

## Libraries Service Redesign - progress update

Lead Officer: Michele Cusack - Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure Commissioning  
Author: Oliver Woodhams - Strategic Manager for Community and Traded Services  
Contact Details: Tel: 07977 400667, Email: owoodhams@somerset.gov.uk  
Cabinet Member: Cllr. David Hall - Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Community Infrastructure  
Division and Local Member: All

### 1. Summary

- 1.1. A report recommending changes to the way library services are provided was considered by the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> November. At that meeting, the Committee resolved:
- a) To ask Officers to identify where Community Library Partnerships are proposed that a list of partners, including a lead partner, is compiled and presented to the Committee's meeting on 11 December;
  - b) To ask Officers to compile a list of the communities where a Community Library Partnership is not possible and to present that list to the Committee's meeting on 11 December.

This report addresses the above requests by providing an update on progress with establishing Community Library Partnerships, in the early stages of implementing the decision by the County Council's Cabinet to re-design the libraries service.

- 1.2. Somerset's Libraries Service supports the council's priority outcomes:
- Children and Young People are supported through early years reading activities, skills development (Code Clubs, technology activities, volunteering opportunities) and study space with free Wifi.
  - We provide books on prescription and other health and wellbeing information resources, a wide range of health and wellbeing activities, and combat social isolation by bringing people together.
  - Through business events, access to digital making equipment and our specialist business resources collections, we support businesses to develop and thrive.

The Library Service Redesign programme furthers the objectives of the Council's business plan by:

- Ensuring the Council is financially sustainable and makes decisions based on evidence and need;
- Supporting development of stronger communities including working with them to increase their resilience (supporting a greater role for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector).

### 2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

### 3. Background and progress report

#### ***Background:***

- 3.1. A vision, outcomes framework and strategic direction for the Libraries Service was determined in November 2017. An objective was set to review and re-design the libraries network, to modernise the Libraries Service in Somerset and to put the service on a sustainable financial footing. Following an extensive public consultation exercise, and a full assessment of needs, access, and equalities impact, recommendations for change were presented to the County Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018. Cabinet took a decision to retain 19 libraries as County Council operated library buildings, and to seek to establish Community Library Partnerships in 15 communities, on the basis that if such partnerships could not be established, those libraries would close and library services would be provided in other ways. An earlier officer decision set a process and framework for agreeing and supporting Community Library Partnerships, and that process is now underway.

#### ***Community Library Partnership Proposals received:***

- 3.2. The deadline for communities to submit Expressions of Interest in establishing Community Library Partnerships was 15<sup>th</sup> November, and all Expressions of Interest were assessed for potential viability in the following week. A summary of the Expressions of Interest that are being taken forward is set out here:

<b>Library</b>	<b>Lead Partner</b>	<b>Staffing model proposed</b>
Bishops Lydeard	Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council	Staff-led, with possible supplementary volunteers.
Bruton	The Ward Library Trust, Bruton	Volunteer-led, with some paid staff resource.
Castle Cary	Friends of Castle Cary Community Library	Volunteer led.
Milborne Port	Milborne Port Parish Council	Hybrid - staff / volunteer mix.
Nether Stowey	Friends of Nether Stowey Library	Volunteer led.
North Petherton	North Petherton Town Council	Staff-led, with possible supplementary volunteers.
Porlock	Porlock Parish Council	Volunteer led.
Priorswood	Friends of Taunton Library	Staff / Open+, with supplementary volunteers
Somerton	Somerton Library Trust	Staff-led, supplemented by volunteers.
South Petherton	South Petherton Parish Council	Staff-led, with possible supplementary volunteers.
Street	Street Library Trust	Staff led, supplemented by volunteers.
Watchet	Watchet Town Council	Staff led.
Wiveliscombe	Wiveliscombe Town Council	Staff led.

- 3.3. All of the libraries in the table above will remain open until 31<sup>st</sup> March whilst work progresses to develop Community Library Partnerships, with the aim of keeping library buildings open into the future.
- 3.4. The project team is extremely pleased with the number and quality of Expressions of Interest that have been submitted; all are considered to have strong potential to develop into established Community Library Partnerships. The majority of community partners have positive ambitions for their local libraries, with many communities seeking to make improvements to the current offer - whether by increasing opening hours, seeking improved premises, or developing the range of events and activities. However, notwithstanding the overriding optimism, a lot of work remains to take forward the proposals and establish new community partnership models. All of the proposals are dependent on a range of factors, and some require difficult issues to be resolved. Legal agreements, staffing and premises arrangements will need to be developed and agreed.
- 3.5. In particular, Scrutiny Committee are asked to note that two of the planned Community Library Partnerships have a significant dependency on support from a third party:
- The Expression of Interest to take forward a Community Library Partnership at Priorswood Library is likely to be dependent on a successful bid for third party funding for Open+ technology (this technology will allow the library to be open to the public without staff or volunteers present). The lead partner is likely to bid for funds from the Taunton Unparished Area fund in January 2019. If this bid is unsuccessful, Priorswood library could close in April 2019.
  - The Expression of Interest from Watchet Town Council is conditional on a request for the freehold asset transfer of the current library building being approved by West Somerset District Council, the current owners of the library building. If West Somerset District Council do not support the asset transfer, Watchet library could close in April 2019.
- 3.6. The project team have issued feedback letters to all lead partners, and posters have been placed in the 13 libraries above to advise customers of the position. A new, temporary Community Library Partnership Co-ordinator has taken up post, providing additional capacity to carry out the significant tasks of developing agreements, transitional and handover arrangements, and training volunteers. Even with this additional temporary capacity, taking 13 projects forward will be a significant challenge for the whole service, as well as colleagues in property, finance and legal services who are providing support.

