

Cabinet – 29 October 2014

Bentley Employability and Learning Hub

Portfolio: Councillor K Hussain – Community, Leisure and Culture

Related portfolio: None

Service: Library Services

Wards: Bentley and Darlaston North

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 Bentley Library closed in April 2006. The previous February, Cabinet had agreed that a replacement would be provided in a new building funded by the sale of Council owned sites in the locality and receipts derived from the release of restrictive covenants on land formerly owned by the Council. Since then, library users in Bentley have relied upon the mobile library service or have visited the libraries in Darlaston and Willenhall.
- 1.2 Unfortunately, due to the changed economic climate and consequent reduction in land values, the scheme was not affordable and the development was put on hold. It was recognised that a smaller library would not fully utilise the site available and the co-location of a new family contact centre was proposed. Following the sale of the identified sites, there remained a shortfall of £650,000 with this proposal.
- 1.3 At this time, a proposal was received from Old Hall People's Partnership (OHPP) for a community run library facility located in their premises at Wing Close, Bentley. The capital cost of this proposal would be £145,000 with no ongoing revenue implications, leaving a surplus of up to £714,064 for the Capital Programme.
- 1.4 This is a key decision as the reduced expenditure equates to a saving exceeding 10 % in the Capital Programme
- 1.5 These proposals support the Council's priorities by encouraging local people to engage in positive activities which will benefit the community as a whole and promoting the creation safe sustainable and inclusive communities. Other community-based services available at Wing Close will be enhanced by a library facility and improve employment opportunities and the employability of local people.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That a one-off investment of £115,000 in the provision of community run library/learning facilities as part of an Employability and Learning Hub at the building managed by Old Hall People's Partnership (OHPP) in Wing Close be approved.
- 2.2 That an award up to £30,000 is offered to Old Hall People's Partnership (OHPP) as a capital grant towards necessary improvements to its building at Leys Hall in Darlaston where the "Pass It On" project has relocated to make room for the Learning Hub at Wing Close
- 2.3 That the remainder of this capital is released to support future capital programmes.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 In February 2006, Cabinet agreed to the closure of the then Bentley Library in Queen Elizabeth Avenue and its replacement with a new building, as part of a master plan for the regeneration of Bentley Centre. The new library development was to be funded by the sale of a number of Council owned sites in the locality and by receipts derived from the release of restrictive covenants on land formerly owned by the Council. The library closed in April 2006 and the building was demolished along with the adjoining former neighbourhood office. Since then, library users in Bentley have relied upon the mobile library service or have visited the libraries in Darlaston and Willenhall.
- 3.2 Due to the changed economic climate and consequent reduction in land values, the sale of the land did not reach the level anticipated in 2006 making the preferred scheme not affordable and the development was put on hold. It was recognised that a smaller library would not fully utilise the site available and the co-location of a new family contact centre was proposed. It was hoped that economies of scale could be achieved by developing the two together and that this would improve affordability.
- 3.3 The library/family contact centre scheme was costed at £2,982,100. Potential resources total £2,332,000 leaving a minimum funding gap of £650,100. In addition, the provision of any new library in Bentley has an ongoing, additional revenue implication of around £90,000 per annum for staffing, utilities and council tax.
- 3.4 Officers were considering how to address this gap when an approach was received from Old Hall People's Partnership (OHPP), a registered charity, proposing that a community managed library facility could be sited at Wing Close in a council owned building that is under OHPP's management. At the time the building was primarily used for OHPP's "Pass It On" furniture recycling project. This has since expanded beyond the capacity at Wing Close and has relocated to Leys Hall in Darlaston. This building belongs to Leys Hall

People's Partnership, a charity allied to OHPP. A capital grant of up to £30,000 would assist OHPP to carry out essential internal works such as the installation of a new heating system and upgrading electrical systems.

- 3.5 Since the relocation of "Pass It On", OHPP have started to develop an Employability Hub at Wing Close. This currently uses European Social Fund (ESF) funding for an "Aim High" job club, which is aimed at people who are over 50 years or disabled who are seeking work. It offers placements and help with literacy, numeracy, CVs and interview skills. This project would be enhanced by a community led library and learning facility on the same site. The Hub will be staffed by OHPP's employees and have an online connection to the Library Service. Library staff would run activities and be available on a "surgery" basis at regular, advertised times. As such, it would be a community-run book exchange facility along the lines previously envisaged by the re-provision of the library service. It would complement the network of libraries across the borough in a way that would not be likely to compromise the Council's ability to demonstrate equity in any future rationalisation of library services.
- 3.6 The facility will benefit any local resident who needs to use these services, as they will be accessible in a single site. Although Wing Close is not as centrally located in Bentley as Queen Elizabeth Avenue, OHPP have a unit in the shop parade (known as The Hub) and arrangements could be made for a book collection/drop off there to complement Wing Close.
- 3.7 This alternative option would require a total of £115,000 (£50,000 to remodel the building and an additional £65,000 allocation for the purchase of stock, networking and IT resources) plus any agreed grant award to OHPP.
- 3.8 The Family Contact Centre would not be part of this proposal and Children's Services would use the funding already allocated for this element of the project to refurbish premises in Stroud Avenue.
- 3.9 This would leave a surplus of up to £714,064 (dependent on land sales) for investment in other council priorities as part of the Council's Capital Programme.

