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**Meeting of the Executive Member for Leisure and Culture and Advisory Panel**

4 December 2007

Report of the Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and Culture)

**Acomb Library Learning Centre Update**

**Summary**

1. This report details progress made on the extension and refurbishment of Acomb Library to create a new Library Learning Centre and seeks agreement on:
  - the proposed opening hours
  - the naming of the centre
  - the provision of refreshments

**Background**

2. In 2005 the Scrutiny Board developed a vision for a 21st century library service; that vision put learning at the heart of the service. As a result, the Library Service has spent the last two years working in partnership with Adult and Community Education developing the concept of library learning centres. It is planned to have 5 such centres at Acomb, New Earswick, Clifton, Haxby and Tang Hall libraries.
3. In 2006 a successful capital bid was made to the Learning and Skills Council to transform Acomb Library into the first Library Learning Centre. This bid was supported by £75k of matched funding from the Council's capital programme.
4. Construction work began in August 2007 with a completion date for the beginning of February 2008. Current indications are that the project is within budget and will be completed a little ahead of time.
5. The centre will be the first community based adult learning facility that has been developed in the city, and will boast state of the art learning rooms, and a completely new and exciting library layout: York's first Library Learning Centre.

**Consultation**

6. There has been ongoing consultation with the local community. Officers visited both Acomb and Westfield Ward Committees to explain the potential of the new building and the public have been invited to send in their comments on the services they would like to see in the new building. The things that people said they wanted were more books, quiet study space, a café and an exciting children's area. It should be possible to provide all of these and more.

Consultation will continue, including the type and range of adult education programmes that people would like to be on offer at Acomb.

### **Issues remaining to be resolved: Options and Analysis**

7. There are still some outstanding issues that need to be resolved for the new library learning centre and officers are continuing to sort out these operational considerations. There remain three areas where guidance is sought from members and these are outlined below.

#### **Opening Hours:**

8. The proposed opening hours are based on the premise that the building will be open as a library learning centre rather than just a learning centre or a library. The proposal increases the total opening hours by 16½ a week (4 a week to the general public), as part of a more flexible approach to staffing the centre. This is crucial to the concept of the library learning centre and will ensure that the learning is seen as a central activity for the library. Staff timetables have been drawn up and following a period of consultation staff have agreed to changing their hours of work.
9. The following tables show the proposed new opening hours against the previous opening hours:

	Proposed	Previous
Monday	9.00 – 21.30	9.00 – 19.30
Tuesday	9.00 – 21.30	9.00 – 19.30
Wednesday	9.00 - 21.30 *	9.00 – 12.30
Thursday	9.00 – 21.30	9.00 – 17.00
Friday	9.00 – 17.00	9.00 – 19.30
Saturday	9.00 – 14.00	9.00 – 12.30

\* On Wednesdays the building will be available exclusively for hire for training, conferences and other activities.

10. The Wednesday opening for hire is key to the successful operation and viability of the centre. It will enable the facilities to be made available for hire as meeting rooms and small conference facilities, and for community events and activities. There will also be opportunities for some income generation when the facilities are not being used for learning for example during the school holiday periods and at the start and finish of the school term. The building will be available on a Friday evening for targeted activities for young people and this idea is being taken forward with Youth Services.
11. Opening hours will be kept under review once the centre is in operation and further consultation with the local community will take place.

#### **A new name for the new building:**

12. In developing the strategy for library learning centres several ideas have been considered as to what they should be called. In Tower Hamlets, for example, their centres are called IDEAS stores. Clearly, “library learning centre”, although descriptive does not express the spirit of the new centres as exciting

and vibrant places. Therefore it is proposed to brand the Library Learning Centres as “Explore”. This will be adopted at Acomb first and then rolled out to the other 5 library learning centres in the city (York, Clifton, Tang Hall, Haxby and New Earswick). It will also be used to market strands of our service, for instance “Explore Reading”, “Explore Learning”, “Explore your Family History” and so on.

