CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee   **1 May 2013**

Libraries Scrutiny Review – Draft Final Report
Report of the Libraries Scrutiny Review Task Group

Background to Review

1. At a meeting of the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee
    in September 2012, the committee received an update on a previously
    completed scrutiny review of library provision across the city together
    with a briefing on the current provision. The Committee agreed they
    wanted to investigate further local library provision across the city and
    their use as community hubs providing other council services, in order to
    ascertain whether the Council is making best use of library buildings and
    if more could be developed as community hubs to better serve residents
    in their surrounding locale. The Committee set up a Task Group to carry
    out the review on their behalf, and agreed the following objectives for the
    review:

    i.   To increase the number of people going into libraries
    ii.   To make better use of library buildings (whilst not undermining the
          integrity of the library service)
    iii. To provide greater access to Council and third sector services, and
          provide more opportunities for community engagement on local
          issues.

Background to Library Provision

2. It is recognised that the most successful library services work in close
    partnership with local councils and local people, to tailor their services to
    meet local needs. Underpinning this, libraries aim to be welcoming,
    neutral and safe places for communities to come together and help
    develop the ties that are essential for local wellbeing and quality of life.

3. Nationally, all public libraries are focussed around a common purpose
    i.e. :

    •   To develop and enhance the literacy, digital and information skills of
        residents to enable them to become active citizens.

- Support learning through access to knowledge and content, and provide space and support to learn, and;
- Support businesses and entrepreneurs in an effort to contribute to the sustainability and regeneration of local communities.

4. Library Provision in York
The range and variety of services offered by libraries across the UK varies to reflect local community priorities. In York, the core service offered at every library is:

- Free Internet access and free Wi-Fi
- A children's area & young people's area
- Fiction and non-fiction books for children, young people and   adults in a range of formats
- Large print books and audio books
- Reference books and enquiry service
- Online reference sources
- Information and advice for learning and work
- Books to support your learning
- Information about local services
- Adult Learning course information
- Reading Groups
- Story times for under fives
- Family and local history
- Newspapers and magazines
- Community events
- Surgeries e.g. ward councillor, future prospects
- Community space

5. The Use of Libraries as Community Hubs
As a result of the libraries scrutiny review completed in 2005, the Council agreed a vision for the library service – one that put learning at the heart of the service and centred on the principle that libraries should not just be libraries but places that add value to their communities in a whole host of ways i.e. they should be spaces that are:

- Modern, contemporary - designed to meet the needs of the communities they serve
- Outward looking - connected with the surrounding landscape and community, drawing people in
- Welcoming - where staff are proactive in helping people make sense of the complex world of information sources
- Customer first - combining the design principles of a modern layout of a bookshop with the traditional values of a library service

- Engaging – inspiring people to join a reading group or a homework club, listen to storytelling, sign up to an evening class, discover their family history, have a coffee, meet new people, surf the internet, access any book ever published, look for job opportunities, learn with their families, hire the latest DVD, access information that enables them to make informed life choices and supports independent living

6. This vision for the library service has influenced everything that the service now does. It led to the development of a partnership between libraries and adult education which delivers the concept of library learning centres – or Explore Centres as they have become known. There are now three Explore library learning centres – Acomb, New Earswick and York city centre.

7. Along with the core library services listed above, York's Explore Centres also offer the following wider range of services:

- Changing Places facility
- Cafe
- Archive and local history centre
- ICT suite
- More in depth support for research and information queries
- Big name author events
- Exhibitions
- Adult Education enrolment & Learning rooms

8. The Explore concept is now recognised and popular. Visitors and issues have increased at all three centres, bucking a national decline in library use. The centres are seen by local people as the hub of their community and there are a wide range of activities taking place in the flexible spaces. CYC's library staff had built strong links into the community and this now needs to be developed further by becoming more integrated into the library vision.

9. Current partnerships and relationships have developed on an almost ad hoc basis e.g. a ward committee meeting held at Acomb spawned the idea for this to become a regular option across all of the libraries. Similarly, a spontaneous 'knit and natter' session at Acomb inspired a number of similar groups across other libraries in the city, and there are now thriving groups using a majority of the libraries.

10. <u>Future Vision for Libraries Across the City</u>
The vision for libraries is that they become the place within the local community where residents can go for information on:

- their community and council services
- how to become more involved in their community and the decisions that affect its development

Information Gathered

11. In order to explore how this might be developed strategically across the service, the Task Group agreed to explore the current opportunities for accessing such information at a public library.