4. Council priorities

These proposals support the Council's priorities as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy "the Walsall Plan" as follows:

- *Economic development, employment and improving employability*
OHPP are developing Wing Close as an Employability and Learning Hub offering a job club for people over 50 years or disabled who are seeking work. This project will be enhanced by a community led library and learning facility on the same site and encourage use by the wider community.

- *Creating safe sustainable and inclusive communities*
The facility will encourage local people to engage in positive activities which will benefit the wider community and promote the creation of safe, sustainable and inclusive communities who help themselves.
- *Improving learning and life children for children and young people*
Access to library facilities in the local area will improve the literacy levels of children and young people, provide information to support homework and engender a love of reading.

5. Risk management

Management arrangements for the Wing Close library facility are yet to be agreed in detail and this is recognised as a potential project risk. A service level agreement will be required to govern basics such as hours of opening, staffing arrangements, stock levels etc. It is proposed that a steering group is set up to determine these arrangements. The steering group could include ward councillors. Once open, this group could become an advisory User Group

6. Financial implications

The financial implications of the development of a community managed library facility at Wing Close are as follows:

- £145,000 investment to enable the provision of a community managed library facility at Wing Close. This comprises: £115,000 for the refurbishment of the space at Wing Close and the set up costs for the library (as set out above) and a proposed capital grant of up to £30,000 to Old Hall People's Partnership to do necessary building works at Leys Hall for the Pass It On project.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The management arrangements between Old Hall People's Partnership and the Council for the community managed library facility will need to be recorded in a legally binding agreement approved by Legal Services.
- 7.2 The local authority is legally required, by the 1964 Libraries and Museums Act, to provide a library service for all its residents that is "efficient and comprehensive" and freely access by anyone who wishes to make use of it.

8. Property implications

The property at Wing Close is owned by the Council and administered by OHPP. Approval of the OHPP proposal to deliver library facilities from their building in Wing Close would release the Queen Elizabeth Avenue site for

alternative use or disposal. Options for the site, within the Council's current planning policy and recognising its location within a local centre, will be considered and recommendations made to Cabinet in due course.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

The proposal will support the development of a sustainable, healthy community offering opportunities for volunteering and for ways back into employment. Media will be available to promote healthy lifestyles and to provide helpful information on coping with illness. Reading for pleasure provides relaxation and can relieve stress.

10. Staffing implications

There are no staffing implications for the Council in this proposal.

11. Equality implications

The provision of library facilities in the Bentley area will improve access to reading materials and information to people in the local area. This will particularly benefit children older people and those with disability who find travelling difficult.

12. Consultation

12.1 A community consultation has been undertaken with Bentley residents to gather their views on the options to provide library services in the area and to inform a decision on which option to implement. 4,000 questionnaires were sent out to Bentley households asking them to state their preferred option, about their current library and their potential use of any new facility. The 5 options were:

- 1. Do not provide a library in Bentley, continue with the current mobile service and use the money to help meet the council's savings*
- 2. Extend the mobile library service in the Bentley area at an annual cost of approximately £1,000 for each new stop*
- 3. Spend £115,000 to set up a council supported library service at Old Hall People's Partnership, Wing Close, Bentley, with running costs met by Old Hall People's Partnership with staff training and stock provided by the Council*
- 4. Spend the £957,000 constructing a new library facility at Queen Elizabeth Avenue, Bentley managed by the council and costing approximately an additional £90,000 a year to run*

5. *Spend £3m constructing a new shared facility at Queen Elizabeth Avenue, Bentley, including a library and another council service (not open to the public). This would be managed by the council and costing approximately an additional £90,000 a year to run. Building costs would be shared between the two council services, however we are still £650,000 short of the £3m required.*

12.2 427 completed questionnaires have been returned, representing an 11% response rate. The key findings are:

