

**12 July 2011**

**Key Messages from the consultation on the Library Service and progress in relation to the recommendations from the Panel to Cabinet in November 2010**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr A Harris - Leisure and Culture Portfolio

**Summary of report:**

In June 2010 a Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel working group looked into the future of the Library Service and leisure centres in Walsall. A report, which was approved by the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 14 October 2010, was taken to Cabinet in November 2010. This provided a long term vision and recommendations for the future of both leisure centres and libraries. The financial climate was a key consideration during the review and the Panel recommendations were made in that context. Cabinet agreed to:

- Note the recommendations of the working group in reviewing library provision
- Agree to further work to remodel the Library Service in the light of reduced revenue budgets, changing customer needs and the ongoing requirement to provide an “efficient and comprehensive” Library Service.

The Scrutiny Panel agreed to monitor the outcome of Cabinet’s response to the report in six months time and the progress on the specific recommendations.

**Background papers:**

- **A vision for the future of Leisure Centres and Libraries** – Report of a Community Services Scrutiny Panel Working Party September 2010
- **The strategic future delivery of the Borough’s Leisure Centre and Libraries**, report to Cabinet, November 2010

**Reason for scrutiny:**

The current Library Review will formulate options for the future provision of the Library Service in Walsall. The recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel to Cabinet contained a number of items to be taken into consideration during this review. Following the presentation of the report to Cabinet in November 2010, the Scrutiny Panel agreed to monitor the outcome of Cabinet's response to the report in six months time.

**Resource and legal considerations:**

The local authority has a duty under the 1964 Libraries and Museums Act to provide a Library Service which is "efficient and comprehensive" and freely accessible to everyone who wishes to make use of it.

Any re-modeling of the service must take this requirement into consideration and ensure that its services remain accessible to every person in the Borough. Proposals in 2009 by Wirral Council to close a number of libraries provoked a ministerial enquiry and the resulting review criticised Wirral Council for its failure to take account of the current and future needs of residents.

**Citizen impact:**

Libraries are recognised, both nationally and locally, as a valuable community asset. The extent of the network of branch libraries means that they are currently accessible to most residents and contribute to supporting lifelong learning and economic regeneration.

New models of delivery should consider how best to ensure that the service remains accessible to all local residents and that its services are tailored to meet local needs and aspirations.

**Environmental impact:**

None arising from this report

**Performance management:**

Any future changes to the delivery of the service will affect the performance of the service in terms of the number of visits, items loan, computer sessions undertaken and satisfaction with the service.

**Equality Implications:**


The Library Service should be accessible to every resident in Walsall regardless of age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender or social background. New models for service delivery should ensure that the service remains available to everyone.

**Consultation:**

- Significant consultation has taken place in recent months with service users and non users, stakeholders and community groups the details of which are set out in the report below and appendix 1.
- The consultation event with community organisations, 9 th March 2011 was followed by individual meetings with groups.

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## **1. Report**

Libraries are facing a time of fundamental change to address not only significant reductions in resources, but also social and technological changes that is impacting on what and how they deliver their services. Walsall Libraries have been working with the Working Smarter Team and the Corporate Consultation Officer to identify current and future demand for the service and how best that can be delivered to the people of Walsall within significantly reduced resources. The aim of the Review is to redesign the service to better deliver local access to reading, information and learning at a very local level, but operate effectively and efficiently with significantly reduced resources

### **Consultation on the Future of the Library Service in Walsall**

As part of the Library Review, significant public consultation has been carried out to ascertain which parts of the service are most valued and to identify the current and future needs of local people. This information will inform planning for the future of the service. Through the various methods adopted, this research has captured the views of over 4,200 people, the results of which provide an important insight into the use and views associated with the borough's libraries.

The results from this consultation should now be used to inform outcome-led decision making, in particular to help understand needs and prioritise improvements.

The consultation took place between February and April 2011.

