

Report of the Strategic Director of Place to the meeting of Executive to be held on 6th February 2024

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Subject:

Library Service Review

Summary statement:

This report sets out the proposed approach to conducting a Review of Bradford Libraries Service during 2024, in order to make savings of £175,000 in 2025/6 financial year.

This report has not been included on the published forward plan as an issue for consideration, because the proposal to undertake a review of the Library Service was put forward only very recently as part of the Council's 2024/5 budget proposals. As it is impractical to defer the decision until it has been included in the published Forward Plan the report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 10 of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in the Council's Constitution.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out for this proposed Review. At this stage the assessment is a neutral impact on people with protected characteristics, as the outcomes of the Review are unknown. However, it is recognised that, as specific proposals are developed, a number of communities that share a protected characteristic could be affected. It is expected that public, staff and union consultation will be carried out on any changes proposed as an outcome of the Review, and the EIA will be kept updated as the Review progresses. Consultees will be encouraged to comment on the proposals and any impacts they believe might be felt by particular groups of people (in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty). Where possible arrangements will be made to reduce any negative impacts of the proposals; these mitigations will be set out in the EIA.

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Healthy People & Places

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Environment and Regeneration

1. SUMMARY

This report sets out the proposed scope, process, timeline and governance for a Review of Bradford Libraries Service, as proposed in the Council's budget proposals for 2024/5, in order to achieve savings of £175,000 in 2025/6 financial year.

Whilst the proposal to conduct a Libraries Review itself forms part of the public consultation on the Council's budget proposals for 2024/5, it is important to agree the approach to the Review in advance to ensure it is successful in achieving the required objectives assuming it goes ahead.

2. BACKGROUND

The report of the Director of Finance to Executive on 11 January, clearly set out the Council's challenging financial position. It stated that "Effectively the Council will require re-shaping to become affordable within the resources that are available" and "there will be a reduction in the level of services provided and the number of staff employed by the Council" as a result.

It said "An approach to strategic financial management is required based on the following objectives" which included:

- Transform and reduce levels of service provision, ensuring that services that continue are as high performing as possible
- Minimise impacts on prevention services that are reducing demand

And went on to say that the development of a sustainable plan requires (among other things):

- Intelligent use of data and sector good practice to identify how to deliver the highest performance within the available resources
- A programme of strategic service reviews to reduce demand and cost

This included a strategic review of the Library Service (proposal ref. P14) as follows:

Strategic Review of Libraries (£0 in 2024-25 rising to £175,000 by 2025- 26)

The Council is undertaking a strategic review of its libraries to identify how overall operating costs can be reduced. This review will focus on the overall costs of the library services which are mainly contained within the council run libraries and specifically review facility operating costs, usage data, property and asset stock-condition and the potential for alternative operating models to be adopted.

This is in the context of previous reductions to the libraries budget of 68% over 10 years, from a gross expenditure budget of £5,804,300 in 2010/11 to £1,854,800 in 2020/21 (Quarter 3 position). Previous savings have included the closure of the mobile library service and the Schools Library Service, the transfer of 17 libraries to community management, restructuring that removed a large number of management and administrative roles, and a 73% reduction in the book fund from £621,675 in 2010/11 to £167,400 in 2020/21. Nationally, there are reports of around 30% reduction in expenditure on libraries over the same time period and up to 800 library closures across the country.

Benchmarking statistics from CIPFA for 2021/2 show the average expenditure on libraries nationally was £9,982 per 1000 population (a drop of 17% from the previous year), giving an average budget of £5.202m. This compares with expenditure of just £6,444 per 1000 population in Bradford, with expenditure of £3.358m that year.

Previous benchmarking shows our budget for stock and resources is particularly low, with £167,400 expenditure representing just £315 budget per 1000 population (31p per head) compared to an average nationally of £1,043 per 1000 population (£1.04 per head). This is the least expenditure nationally bar one according to CIPFA statistics and the lowest regionally.

The proposed approach to the Library Service Review, set out in section 3 below, is based on the strategic principles taken from the budget report, as set out above, and will also consider opportunities to generate new or increased income.

Public consultation on this and all other budget proposals opened on 11th January and will close on 17 February and the outcome will be presented to the Council's Executive on 20 February.

3. PROPOSED APPROACH TO REVIEW

The driver for the Review is the need to find savings of £175,000 with full year effect in 2025/6. This is 7.8% of the current gross budget of £2.237M. It is highly likely this will require rationalisation of the service, with some reductions; this will be done with the aim of retaining as high performing a service as possible.