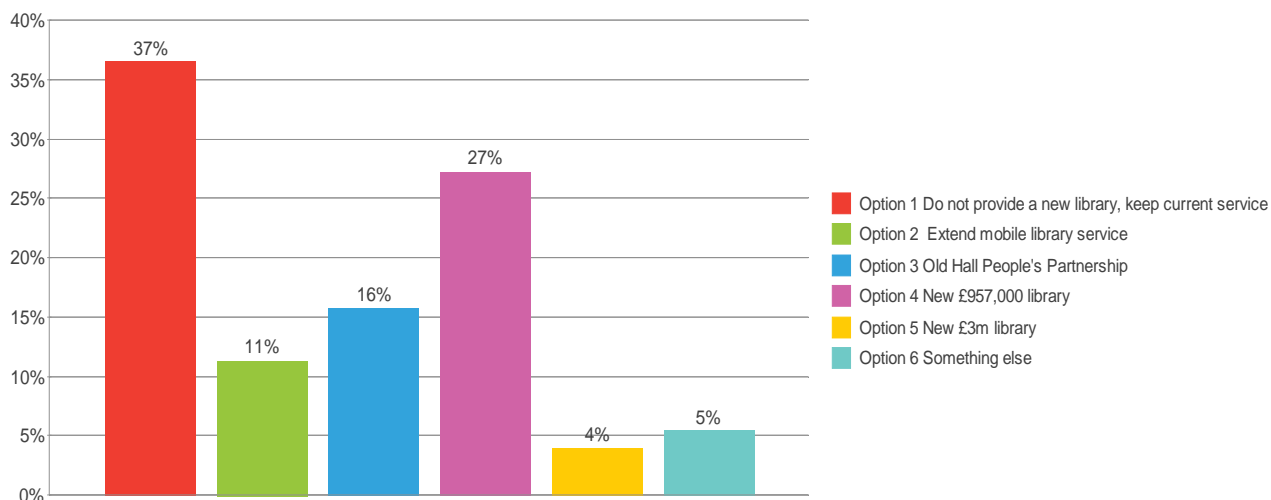
- Libraries are generally seen as more important to the local community than to individual respondents themselves
- 51% of respondents had used the library within the last 12 months, but 31% have never used the library.
- Of those who would visit the library, 80% were prepared to travel up to one mile and 37% a up to 2 miles
- Distance puts most current library users off visiting the library more often, but non users feel they can get what they need from other sources and have no reason to use the library.
- Excluding the 66 people who did not know, over two thirds of respondents think access to some sort of library facility is needed in Bentley, however over a third do not think a new library is needed
- Most respondents (37%) stated a preference for option 1, not providing a new library and keeping the current mobile service. This was followed by option 3 (27%) to build a new £957,000 library at Queen Elizabeth Drive. 16% prefer option 3, a facility at Old Hall People's Partnership.
- 39% of respondents were aged 65 years or older. 43% said they were retired, 42% were in paid full or part time work. Only 1% were studying or in full time education

12.3 The analysis of the consultation was considered by the Bentley Project Reference Group. They accepted that the majority of people who responded were satisfied with the current library provision and did not want a new library. Respondents felt more important issues for the Bentley area were activities for teenagers and young people, road repairs, levels of crime and clean streets.

12.4 The Project Reference Group expressed strongly, their wish for the capital receipt currently allocated to the provision of a new library to be retained to benefit the residents of Bentley. The Group suggested that some of the capital receipt could be ring fenced to provide a play area and skate park for young people and teenagers and CCTV in the local shopping centre. Other suggestions were for improvement to existing local community facilities.

12.5 The Project Reference Group also expressed support for a pilot for the provision of library facilities through Old Hall People's Partnership, as a mature community organisation, who would also provide other, complimentary services such as an "employability hub". This could be piloted alongside the current mobile library provision in the area while its sustainability was assessed.

Preferred option for a library service in Bentley (Base 408)



12.6 This report was considered by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel at its meeting on 13 October 2014. The Panel supported the project and agreed the following resolutions (draft):

1. A service level agreement be set up between the Council and Old Hall People's Partnership with regard to the operation of a library facility at Wing Close. The agreement should cover:
 - a. A minimum term of operation for the Library facility;
 - b. A range of expected opening hours;
2. A further report be considered by the Panel prior to the Library facility becoming operational;
3. The Panel receive feedback on the operation of the library facility six months after it has been operational.

Background papers

None

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Jamie Morris
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Morris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

20 October 2014

Councillor K Hussain
Portfolio Holder

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Hussain', with a large, sweeping initial 'K'.

20 October 2014