- 2,708 completed questionnaires were received,
- 643 telephone interviews were completed
- 100 people were interviewed face to face,
- 800 comments were posted on comments boards in libraries
- 5 community meetings were attended
- 100 staff attended consultation workshop
- Telephone interviews with stakeholders
- A consultation event with community organisations was held on 9th March 2011

The huge response to the paper based questionnaire is a significant result in itself. A summary of the findings and the conclusions can be found at Appendix 1, but the 6 key messages were:

1. Libraries are seen as a valuable local service and community resource, but most people are unwilling to travel more than 2 miles to a library, therefore maintaining local access to services is an important objective. (Appendix 1, point 1.32).
2. Many people used the library to find information or study (Appendix 1, point 1.13). 37% of people use the library to find information. They also valued the expertise of staff (Appendix 1, point 18). The Library was thought to be a highly rated service with professional,

knowledgeable staff who are a key asset to the service and without which the library would be a very different place.

3. Opening hours and days of the week must be addressed in order to meet customer needs and wants. Opening hours were seen as the key barrier to use for those who wished to use the service. (Appendix 1, points 1.26, 1.27, 1.28, 1.29)
4. Whilst the core services, such as the provision of information, books for loan and support for literacy, should remain, there are lots of opportunities for diversification which would enhance the service, strengthen partnership working and encourage community cohesion. (Appendix 1, point 1.30, 1.31).
5. Libraries must have the right IT and enough of it, responding to changing customer needs and wants and embracing new communication technologies. (Appendix 1, point 1.13, 8.20, 8.22).
6. The image of libraries should be addressed and the service effectively promoted and marketed (Appendix 1, point 8.27).

### **Progress in relation to Scrutiny's recommendations to Cabinet in November 2010**

In the Community Services Scrutiny Panel's report to Cabinet in November 2010, Cabinet was asked to consider the following specific recommendations. The progress on each recommendation is detailed below:

- 1. *the existing library network be maintained, where possible, with all residents residing within a maximum 2 mile radius of their nearest library.***

This recommendation has been supported by evidence from the public consultation undertaken between 28 February and 10 April 2011 as part of the Library Review's consultation process. Every effort will be made to deliver this level of local access to the service in proposals for the future.

- 2. *Libraries should increase their opening hours by considering the following methods:***

- a. *Self service machines;***

A capital sum of £232,000 has been allocated in the 2011/12 Capital Programme for the introduction of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology into the 6 largest libraries. RFID technology will enable the introduction of self service facilities in libraries as well as improving stock management and the supply of requested items. It will be introduced into 6 libraries by March 2012, with the new Pelsall Library to follow. The contract for RFID equipment will be awarded in July.

The new equipment will:

- issue and discharge books
- take payments (e.g. fines, DVD charges) and give change
- have a Chip and Pin option
- identify returned books that are reserved.
- give receipts
- scan shelves to locate requested or “lost” items and enable more efficient stock management.

***b. Using volunteers to deliver added value activities;***

The use of volunteers is being expanded to provide additional and complimentary support to customers. Currently, the service has 20 “computer buddies” who offer a one to one support for people who are struggling to make full use of our computers and 15 summer reading champions who mentor and encourage young people to read more. In addition, recruitment is underway for volunteers to help support events and activities. The service is also investigating other potential roles where volunteers can add value, such as an induction for new members and meeting and greeting customers. A recruitment policy for volunteers has been adopted. There are challenges in using volunteers, particularly in finding, recruiting and keeping the right people; training them in their roles and in co-ordinating and supervising their work.

***c. Offering additional council and partner counter services;***

The library consultation highlighted opportunities to add value by providing additional services. Some suggestions included café or refreshment facilities, ticket sales to local events, and renewal of bus passes. These and other opportunities are under investigation.

***d. Co-locating with other services and/or businesses;***

Options to co-locate library facilities using the buildings or facilities of other partner organisations is ongoing. A workshop with community and voluntary organisations was held in March and from that meeting more detailed discussions are ongoing with a number of community organisations.