13. It is also important to retain the term library as it is instantly recognised and understood and it is therefore proposed that it will appear in the strap line for the centres – Explore at Acomb Library Learning Centre. Detailed designs for the signage have not yet been developed but following member approval this process can begin with some urgency.

#### **Refreshments:**

14. Key to the success of the Library Learning Centre, and a prime consideration in the design, is the concept of a “transitional space” where refreshments would be offered and where members of the public could relax and spend time. It is important that the front of the building is a vibrant, welcoming space but also one that attracts people to visit. There are three options for how refreshments could be provided:
  - a) Vending machines – This would have some clear advantages. Refreshments would be available with minimum staff input and little up-front investment would be required. However, the range and variety of drinks and food would be limited, and lack of staffing could mean that the area would be inappropriately used and become messy.
  - b) Staffed café:
    - i) provided on a contracted model - This would be the preferred model as it deliver our requirements without distracting from the core work. However, it is not yet clear whether this model would be financially profitable enough for it to be considered by a commercial organisation.
    - ii) directly managed through the library service - This would mean more control of the facility, particularly over quality, and greater flexibility. It would, however, bring some financial risk.
15. Longer visiting times and attracting visits for more than one reason are key to the success of the new facility. Of the options above, the vending only option is the least appealing, although it is unlikely to be practicable to have a fully staffed facility for all the opening hours and a combination of vending and staffed facilities may be appropriate.
16. It is therefore recommended that a staffed facility is pursued. If members agree the next step would be to work up a business model for the café testing the commercial market as part of that process in line with the Council’s procurement procedures. It is proposed that the decision on the final arrangement is delegated to the Director of LCCS including the establishment of any new post or posts if appropriate on the basis that:
  - There will be no cost to the Library Service budget (and ideally some profit)
  - Financial risk to the service is minimised

- Best value is obtained

### **Corporate Priorities**

17. The concept of Library Learning Centres contributes to the following corporate objectives:
- Increase people's skills and knowledge to improve future employment prospects
  - Improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city

It also contributes to the five outcomes from the Lifelong Learning and Culture Plan:

- Making York More Eventful
- Engaging in Learning
- Being Healthy
- Building Stronger, Safer and Greener Communities
- A Vibrant Cultural Infrastructure

### **Implications**

18. **Financial**

Opening Hours:

The additional opening hours were accounted for in the library restructure proposals agreed by members earlier this year. The costs can be contained within existing Libraries staffing budgets as the additional hours are delivered by alterations to working patterns rather than any increase in actual staff hours.

Name Change:

The additional costs associated with change of signage and documentation are estimated at £500. These costs will be funded from the Acomb Library capital project budget and existing Library revenue budgets.

Catering:

If this decision on catering is to be delegated to the Director of LCCS then this will be subject to any proposal being at worst cost neutral. The potential for increased income generations will also be explored.

19. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology, or Property implications arising from the recommendations.

### **Risk Management**

20. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives, leading to financial loss and non-compliance with legislation. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score has been assessed at 9, placing the issue in the Low category as an acceptable risk. This means that the risks will be regularly monitored.

## Recommendations

21. The Executive Member is asked to agree:
- the proposed opening hours for the centre
  - naming the centres “Explore”
  - To pursue a staffed catering facility and to delegate the detailed arrangements to the Director of LCCS subject to any proposal being at worst cost neutral

Reason: In order that planning and promoting the service can move forward.

## Contact Details

### Author:

Fiona Williams  
Head of Libraries and Heritage  
Lifelong Learning and Culture  
3316

Alistair Gourlay  
Head of Adult and Community  
Education  
Lifelong Learning and Culture  
4294

### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Charlie Croft  
Assistant Director (Lifelong Learning and  
Culture)

**Report  
Approved**

✓

**Date** 20.11.07.

### Specialist Implications Officer:

Richard Hartle  
LCCS Finance Manager  
554225

**Wards Affected:** Acomb and Westfield

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Background Papers:

21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Libraries – Report to the Executive