12. The Task Group agreed to carry out site visits to a number of libraries to see and experience the services being provided, and to meet with staff and talk with library users. The libraries chosen were:

13. **Acomb** – York's second busiest library with around 10,000 visits per month. It was the first Explore Library Learning Centre offering a range of facilities (as shown in paragraph 7 above).

14. The Task Group were very impressed with the Acomb Explore and agreed it offered an ideal range of facilities in a fully accessible building, in the right location for the community it served.

15. The Task Group also noted the provision of a direct dial phone for housing benefit enquiries and learnt that Library Services had partnered with the benefits service to introduce the phone advice service allowing customers to drop in and use the phone to get through to a member of the housing team for advice. The Task Group learnt that the take up of this service was not high. However they recognised that it was a cost effective method of providing access to advice and a resource that could be explored at other libraries.

16. **Tanghall** - After Acomb, this is the second biggest community library with an average of 5,000 a month through the door. It is situated next to a health centre in one of York's more deprived areas, and is set across 2 floors. It offers a meeting room and ICT suite, both of which are used by the council's adult education partners to deliver courses to members of the public.

17. In comparing the library to the Acomb Explore, the Task Group agreed the reception area at Tanghall could be better utilised to provide access to more community/council information. Discussion took place around

future options for the library and the possibility of expansion. The Task Group learnt that there was some room for extension at the current site, and that architect plans had been produced to show how it might work.

18. However, work was currently ongoing to look at the best ways of developing the nearby, and the Task Group learnt that the there was a suggestion that a community hub with space enough to consolidate a full range of public and voluntary sector services be built on the school site. This would allow for a new purpose-built Explore centre to replace the current library, providing a bigger and better library and learning service with all of the usual community hub facilities.

19. The Committee also noted the current community provision provided at the nearby community centre on Fifth Avenue and agreed that any development either at the current library site, or in the future at the Burnholme School site, would need to be properly considered so as not to effect the viability of that community centre.

20. **Strensall** – A small community library, open 18 hours a week with an average of 2,000 a month through the door. The staff had developed excellent links with the local community to the extent that the library is a key part of community life within the village e.g. taking part in summer fetes, being a venue in the village jubilee celebration etc.

21. Discussion took place around the current opening hours for Strensall library and the possibility to extend those hours to allow use of the building for other purposes – perhaps allowing a voluntary sector partners to hire the space. The Task Group recognised there was limited space in the building and there may be accessibility issues. They also questioned whether the library was in the right location for the village, but recognised there were no other council owned properties in the village suitable for such use.

22. **Clifton** – A purpose-built, half time library and learning centre. Discussion took place around the location of the library and the size of the community it serviced. The Task Group noted there was some room for extension on the site and that architects plans had previously been drawn up. However, they agreed that the location of the library was not ideal based on the size of the community it serviced, but recognised there were no better placed council-owned buildings available in the vicinity. The Task Group queried where the library patrons were coming from, as that might help identify a better location for the library.

23. The Task Group also noted that the library was very traditional in its provision and layout etc, although its patrons did not appear to have a problem with that (possibly due to the majority of patrons being of an older age range and therefore more used to a traditional library). They were pleased to learn that there were plans to renew the shelving with moveable units which would allow the space to be opened up for other uses. The Task Group agreed this may encourage groups to use the library for alternative purposes.

24. The Task Group's detailed feedback from their visits is shown at Annex A.

25. <u>Other Community Provision</u>
In considering a move towards those four libraries becoming community hubs, the Task Group looked at what other community provision currently existed in their local vicinity, as they recognised it would not be helpful to take opportunities for generating income away from other nearby community facilities. They also received information from CYC Asset Management on other council owned buildings in the areas surrounding those libraries which were currently being used by community groups and where residents were accessing council and/or third sector services.