***3. the mobile library service should be retained with the following alterations:***

***a. reconfigured timetable for longer stops;***

***b. additional computer and internet provision should be added;***

***c. Customer service facilities should be included;***

Plans to extend and develop the mobile library and the housebound delivery services are being considered. However, it should be noted that,

unless the fleet of mobile vehicles is increased (at a cost of around £170,000 per vehicle), longer stops will mean a reduction in the total number that can be met. The current timetable would have to be substantially reviewed and many traditional mobile stops would cease. New, replacement vehicles were introduced earlier this year with greater on-line connectivity across a much wider geographical area. Mobile 2 has internet for the first time and includes a "Simplicity" PC with a simple interface for those with learning challenges supplied by Social Services

**4. *the First Stop Express customer service bus should be reconfigured to act as both a mobile library and a customer service vehicle;***

Talks have taken place with managers from Customer Services and it has been agreed that the First Stop Express could be used to supplement the mobile service by hosting a small collection of books and information.

**5. *computer provision and web access should increase within all Libraries;***

Every library has public access computers and Central and Bloxwich are WiFi enabled. Further provision is hampered by lack of space in many buildings

**6. *Libraries fully engage with emerging electronic and digital methods of communication and learning to ensure the offer of an appealing, credible and sustainable service in the future;***

The Service will be piloting the provision of e-books later this year. This service will mean that customers can download titles directly to the customer. This technology is still developing and currently there is no one "universal" system available

**7. *Libraries should share buildings and facilities with other businesses, schools and/or Council/Partner services where possible;***

Talks have been opened with several community organisations to assess the feasibility of offering library facilities from their buildings. More detailed discussions are currently being held with:

- Collingwood Community Association
- Frank F Harrison Community Association
- Old Hall People's Partnership
- Manor Farm Community Association
- New Invention People's Forum
- Oak Park Leisure Centre

**8. *A feasibility study should take place to establish suitable models of community ownership and management;***

Please see the response above to 7.

**9. A potential long term regional partnership for operating libraries be pursued with neighbouring local authorities;**

A proposal has been considered by the Black Country Leaders Group to create a single Black Country Library Service within the next 5 years and a draft business case was submitted to the Group in May. Agreement has been received to commence more detailed work into the feasibility of this proposal.

**10. Any capital receipts received from the future sale of library assets should be ring fenced for reinvestment in the development of the service.**

This would require specific agreement by Cabinet



## **APPENDIX 1 – Summary of consultation findings**

### **The Strategic Future of the Library Service in Walsall Findings of the public consultation**

#### **1. Executive Summary**

**1.1.** Library consultation was conducted between 28 February and 10 April 2011 and sought to find out information about;

- Frequency of library use
- Library services used
- Satisfaction with libraries
- Library staff
- What would encourage library use
- Opening times
- Distance prepared to travel
- Method of travel to the library
- Library co-location
- Other services in libraries

**1.2.** 6,000 paper questionnaires were distributed to all Walsall libraries and mobile libraries, museums and the New Art Gallery, Community Associations, Children's Information Service and Children's Centres in the borough. The questionnaire was also made available to complete online.

**1.3.** By the closing date a total of 2,708 people had filled in a questionnaire, with the following number of paper questionnaires stating the library they use most often as being;

- • Aldridge (215)
- • Beechdale (87)
- • Blakenall (61)
- • Bloxwich (176)
- • Brownhills (187)
- • Darlaston (102)
- • New Invention (73)
- • Pelsall (84)
- • Pheasey (159)
- • Pleck (173)
- • Rushall (52)
- • South Walsall (65)
- • Streetly (422)
- • Walsall Wood (114)
- • Willenhall (126)
- • Walsall Central Library (410)
- • Walsall Mobile Library (74)
- 

**1.4.** Based on paper questionnaires only (2,543), this represents a 42%

response rate. Whilst a large response was achieved it should be noted that this approach did not use a robust sampling frame (anyone could complete the questionnaire) and thus is not as representative as a sample survey. The profile of respondents does not represent that of the borough's population.