***Communities where a Community Library Partnership is not possible:***

- 3.7. Unfortunately, no Expressions of Interest were received for the following Libraries:
- Highbridge
  - Sunningdale (Yeovil)
- 3.8. These libraries will therefore close on 29 December 2018, and library services will be delivered to the surrounding communities through the new Library Outreach Service delivery model, as determined through the Cabinet decision. At the point of publishing this report, work to identify and agree locations for outreach service delivery is underway, and posters have been placed in these

two libraries to advise customers. More detailed customer engagement will be undertaken during December.

- 3.9.** Whilst the closure of these two libraries will impact significantly on individuals using the service, they are two of the lowest-used libraries in the current network. Footfall in 2017/18 for these libraries was just 0.4% of total footfall for the library service as a whole. Both libraries are less than 2 miles away from alternative library buildings at Burnham-on-Sea and Yeovil Town Centre respectively.

***Other Library Service Redesign work underway:***

- 3.10.** As well as taking forward the implementation of new Community Library Partnership and Library Outreach Service delivery models, the Library Service Redesign programme is also taking forward a number of other aspects of the Cabinet decision:

- The implementation of new outreach models in the 4 major Somerset towns is underway, with an initial focus on Yeovil.
- Community support and income generation initiatives are being developed to support Cheddar, Ilminster, Langport and Martock libraries, which are being retained with reduced budgets in 2019/20.
- The project to develop an alternative town centre option for Shepton Mallet library is moving forward, following work by Shepton Mallet Town Council on this project.
- A staff consultation on a comprehensive workforce restructure (including a restructure of the Libraries Management Team) will commence at the beginning of December.

Implementation of the cabinet decision to develop a policy on donations and philanthropic giving for the library service will commence as early as possible in 2019.

## **4. Consultations undertaken**

- 4.1.** A major public and staff consultation exercise was carried out between 29<sup>th</sup> January and 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Over 7000 people and organisations provided feedback, which was carefully analysed and thoroughly considered. The vast majority of respondents to the public consultation exercise were strongly opposed to changes to library provision, particularly the potential closure of library buildings. Where respondents were asked to express their preference for Community Library Partnerships or mobile / outreach options, there was an almost universal preference for the community partnership option as a means of retaining the library.
- 4.2.** Prior to the public consultation exercise, an extensive community engagement exercise was undertaken in the Autumn of 2017, which included many fruitful discussions about the potential for community supported library delivery models. Many of the Expressions of Interest we are taking forward originated from these early discussions with community groups. This 'co-production' approach continues as we work with partners to develop Community Library Partnerships and outreach delivery services.

## **5. Implications**

- 5.1.** Implications of the alternative models of service delivery were thoroughly

assessed as part of the cabinet decision report. In particular, a full Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out for both of the potential scenarios of library closures and (at a higher level) the implementation of Community Library Partnerships. The actions set out in the specific Equalities Impact Assessments for Highbridge and Sunningdale will now be implemented. As Community Library Partnership proposals develop (and before contracts are signed), a revised assessment of Equalities Impacts will be undertaken, which will take into account the latest available information.

## 6. Background papers

- 6.1. A number of previous decisions have been made during the course of the Libraries Service Re-design programme:
- Vision, Strategic Direction and Outcomes Framework decision  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=566>
  - Consultation decisions
    - Decision to carry out Library Redesign Consultation  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=632>
    - Extension of Library Redesign Consultation decision  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=682>
  - Community Library Expression of Interest Procedure decision  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=682>
  - Library Service Redesign Cabinet decision  
<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MIId=761&Ver=4>
- 6.2. Scrutiny Committee may also wish to refer to previous reports and presentations to the meetings on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2017, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2018, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and 24<sup>th</sup> October 2018, all of which are available on the Somerset County Council website at <http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=184&Year=0>.

**Note** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author