26. Finally, the Task Group received information from the council's mobile community services on the types of enquiries they often receive from members of the public about other council/community services e.g.:

- **Mobile Library Service** confirmed they often receive a range of enquires:

  - Health Issues e.g. *"My doctor says I need this operation do you have any info about the condition and being in hospital? Can I use your wifi/PCs to book the time?"*

  - Job Issues e.g. *"Can I look at the Press for jobs? / How do I apply for a job online? / Can I learn more about this company I have an interview with? / I need to update my CV"*

  - Financial Issues e.g. how to budget, latest stocks and shares, 'Which' magazine, courses to learn how to manage budgets

  - Council Services e.g. *"How do I report a broken lamp post?/ How do I get a council meeting agenda/minutes?"* or requests for information on planning applications / councillors / schools / community asset transfer / right to challenge / CYC website access / payments online etc

- National Govt Information e.g. VAT online, passport and driving licence applications etc

- Community Information e.g. on forthcoming events, reading groups, focus for community activity, how to volunteer etc

- **URBIE** (CYC mobile youth club for young people) confirmed they had received no specific requests for services such as housing or benefits. However during general conversations they often raise awareness of the issues of housing and benefit for young people, and have highlighted the role of Castlegate in giving advice, and the use of websites such as CYC and the young people's survival guide.

27. Recent Public Consultation on Local Libraries
Finally, the Task Group considered a report highlighting feedback from a recently completed public consultation on local libraries - see Annex B. Having noted that 13% of respondents stated a lack of transport as the reason they did not use the libraries, the Task Group suggested that the Libraries Service team look at those responses in detail to try to understand the reasons behind that figure and explore solutions.

Concluding Work on the Review

28. At their final meeting in early April 2013, the Task Group considered the difference between a community centre and a community hub built around a community library i.e. the provision of a community space but with the addition of professional library skills (including a children's specialist and a reader development specialist), promoting reading and literacy, giving free access to impartial information, enabling digital inclusion, and supporting lifelong learning and skills.

29. Learning in York's community libraries was provided through flexible learning in ICT suites. This included literacy and numeracy to level two, family learning courses, IT courses, ECDL etc. Many libraries also offered employability sessions and traditional adult learning e.g. calligraphy, Pilates, Spanish etc.

30. Where the space allowed, a Community hub would also aim to provide a range of other services and information, and provide opportunities to become involved, which might include the following (in addition to the provision listed at paragraph 4):

- Local history events
- Community engagement activities

- Access to information on public meetings and council decision making
- Councillor surgeries
- Meetings of self organised groups e.g. craft groups, reading groups
- Council services outreach programmes
- Government outreach programmes
- Drop in sessions for third sector organisations e.g. Macmillan, age uk, etc
- Children's activities
- Cultural, art activities and exhibitions, craft fairs, photography exhibitions
- Health information
- Wifi, Internet access
- Support for start up businesses
- Refreshments / cafe

31. The Task Group noted that the meaning of 'Community Library' had expanded to include a range of different models, from partnerships between a Local Authority and a community to independent single. Elsewhere some libraries are run by volunteers. However, volunteer run libraries need to fundraise for all their revenue so they tend to use their space in different ways in order to raise money, which moves the focus away from the provision of a library service, resulting in more of a community centre approach. The Task Group agreed that it may be beneficial to have a proportion of any income raised by a community hub ring-fenced to enable the service to re-invest the money in ways which will specifically support the needs of its community. Community hubs should clearly define their opening hours and which services are being offered when.

32. Finally, the Task Group received an update from the Head of Library Services on the ongoing work to draft a business plan for a social enterprise to operate the Council's Library and Archives services. The Task Group were reassured to hear that full consideration had been given to the associated legal, property and HR implications. And, that staff and library customers had been consulted.

Conclusions

33. Overall the Task Group agreed that where possible it would be helpful to increase the opening hours in those library buildings where the layout of the building and/or the availability of additional rooms, would allow for their alternative use.

34. Communities should be encouraged to use the buildings and the space they provide for community purposes, complementing other community facilities in the vicinity.

35. Whilst library buildings are open for community use, where at all possible and where self-service facilities are in place (or could be provided in the future), the library opening hours should be extended to provide a basic level of library service without the need for library staff.

36. Information on a range of council services (including public meetings and how to get involved), together with contact information, and similar appropriate information from the council's partners and third sector organisations should be made readily available in Libraries either on notice boards or via leaflets etc. The Task Group also agreed it would be useful if all libraries displayed more community information and details on how to volunteer and participate in responding to issues affecting their local community.

37. The Task Group agreed it would be useful to have a definition of what a community hub modelled around a community library was. They therefore suggested the following:

    'A Community Hub puts the local library at the heart of the community providing a flexible and welcoming space where local residents can come together for a wide range of community activities'

    Council Plan 2012-15

38. The recommendations arising from this review supports the council's aim to build strong communities and be a city full of active and self-reliant communities, where everyone has an effective voice in local issues and where there is a strong sense of belonging.