- 1.5.** Given that almost all of the respondents to the paper questionnaire were library users, this survey is referred to throughout this report as a 'users survey'.
- 1.6.** Whilst not a sample survey, the huge response to the paper based questionnaire is a significant finding in itself.
- 1.7.** To complement the paper and internet based questionnaire, a sample survey of 634 people was completed with residents across the borough (at least 100 in each Area Partnership). This survey was conducted by telephone using random digit dialling, thus a "random" sample where each member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected. This survey is referred to in this report as 'telephone survey'.
- 1.8.** Comment boards located in libraries were also used to gather feedback from library users. Over 800 comments were gathered in this way.
- 1.9.** Respondents can be generally divided into 3 groupings;
  - a. those who use the library, love the service and cannot do without it
  - b. those who don't use the library but think its important for other people
  - c. those who do not use the library and do not think libraries have anything to offer them
- 1.10.** Just over two fifths (43%) do use the library (from almost every day to within the last year), with the largest proportion using the library about once a month (18%). However, Walsall residents are more likely not to use the library than use it. Over half (55%) of respondents to the telephone survey do not use the library.
- 1.11.** Respondents with now grown up children often said that they used to use the library when their children were small, but don't anymore.
- 1.12.** Frequency of library visit is high amongst users (user survey), with most visiting at least once a week (45%) and notable proportions visiting daily (5%) or almost every day (10%).
- 1.13.** Borrowing books (adults) remains the core library service, with 83% of users saying they have done this in the last 12 months. In addition 30% had borrowed children's books<sup>1</sup>. A significant proportion (37%) use the library to find information, use the

computers for general interest (24%) and photocopying (23%). (User survey).

- 1.14.** Findings clearly show that those who currently use the library find it an invaluable service meeting a range of needs from educating children and adults, providing information and advice and generally being a nice place to visit and spend time. 93% of users (user survey) say that the library is important to them. Many non or infrequent users also spoke of the 'essential community resource' libraries provided.
- 1.15.** The library is far more than a building with books in it. Findings clearly show that people use the library for a wide range of reasons, with the library being the first 'port of call' for many people.
- 1.16.** In the discussions that were had, many people responded with surprise when told about the range of facilities, resources and services available in libraries. Many people suggested library improvements that were already in place.
- 1.17.** Amongst users overall satisfaction with the library service is high with 90% net satisfaction<sup>2</sup>. Net satisfaction amongst non users is less at 66%. (Telephone survey)
- 1.18.** Across a range of aspects, users rate the library service and its staff very highly and results indicate an excellent level of customer service, with 98% of respondents who asked for assistance feeling that the member of staff who helped them was knowledgeable and competent. (User survey).
- 1.19.** Those who are satisfied with the library service say that this is because they are satisfied with the core aspects of the service; books, the range of service available, customer service and the library being local to them.
- 1.20.** The main reasons for dissatisfaction with libraries mainly relate to inconvenient opening hours and the threat of closures.
- 1.21.** Many respondents to the telephone survey say that they prefer to buy books (8%) or that they get everything they need from other sources including the internet (6%).
- 1.22.** A number of non users (8%) and users (7%) say that they do not have time to use the library or use it more often than they currently do. (Telephone survey).
- 1.23.** 58% of non users in the telephone survey state that nothing puts them off or prevents them from using the library. Furthermore 68% of non users state that nothing would encourage them to use the library.

- 1.24.** However, extended opening hours in the evenings and weekends (8%) and more books (4%) did surface as the most popular things that would encourage use amongst non users (telephone survey).
- 1.25.** In addition, comments from non library users identify difficulties with transport, health and mobility as barriers to library use (telephone survey).
- 1.26.** Of the top three things that put off or prevent library users from using the library more often, just one (opening hours) is within the control of the service; the top three being; nothing (44%), opening hours (12%) and I don't have time (11%). (User survey)
- 1.27.** Results show that users would be encouraged to use the library more if; opening hours were extended (in the evening 29% and at the weekends 24%) and if there were a wider selection of books (24%) and increased stock of a particular genre of book. (User survey)
- 1.28.** Respondents who use a library that has reduced opening hours are most likely to say that inconvenient opening hours puts them off using the library more often. (User survey).
- 1.29.** Users (user survey) say that they generally prefer to visit the library on weekdays (morning and afternoons), with weekday lunchtimes and evenings being much less popular. This pattern of response can in part, be attributed to the demographic profile of respondents to this survey.
- 1.30.** Users thought that community centres (44%), local community buildings (39%) and schools (35%) were good locations for co-locating library services. 16% thought that none of the suggested locations were appropriate. Responses from non-users generally mirrored that of users. (Telephone survey).
- 1.31.** The most popular additional services respondents to the telephone would like to see in libraries included a café, ticket / booking office for local events and careers advice / job shops. However, 43% of non users and 28% of users did not want to see any other service located in a library.
- 1.32.** Results to the telephone survey and user survey both show that people are generally unwilling to travel more than 2 miles to a library.
- 1.33.** More people say the library is important to the local community (89%) than to themselves and their household (72%). (Telephone survey).