The purpose of the Review will be to determine how the Council can best meet its statutory obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service within the available budget, including consideration of:

- Community managed libraries, Hybrid libraries and Council managed libraries
- Buildings
- Opening hours
- Staffing and volunteers
- IT infrastructure
- Income generation
- Alternative governance models

The outcome of the Review will be to articulate an overall service specification to meet community needs that is sustainable within available resources.

It is worth noting that customer engagement with library services is widely understood to help prevent or reduce demand for higher cost interventions and services, which is why our Public Health and Adult Services contribute financially to maintaining and enhancing the library service. More information about this can be found at the following links: <https://dcmslibraries.blog.gov.uk/2016/09/26/healthier-and-happier-lives-how-libraries-deliver/> and <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/research-and-data/health-and-wellbeing-benefits->

[public-libraries](#) and <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/how-council-library-services-can-support-children-and-families-earliest-years> for example. Therefore, decisions will need to be made judiciously to avoid impacting the positive benefits of libraries.

4. METHODOLOGY

Officers will review and update the data and assessments that were carried out as part of the 2019/20 Libraries Review and make use of industry best practice, including successful savings and income generation models adopted elsewhere. In particular we will follow the guidance and toolkit published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on how to make changes to library services in a way that is data and evidence led:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service>

The toolkit supports portfolio holders, senior officers, council transformation teams and library service managers to:

- undertake a robust, objective and evidence-based analysis of local need
- develop a strategy to deliver a library service that will meet the needs of their local communities

Following this methodology should help mitigate the risk of a legal challenge that is upheld by DCMS in its role as superintendent of public library services.

5. TIMELINE

Below is an outline timeline for key milestones in the Review:

January – March: commence data and needs analysis work and identify any ‘quick wins’ that will deliver savings without impacting the public service or requiring public consultation

5th March Executive: progress update and decision on any available ‘quick wins’

April – July: identify specific savings proposals and create a robust, evidence-based service specification for the statutory library service that is sustainable within available resources

July Executive: decision on service specification and savings proposals, and agreement to launch public consultation as required.

September Executive: report results of any public consultation and agree final savings proposals for implementation

October – March: carry out any HR and other consultation and processes as required in order to implement the agreed final proposals by April 2025

6. GOVERNANCE

The Library Service Review will be overseen by a senior officer Review Group led by the Strategic Director of Place and comprised of the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources, the Assistant Director for Assets and Facilities Management, the Assistant Director for Culture, Sport and Leisure, the Director of Human Resources, and the Head of Finance. The Head of Libraries, supported by the Council's Transformation Team, will report to this Review Group as required.

7. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The Library Service nett budget is £2.06M for 2023/4 financial year, including an income target of £177k. Throughout the year the Service has been reporting up to £400k overspend, largely due to a previous unachievable saving of £350k, together with additional pressures mainly related to premises costs. This unachievable saving and pressure is set to be reversed in the 2024/5 financial year, whilst a new saving of £175k will need to be met in the 2025/6 financial year.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

As set out above, care will be taken to follow the guidance published by DCMS on how to make changes to library services, in order to mitigate the risk of the Council failing to comply with its legal duties and thus being vulnerable to legal challenge or action by the Secretary of State. Governance arrangements are set out in paragraph 6 of this report.

9. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There is a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 on local authorities to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service". The detailed statutory duty is set out below.

Section 7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 provides as follow:— General duty of library authorities.

(1) It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

(2) In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available

for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and

(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and

(c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.

Under the same Act, section 10 provides that the Secretary of State has certain step-in powers where concerned that library authorities are not performing their duties properly.

In considering its Library Service Review, it will be necessary for the Council to have regard to its public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

10.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified.

10.2 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified.

10.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified.

10.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

No significant implications have been identified.

10.5 TRADE UNION

Trade Unions will be consulted on any staffing impact of proposals.

10.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified at this stage.

10.7 AREA COMMITTEE LOCALITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified at this stage.

10.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

No significant implications have been identified at this stage.

10.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

No significant implications have been identified.

11. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members agree to proceed with a strategic Review of the Library Service that will deliver £175k savings in 2025/6, pending the outcome of the public consultation on the Council's budget proposals, and agree the proposed approach to conducting the Review as set out in sections 3 - 6 of this report.

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.