

12 December 2018		ITEM: 17
		Decision: 110493
Cabinet		
Communities First – A Strategy for developing Libraries as Community Hubs in Thurrock		
Wards and communities affected:	Key Decision:	
All	Key	
Report of: Councillor Deborah Huelin, Cabinet Portfolio Holder Communities		
Accountable Assistant Director: Les Billingham; Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Community Development		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris: Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		

Executive Summary

This report introduces Thurrock's first comprehensive strategy for Thurrock's Library Service and Community Hubs. The strategy provides a strong foundation to deliver our vision for a vibrant service, meeting the needs of a growing population in modern buildings alongside activities relevant to local communities.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Cabinet approves the draft strategy at Appendix 1.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Whilst there have been many reviews of the library service, this is the first comprehensive library strategy since Thurrock became a unitary authority. This is a positive opportunity to look to the future potential, consolidating all that works well, developing a strong alignment with Community Hubs.
- 2.2 A key aim of the strategy will be to develop an investment plan for the service, balancing council funding with commercial and partner opportunities to create a sustainable service. Business plans for the overall service and individual libraries / hubs will be developed, and funds raised will be reinvested in the service. Getting there will take time – the last significant efficiency savings in February 2015 saw £0.569m taken from the controllable budget of £1.463m which resulted in reductions to opening hours and significant reductions in service budgets. Some immediate investment to support and develop the service will be required if the principles of this strategy are to be implemented. The 2016/17 budget (the last year we have benchmark data) was just over £1m with a materials budget of £493 per 1,000 population. Bedford borough

with a comparable population of 168,800 spent £2,195k with a materials budget of £1,445 per 1,000 population.

- 2.3 The consultation generated a huge amount of interest - 89.3% of responses supported the delivery of library services working more closely with communities. The strategy will seek to develop vibrant public spaces at the centre of communities. This strategy will maintain the existing number of libraries and expand provision through working differently. The location of libraries may change as local opportunities for modernisation and co-location are realised for example, as with Aveley Community Hub.
- 2.4 The public consultation ran from 25 June – 16 September 2018. This capitalised on 'The Summer Reading Challenge' in libraries as well as outreach in areas that do not have a branch service. A simplified version of the consultation captured the views of children aged 15 and under. 91% of those responding across both consultations had visited a Thurrock library in the previous 12 months. 25% completed the simplified version of the form, and 95% of these were aged 15 or under. 79.5% cited the quality and range of books available as being most important to them, and 71.55% felt that having well informed staff available to assist was also important.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Thurrock Library Service includes 9 authority run libraries and one self-serve library within Purfleet Community Hub. Opening hours range from 15 hours in four libraries, 27 in two libraries, 38 in two libraries and 48 at the central Grays library. The principal purpose of the library is to provide equality of access to accurate and up to date information achieved through provision of printed material and increasingly, access to information on line. The service champions reading in all its forms enabling all residents to make the most of the proven benefits of reading, economically better educational prospects leading to better paid jobs as well as supporting health and well-being.
- 3.2 The service supports residents to get on line providing basic training, one to one assistance and access to computers and printers. Residents value the chance libraries provide to access support and develop friendships, combatting social isolation. The Home-link service reaches out to those unable to visit providing a monthly visit by trained volunteers.
- 3.3 Four Community Hubs are co-located in libraries. Hubs draw together the strengths of local neighbourhoods, maximising resources and opportunities for the benefit of local people of all ages. Over 7,790 people attended one-off seasonal events arranged through hubs 2017/18 such as Christmas events or summer BBQs. Hubs support resilient and aspirational communities that utilise the strength and assets of their communities' first and statutory services second. The strategy will align with the community hubs programme, improving partnerships in the supporting the longer term potential to explore development opportunities.

- 3.4 The principle of partnership between libraries and hubs will underpin this offer, utilising the appropriate strengths of partners to lead on different aspects of delivery. Currently, the statutory sector has provided access to buildings; the voluntary sector has supported the infrastructure around hubs, and local communities have shaped local priorities and provided volunteer support.
- 3.5 Volunteer support at community hubs is crucial to their success. Since the hubs programme launched, 217 volunteers have been recruited via ngage. Of those, 82 volunteers are currently active. The estimated value of volunteer hours contributed in 2017/18 is £146,820. 12 volunteers left to take up employment – based on cost benefit analysis calculations; the annual fiscal benefit is estimated at £27,555 – or £41,080 annual public value benefit.
- 3.6 The library service will continue to be a key partner alongside Community Hubs, and the strategy seeks to strengthen this partnership.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The strategy provides an exciting framework for developing libraries in partnership with key services, championing local heritage and galvanising around local priorities. Working alongside community hubs unlocks the potential that a refreshed service can bring to the wider, local community.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The consultation is explained at 2.4 and a summary consultation report is available via consult.thurrock.gov.uk/portal/tc/library. An away day was held September 2018 to test the principles with Community Hub representatives and with library staff. The strategy was supported at Health Overview and Scrutiny November 2018.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The strategy has the potential to support a number of key outcomes across the People, Place, Prosperity priorities, supporting the public sector and community social action to galvanise around key priorities.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Finance Officer – Corporate Finance

Additional funding is required to secure the service at current levels and the strategy recognises and supports the requirement to diversify future income streams. One-off funding will be allocated to support the development of individual business plans and specific financial implications will be considered at that stage.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Assistant Director of Law and Governance

Public libraries are the responsibility of Local Authorities who have a clear statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964 to provide to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service that is open to all and includes the provision of books, journals and information free of charge, and help from appropriate staff and retrieval systems to access these collections.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Team Manager, Community Development & Equalities

Library services provide a universal service across the borough. A full Community and Equality Impact assessment will inform implementation of the strategy reflecting the consultation results.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

The strategy places libraries at the heart of communities, supporting the wider delivery of public services and community led activities.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Communities First Strategy

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