    Recommendations Arising from Review

39. In May 2013, the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the draft recommendation proposed by the Task Group, and agreed to propose the following recommendations to Cabinet:

    i.   The Library Service to:

        a) adopt the following definition of a community hub modelled around a community library and commit to implementing community hubs throughout the city:

'A Community Hub puts the local library at the heart of the community providing a flexible and welcoming space where local residents can come together for a wide range of community activities'

b) Consider the customer base for each library to identify ways of encouraging more use

c) Consider ways of increasing the number of volunteers and volunteering roles

d) Improve marketing for libraries and their facilities through a variety of mediums to the community and organisations

e) Identify the community hub elements currently available at each library and investigate how other elements may be introduced in the future to meet the aims of the agreed definition

f) Investigate the introduction of a fair trade refreshments / cafe at all community libraries

g) look at the Big Survey responses in detail to try to understand the reasons behind the figure of 13% of respondents who had stated a lack of transport as the reason they did not use libraries, and investigate the use of Dial-a-ride to improve access

h) Investigate the possibility of ring-fencing a proportion of the income raised by each library for re-investment into supporting the specific needs of its local community.

ii. Each Community Hub to:

a) Clearly define its opening hours and the services it offers and when, and ensure these are appropriately advertised so that it is clear when the building is available for alternative use.

b) Increase its opening hours to enable more opportunities for community use wherever possible.

c) Provide flexible space so that it may be used for a variety of purposes e.g. moveable shelving

d) Maintain self-service machines in its community library to enable a basic level of library service throughout its opening hours, without the need for library staff

e) Provide display boards and/or leaflets on:

- council services, public meetings and contact information
- the council's partners and third sector organisations
- community events and activities etc
- volunteering and participating in responding to issues affecting the local community

Reason: To complete the work on this review in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols.

Implications

40. **HR** - The Head of Libraries, Information & Archives has confirmed there would be no HR implications associated with the implementation of the proposed recommendations, even if the proposed introduction of a Social Enterprise to operate the Council's Library and Archives services were to proceed.

41. An assessment of the HR implications associated with the introduction of a Social Enterprise will be presented in a future report to Cabinet. All HR changes will be managed in accordance with the CYC Supporting Transformation policy.

42. **Legal** – There are no specific legal implications flowing from the recommendations. The Council does have a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. The Service also needs to ensure that appropriate agreements are in place for any building hires.

43. **Financial** – There are no financial implications associated with Recommendations (i) a-c & e, and (ii) a, d & e.

44. In regard to recommendation (i) d, the cost of marketing will depend on the mediums used. The intention is to advertise via the council's website, council newsletters, Your Ward, within library buildings etc therefore the costs will be minimal.

45. In regard to recommendations (i) f, g & h, there are no financial implications associated with carry out the recommended investigative work. In regard to recommendation (i) f, fair trade or rainforest alliance goods are no more expensive and are already in use in the current

library cafes. In other libraries, the plan is to introduce small drinks machines which will be self financing following a model in Northants libraries. In regard to recommendation (i) g, the Library Service plans to investigate opportunities for sponsorship i.e. good news story for a private sector firm. In regard to recommendation (i) h, the Library Service currently has an income target that needs to be met in order for the service to remain within budget. If income is above budget (and the overall service is within budget) the Service Manager has discretion to vire budgets to fulfil service aims. However following a move to a Social Enterprise, it may be easier to implement this recommendation through different ways of working with the community.

46. In regard to Recommendation (ii) b, extending community hub opening hours may increase costs in relation to staffing and premises. However it may be possible to recoup that cost through the use of volunteers, and charging for the use of the building, which will be easier in a social enterprise. The costs and potential charges would need assessing for each hub.

47. In regard to recommendation (ii) c, at some libraries movable shelving has already been introduced allowing better use of the space available, and it may not be very expensive to add to that. Where plans already exist to refurbish or extend library buildings, any furniture will be costed into the overall plan to make it easier for other uses of those buildings. Those plans will be initiated if and when funding becomes available.

48. In regard to recommendation (ii) e, there would be no cost to the council as long as the notice/display boards were already available and the leaflets and notices were printed by others. There may be an additional minimal cost to Democratic Services if a decision were taken to provide a hard copy of each agenda for public decision making meetings at all community hubs.

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Implications: Information was provided by the following Officers:

Legal – Andrew Docherty
Finance – Richard Hartle
HR – Mary Bailey

Wards Affected: All ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:
Annex A - Site Visits - Information Gathered
Annex B - Report on Recent Libraries Public Consultation