## **8. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 8.1.** Through the various methods adopted, this research has captured the views of over 4,200 people, the results of which provide a very useful insight into the usage and views associated with the borough's libraries.
- 8.2.** The results from this consultation should now be used in outcome led decision making, in particular making use of feedback to help understand needs and prioritise improvements.
- 8.3.** Feedback on the results and how they have been used in decision making should be communicated back to library users and the wider public. Should any decisions be made in contrary to the consultation findings, reasons why should be clearly explained.
- 8.4.** Libraries are important to households in the borough and are seen as even more important to local communities. The huge response to the paper questionnaire gives the first indication of how people feel about libraries.
- 8.5.** Library users and non users feel that libraries are important for the local community, however more should be done to encourage library usage.
- 8.6.** The library service offers an important opportunity for learning in a non threatening environment. Libraries are seen as having an important role in education (children and adults) and offering courses such as basic IT are particularly valuable to older people and the socially disadvantaged. In the library service review careful consideration should be given to minority ethnic communities, those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable and how any change to the service may impact on these groups.
- 8.7.** Library users recognise and value the expertise and knowledge of library staff, which should be promoted. The high standards of customer service should be shared with other services across the council and be used as best practice to help make improvements elsewhere. Any use of volunteers must not be at the detriment of the high standards in customer service.
- 8.8.** Libraries are seen as a valuable community resource and have the scope to offer much more than the core library service. Whilst users and non users are keen to see libraries offer additional services, including those of partner organisations, additional services should be introduced to complement and not detract from the core library service.
- 8.9.** Like any service it is impossible to meet the wants and needs of all customers. However the unique selling point for libraries, which is

not promoted enough, is a wide ranging free services and courses, online catalogue and inter-library loan service.

- 8.10.** There is a significant minority of people who don't use the library and nothing will persuade them, however there are groups of people who would use the library if they knew more about the service, the range of stock were improved and if opening hours were more convenient.
- 8.11.** Many users and non users are critical of libraries because of the inconvenient opening hours which do not reflect the needs of the community. Users of libraries which open on a limited number of days are particularly keen that opening times (days) are extended. Better and more convenient opening hours is seen by many as being key to improving libraries in the future. There is however no consensus as to how libraries should extend their opening hours, with older people preferring to visit during the day and those that work preferring to visit in the evenings or at the weekends. Further research in this area is required.
- 8.12.** The main reasons why people don't use the library are to do with lifestyle issues outside of the control of libraries – 'I don't have time', 'I have no reason to use the library', which are difficult to address but should not be ignored.
- 8.13.** A local library service is important, particularly in terms of the distance people are prepared to travel to access a library. Having a local library service in the community is seen as a real asset, one which people want to see retained. This is particularly important for those with limited transport, health problems and families with young children. However, whether people would prefer a bigger and better library service in fewer locations requires further investigation.
- 8.14.** Young people in particular view the library in a very traditional light, believing the service is old fashioned, using terms like 'dull' and 'boring'. This perception and general image of the library must be addressed if it is to attract new and retain existing (particularly younger) customers into the future and generations to come.
- 8.15.** It should not be assumed that people know how to use the library and all its services. Like a gym, the offer of inductions, tours and staff undertaking a meet and greet function would help ensure people get the most out of the library and keep coming back.
- 8.16.** Offering a flexible service that meets and accommodates the specific needs of users is important. For example, flexible loan periods and extended time limits on computers would be welcomed by people with learning difficulties. Some feel that the service is inflexible and are reluctant to ask for exceptions to be made.

