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**Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture &  
Social Inclusion**

13 September 2011

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities and Culture)

**The Explore Vision and Community Consultation**

**Summary**

1. This report proposes a programme of community consultation in order to guide the roll out of the Explore Library Learning Centre model across the city.

**Background**

2. In March this year the then Executive Member agreed to roll out the Explore Library Learning Centre model across the city including implementation of the innovative Explore Gateways. The incoming Executive Member has requested a comprehensive programme of community consultation and equality impact assessment to underpin this roll out, in order to ensure that the service meets the needs of all York's residents, before implementing new arrangements in each community.
3. The key principles agreed in March were:
  - **Explore Centres** will be: York, Acomb, Tang Hall, Clifton and Haxby
  - **Explore Gateways** will be: Bishopthorpe, Copmanthorpe, Dunnington, Dringhouses, Fulford, Huntington, Poppleton, New Earswick and Strensall
  - The mobile library will be reviewed later in the year as a new vehicle is planned. The mobile library will continue to provide services to those people unable to easily reach a static library.
  - The Library at Askham Grange Prison will continue to be run and the Home Library Service will be developed to include more people.
  - Digital services will be developed with free Wi-Fi offered from every building and the People's Network PCs will be upgraded

The E Library will continue to be developed as a virtual branch – providing an online service to York’s digital community.

- Each Gateway will have self issue terminals.
  - Gateways will be grouped around Explore Centres to provide support. The full range of services will be available at Explore Centres and through Gateways.
  - Specialists will work more closely with frontline staff providing expertise
  - There will be more community involvement through the establishment of Friends groups and the use of volunteers.
  - A process improvement project will be undertaken to support this model, working with EDRMS to set up a new system for sharing information across the service
  - We will be actively looking at other possibilities for the provision of Gateways including an Explore Book Café in Rowntree Park.
  - During 2011/12 we will begin to consider shared use of our buildings by both other council services and community groups
4. Since March the self-issue machines and free wi-fi have been installed.

### **The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

5. In order to create an effective and focused community engagement plan we have begun the process of carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment. The first stage of this is a screening exercise which draws on our knowledge of who currently does and does not use the service and how they use it. This focuses on people with protected characteristics and will guide us in designing our community engagement and subsequently in creating an action plan to address any barriers to accessing the service.
6. We have used a number of sources of information:
- Feedback from customers and user groups
  - Experian data, looking at categories of households
  - Talkabout surveys relating to York Explore
  - Equalities monitoring information from our ongoing re-registering of users

Detail about the customer insight data can be found in Annex B1.

7. The key issues identified from customer feedback are:
- There are a number of barriers for disabled people including:
    - inaccessible signage
    - little adaptive technology e.g. for visually impaired users
    - poor service for customers who are unable to leave their homes to choose their own books and access information
  - Spaces are not allocated for breastfeeding mothers in all libraries
  - There is little provision in languages other than English
  - There is little recognition of the needs of carers, e.g. in relation to the timing of events
8. Encouragingly, all the data shows that our users are broadly representative of York's communities; however, there are areas for improvement. By combining all the information we can draw the following conclusions regarding potential target groups that we must particularly engage with:
- Those aged 80 plus, about 10,000 people. Our home library service which takes books to housebound people is currently only serving just over 100 people. This is clearly not good enough and we need to develop a plan to improve this service to vulnerable people
  - Younger adults 15 – 34, about 63,000 people. This may be due to a lack of knowledge about the service and so we will need to find ways to engage more effectively with them.
  - The BME communities particularly Indian, Pakistani, and Black African
  - Disabled people

### **Next Steps – A Community Engagement Plan**

9. The next step in progressing the EIA to the action plan stage will be the development of a comprehensive consultation programme with each community in York, both geographic communities and communities of interest. The timescale for this work will be October 2011 to March 2012. Areas for consultation will be based around the core statutory duty and individual local offers e.g. opening hours, stock, use of buildings. Key elements will be:
- A **User Committee** will be set up for each library. These are used successfully in other authorities and we have been looking at how South Gloucestershire operate theirs. The committees

would help us to develop and deliver the service ensuring it reflects the needs of the local community. We will ensure that the committees are representative of local communities and include local city and parish councillors. We will begin with Strensall and Copmanthorpe.

- An **Explore Friends Group** will be set up with different levels of membership depending on how much or how little people want to be involved. This will also be a Friends Group for Adult Learners, enabling people to influence the development of learning programmes. We are in discussions with Northamptonshire Libraries to learn how their successful Friends groups work and we are looking at New York Public Library as an example of international good practice
- **Volunteers** – we have developed a number of roles for volunteers e.g. storytelling for under fives, IT buddies, summer reading challenge, big city read. We are working with our partners Aviva to promote these opportunities amongst their staff as well as the general population
- Work with **special interest groups** in the areas of disability, BME, older people and faith to discuss how we can better meet their needs

### **Options**

10. The options open to the Executive Member are:
  - to agree a Community Engagement Plan
  - not to engage with users and communities

### **Analysis**

11. Our statutory responsibility includes ensuring that the service reflects the needs of local communities. These proposals offer a greater degree of community involvement through the establishment of Friends groups and roles for volunteers and will allow us to better understand and respond to local need.

### **Corporate Priorities**

12. The proposal relates to all the strands of the Council Plan. The provision of safe, free spaces open to all in local communities is important to community cohesion and enables the Council to deliver a range of services that will particularly contribute to Building Stronger Communities.

## **Implications**

13. **Financial:** The costs of the consultation exercise can be met from within the current Libraries budget. Any future proposals brought to Cabinet Member Decision Sessions arising from the consultation will identify their financial implications.
14. **Human Resources:** The implementation of self-issue machines means that a reduction can be made in the number of Reading and Information Advisors. It is proposed that the Head of Service delivers this working in consultation with staff and Unison to agree to requests for voluntary redundancy and avoiding the need for any compulsory redundancy.
15. To achieve the above the Head of Service will, under delegated authority, set out revised arrangements that:
  - ensure that existing staffing resources are most effectively allocated across the service
  - provide for a revised post of Gateway Manager
  - allocate staffing resources to create an improved home library service
16. **Equalities:** The equality implications are as set out above. Once the action plan associated with the EIA has been developed and implemented it will be essential to monitor its success through usage statistics and customer feedback, through further Talkabout surveys, and through constant engagement with user and representative groups.
17. There are no additional Legal, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology, or Property implications arising from this report.

## **Risk Management**

18. The risk/s associated with the recommendation of this report are assessed at a net level below 16.

## **Recommendations**

19. The Executive Member is asked to comment on the proposals and to instruct the Head of Service to:
  - Develop a community engagement plan along the lines set out in paragraph 9

- Implement revised staffing arrangements to deliver the proposed approach as set out in paragraph 13 and 15

Reason: so that the library service can continue to develop its Explore vision

### Contact Details

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Report Approved               Date

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

**Wards Affected:** **All**

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

### Background Papers:

*Development of the Explore Vision in Libraries*, report to the Executive Member of Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion: 8 March 2011

### Annexes

B1 - Customer Insight Data