a page' summary format. A more detailed version of the strategy, which will be used to support external funding bids, is attached at appendix two.

### Resourcing the strategy

- 2.7 Section 8 of the draft strategy sets out clearly that Council funding for libraries will reduce during the life of the strategy. This reality has directly shaped the development of the strategy and the accompanying improvement action plan.
- 2.8 A cornerstone of the strategy is the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness to deliver the same quality and range of services for less money, or to deliver more for the same level of expenditure. There will also be a continued focus over the life of the strategy and beyond to secure funding from other sources working in partnership with local, sub-regional and national agencies.
- 2.9 There also needs to be the consideration of a range of management models including asset transfer of libraries as well as services being delivered by the voluntary, private or trust sectors. These could provide a more effective way of maximising available resources in order to release funds for the continued development of library provision in these financially constrained times.

## **3. Options appraisal**

- 3.1 The options available to Cabinet are to approve the strategy and action plan (with any direction on amendments to be made) or to reject it.
- 3.2 Not to approve the strategy would mean that there is no strategic framework to drive improvements in the service, which would also impact on the ability to lever in external funding to support service delivery.
- 3.3 Therefore, Members are recommended to adopt the strategy and improvement action plan with any amendments, removals, or additions as they consider appropriate.
- 3.4 If approved, it is intended to make the strategy available in an electronic format only.

## **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 Consultation has been undertaken to inform the development of the strategy including: a series of strategy planning workshops with staff, service users and non-service users; ten consultation events have been held with service users in the branch libraries; and a pre-decision scrutiny of the proposed themes for the strategy was undertaken by the Safer and Stronger Community Select Committee.
- 4.2 The recommendations from Scrutiny Members have been incorporated into the strategy, including:
- increasing the use of volunteers;

- presenting more one off events and activities to encourage people to visit;
- focussing services to support families with pre-school age children and children who have recently started school, especially those for whom English isn't their first language;
- targeting older people was also a priority through initiatives like the older people's zone at Valence library and through supporting people who find it difficult to get out and about;
- Members were also keen to see more use of technology to improve services, such as through the roll out of self service machines across the libraries.

## **5. Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: Dawn Calvert – GM Finance

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.
- 5.2 However, Members should note that the net budget for the library service for 2013/14 is £2,201,000, a reduction of £669,000 on the 2011/12 net budget of £2,870,000. Also there are proposals being presented to Members in another report to the same meeting of Cabinet (23/07/13) that will recommend a series of actions to achieve a further saving of £400,000 from the library budget for 2014/15.

## **6. Legal Implications**

Prepared by Lucinda Bell, for Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

- 6.1 The Council has a duty under section 7 of the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 to provide '*a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof*' and this should be so evidenced by an examination of the needs and a suitable service plan to continue to meet the duty.
- 6.2 Where there are proposals for the closure or discontinuance of a service or services, appropriate consultation will need to be carried out. The savings proposals that affect staff will require consultation with Unions and staff.
- 6.3 The Council must have due regard to the duty imposed on it under s149 of the Equality Act 2010, that is to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that the Equality Act 2010 prohibits, and to:
  - Advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those individuals who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 6.4 To achieve this, Members will need to be sure that a relevant Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out before the proposals are decided by Cabinet, and consider the results of this in full.
- 6.5 Decisions to reduce library services have been the subject of judicial review proceedings. In order act in accordance with public law principles it is important that any decision taken is reasonable, rational and procedurally correct. It is important that all relevant factors and considerations are taken into account,

especially the consultation and the duty referred to above, under s149 of the Equality Act, and that Members retain an open mind.

- 6.6 Members must also consider the practical impact of the proposed decision, and the alternative courses of action that were proposed, and whether any adverse impacts arising from the decision to cut or withdraw funding or services can be mitigated, and give proper reasons for their decision.

## 7. Other Implications

- 7.1 **Risk Management** - The action plan for the strategy will be incorporated into the Culture and Sport annual service plan. Any risks associated with the successful implementation of the service plan are set out in the divisional risk register, which is reviewed by the Adult and Community Services Departmental Management Team on a quarterly basis.
- 7.2 **Customer impact** - the equalities impact assessment for the library service indicates that women, older people and children and young people would be particularly affected by any reduction to the current level of library provision across the Borough.

At this time it is considered that a good quality and comprehensive library service continues to be provided across the Borough: fewer than 1,000 of the Borough's residents live more than 1 mile away or further than 20 minutes travel time by public transport to a library. This takes into account current library provision in the neighbouring boroughs of Havering and Redbridge.

None of the proposed actions outlined in the library strategy envisage a reduction in the number and distribution of libraries across the Borough or that there will be any adverse impact on the core universal offer; however, it is recognised that the quality of service that can be provided by a community managed or volunteer led service is unlikely to be as consistently good as that provided by a wholly Council managed service.

Steps will be taken to minimise any adverse impact by the Council retaining responsibility for sourcing and providing book stock, IT support including self-service terminals, specialist support for activities and events, and support for recruitment and training of volunteers.

- 7.3 **Crime and Disorder Issues** - the Council has a statutory duty to consider crime and disorder implications in all its decision making. In delivering this strategy and action plan, the Council will be providing quality facilities and activities, which will provide positive activities for all residents and, in particular, opportunities for families to enjoy their leisure time together.
- 7.4 **Health issues** - it is recognised that libraries have huge potential to contribute to the health and wellbeing of local communities as well as the needs of the most vulnerable within communities, who need access to good quality information and digital literacy skills to participate effectively in an increasingly online world.

Libraries provide space for people to meet and socialise and schemes like the Home Library Service help to reduce loneliness, which can be a particular problem for some older people especially those who find it difficult to get out and about.

- 7.5 **Safeguarding** - libraries provide a unique resource to help improve literacy levels in adults and children, in particular for those residents for whom English is not their first language. They also offer quiet, safe and well equipped study and research space for residents of all ages.

The service delivers the library service for a number of local schools as well as activities that encourage children and young people to develop a love of books and reading.

All Council libraries operate within the Culture and Sport division's safeguarding policy framework for children and vulnerable adults. The new library to be provided in the Barking and Dagenham learning centre (Rush Green campus) will follow the Barking and Dagenham College's safeguarding arrangements.

The Council will require robust safeguarding arrangements to be adopted for the proposed community management arrangement for the Robert Jeyes Library. To support this it is intended that the Council will provide recruitment (including Disclosure Barring Service checks), induction and training support for all volunteers.

### **Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

The links to other strategies and plans that have informed the development of this report are set out in section 5 of the draft strategy.

### **List of appendices:**

**Appendix 1** – Plan on a page - A Library Strategy for Barking and Dagenham 2013-16

**Appendix 2** – Let's Get Barking and Dagenham reading – A library strategy for Barking and Dagenham 2013-16