- 8.17.** People with disabilities want a service that is simple to use and easy to access. Easy read signage and large fonts is especially important to people with learning difficulties but also beneficial for all users. Disabled groups would welcome inductions and group tours.
- 8.18.** Libraries should consider being part of a Walsall 'Safe Place' scheme for people with learning disabilities or anyone who is vulnerable.
- 8.19.** Lack of access to easy, nearby, free car parking can pose a real barrier to people with disabilities and their carers and others more generally.
- 8.20.** Access to the latest and appropriate technology is important. A flexible environment that is student / study friendly would encourage students and others to use their local library.
- 8.21.** Obtaining and stocking the course reading lists of Walsall College and Wolverhampton University library services would be mutually beneficial.
- 8.22.** In this mobile and digital age, with many people having their own laptops and web enabled devices, access to Wi-Fi is essential.
- 8.23.** With more and more people downloading audiobooks, music and films, libraries should look at the possibility of offering a chargeable download service, saving shelving space and generating income.
- 8.24.** Access to office equipment such as faxes and photocopiers is popular, and can prove to be a very important service for people, especially job seekers and students. Offering other services such as comb binding, laminating and low volume colour printing could also prove to be a valuable service and one that generates income.
- 8.25.** Income generation through selling cards, postcards, pens, folders, envelopes, stamps and other stationery items should also be considered.
- 8.26.** Findings suggest there is an appetite for libraries to be co-located in other buildings, the preference being community buildings/centres.
- 8.27.** IT could be better used to market and promote library services and events. Eye catching adverts on computer monitors in libraries, the libraries webpage and catalogue as well as a more prominent presence on the council's homepage present cost effective communication channels. Advertising and having a presence in a range of community settings should be considered. Venues such as GP surgeries, dental practices, police stations, cafés, local shops and markets, children's centres, youth centres, religious buildings, hospitals, the council's First Stop Shop, housing association

receptions, public transport, features in newsletters and magazines of partner organisations and in staff newsletters / intranet all offer opportunities as communication channels.

- 8.28.** Introducing a café / refreshments in some libraries is very popular idea, drawing in people for a range of reasons and providing a place where they can socialise and take a break from studying as well as generating income. People with learning disabilities are particularly keen to be involved in running such a service.
- 8.29.** A libraries e newsletter could be used to keep library users up to date with new releases and library events and activities. Libraries should seek to establish and maintain an electronic distribution list, drawing contacts (with permission) from membership, event bookings, ticket sales and telephone enquiries.
- 8.30.** New innovative ideas could be used as a way of retaining and growing membership – book clubs, hobby clubs and involving / consulting customers when choosing what stock to order and what events to hold. Devolving some decision making to customers can have wide ranging benefits.
- 8.31.** Opportunities to draw people into the library, not necessarily to use library services, should be identified and exploited. Invite community groups for special visits, hold events, exhibitions and author signings, as well as consider quiz nights, music / recitals, choirs, cultural events plays and craft based activities all which should be tailored to the local community.
- 8.32.** In order to motivate some people to use libraries, changes to the image of libraries must be accompanied by actual improvements to the service. To underpin any improvements, libraries also need to market and promote themselves better to tackle the negative perceptions some people have of libraries, and to inform them of the extensive and modern services available.
- 8.33.** People say that they want libraries to be modern and welcoming, stocking a wide range of the latest books, offering a variety of services and facilities including the latest IT. Providing all this and extending opening hours may have a positive effect on increasing usage and should increase satisfaction too.
- 8.34.** Whilst the library service is not for everyone, the main challenge for libraries is meeting the needs of a varied and ever changing population, in an ever changing technological world. Improving the service so that it better meets the needs of the community and addressing the negative perceptions of libraries is a must.
- 8.35.** Using data and intelligence, keeping in touch with and understanding customer and community needs should be an



ongoing process so that the library service can meet and react swiftly to the changing social, economic and demographic needs of the local community.

- 8.36.** Further more detailed consultation on opening hours, IT, stock, additional services, co-location and mobile libraries is recommended.