

7 November 2019		ITEM: 10
Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Library Peer Challenge Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Rosalyn Jones Library Services Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Les Billingham, Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and Community Development		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing & Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Thurrock Library Service successfully applied to participate in a Peer Challenge organised by the LGA and Arts Council. A small team spent two days reviewing a number of core documents and meeting key stakeholders 8th and 9th July 2019. We have received the final report from the Peer Challenge team. Health and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny is invited to comment and support next steps.

The report is very complementary about the service. Currently Thurrock Libraries are seen to be at a cross roads with a great deal of opportunity to grow and thrive, linking more with cross cutting council agendas and building on the community relationships in place through the hubs programme.

The report commends the strategy agreed by Cabinet in December 2018. It does however suggest further consideration to the capacity and revenue budget necessary to deliver on this aspiration.

A delivery plan is already in place to support the alignment of the library service and community hubs. This will be updated to include recommendations from the Peer Challenge report.

This report highlights progress to date and seeks comments from the committee to support the promotion and development of Thurrock Library Service.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the recommendations in the Peer Challenge report and comment on the proposed actions

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock is growing with an increasingly diverse population. It is important that hubs and libraries can continue to develop to remain 'anchors' within their community.

2.2 We welcome the recommendations made by the Peer Challenge and work has started to incorporate these into a delivery plan to implement the Communities First strategy agreed by Cabinet in December 2018 – this seeks to align Thurrock Libraries with the Community Hub Programme.

2.3 Thurrock's Library Service is highly valued by its residents. Footfall and the number of members are high compared with other similarly sized services. Libraries engage with around 1,500 residents each day.

2.4 The public consultation in summer 2018 confirmed that access to books and computers remained very important for the majority of residents.

2.5 The development of Community Hubs closely aligned with the library service was recognised as a positive way forward, providing additional support, an increased range of activities, community engagement around local priorities and valuable volunteering opportunities.

2.6 The Community Hubs in South Ockendon, Chadwell and Tilbury are well established with community led steering groups identifying local priorities and developing programmes in partnership with libraries. In each venue the hub volunteers and library staff are managed by one Supervisor enabling a close working partnership. (At South Ockendon in addition to the supervisor, a centre manager is employed through CVS to provide additional support at a venue open 6 days a week often including evenings with a variety of community led activities) With the re-opening of East Tilbury in 2019 after the fire and the new Community Hub and Library in Aveley due to open January 2020, this will bring the number of hubs within libraries to 5.

2.7 Although 5 hubs are co-located in libraries, the programme remains a true partnership across Thurrock Council, Thurrock CVS including ngame, and local communities through steering groups that involve key stakeholders. Each partner brings distinctive skills and resources to the programme which, through discussion and agreement, help to find the best solution to local issues. At Purfleet, it is the Hub that hosts a self-serve library, and CVS employ a community builder to support development in this area.

2.8 Staff and volunteers have embraced the opportunities the hub programme has afforded. The Peer Review team commented that the staff and volunteers

were knowledgeable, passionate and committed to provide the best service/offer to residents that they could.

- 2.9 A learning programme has recently been refreshed to support volunteers active at hubs. The programme, coordinated by ngage, includes four core training sessions. Volunteers from across hubs are encouraged to attend with volunteers from other hubs to support networking and the sharing of best practice. This has recently been refreshed following feedback from volunteers to include community engagement techniques, first aid and bespoke training as a need is identified. This was launched at a successful volunteer celebration day hosted by Thurrock Adult Community College September 2019.
- 2.10 A training plan is currently under development to ensure staff continue to have the skills required to meet changing needs. This will include First Aid, a refresh of customer care plus mandatory Health and Safety and specialist library training around Reader Development and stock management.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 A summary of the actions being taken to embed the recommendations in the Peer Challenge report into the Library and Hub Delivery plan are summarised below:

Recommendation 1 - Develop a clear plan to roll out the new library strategy

- 3.1.1 The 5 year 'Communities First' strategy for libraries and hubs approved by Cabinet in December 2018 agreed that all libraries would remain open and develop into hubs looking to improve sustainability through co-location and increased income generation.
- 3.1.2 Capital investment has been identified for technology and investment in libraries' infrastructure. East Tilbury has reopened following the fire in 2017 and the new Aveley hub and library is due to open January 2020
- 3.1.3 A feasibility study has been completed to consider a refurbishment of Chadwell to maximize use of the building, expand community space and create meetings rooms for hire and community use.
- 3.1.4 There is a need to increase revenue investment in the book and resources fund, currently one of the lowest in the country. This will improve residents' access to current information and educational and leisure reading especially for children and families in poverty
- 3.1.5 Additional meetings rooms for hire have been and will be incorporated into redesigned/relocated buildings. Hire charges for meetings rooms and buildings out of hours have been reviewed for April 2020. These simplify the

range of charges and strike a balance between income generation and the need to provide accessible space for priority groups supporting local priorities.

3.1.6 Though capital funding, improved technology within libraries is being rolled out. By January 2020 all libraries and hubs will have:

- New PCs with Windows 10 for both public and staff
- Self-service kiosks to allow residents to issue, return items, book computers and pay for printing
- Multi-Functional Devices will enable residents not only to photocopy but also scan documents directly to council departments and pay and print from their own devices via WIFI
- Council staff will be able to print, supporting the roll out of agile working

3.1.7 This improved offer will improve the ability of the service to explore income generation opportunities. We are committed to developing business plans for individual hubs in partnership with local steering groups, as well as a service wide approach to sustainability alongside council investment. As part of the strategy development, funding for developing business plans was assigned to the service. Our planned restructure will enable new business ideas to be explored and supported by staff as we develop new ways of working.

3.2 Recommendation 2 - Consider appropriate timing for staff restructure

3.2.1 A restructure of the library service is currently being considered. Our restructure will:

- Increase management capacity to drive and embed change, support staff as the alignment of hubs and libraries gathers pace and identify income generation opportunities/develop business plans for longer term sustainability and expansion of the programme.
- Recognise and value the increased responsibilities staff have taken on with the introduction of hubs and changes in library priorities, including support for residents to ensure digital inclusion.
- Ensure capacity for staff to network, develop on-going partnerships and collaborate more closely with the community.

3.3 Recommendation 3 - Increase the profile of Thurrock and its libraries locally, regionally and nationally

3.3.1 We aim to increase the library profile, locally, regionally and nationally and seek the opportunity to share the programme more fully with Councillors and the wider community. This will be achieved through a local campaign to raise the profile of libraries and the range of support on offer as well as through promoting case studies and applying for awards that recognise the innovation and achievements made by libraries.

3.3.2 We recognise that much has been achieved to position Thurrock's libraries as the Face to Face image of the council e.g. residents encouraged to visit

the libraries and hubs to apply for parking permits, blue badges, bus passes but more can be done. Adult Social Care Community Led Support Teams and Local Area Coordinators currently work from hubs and libraries and phones have been installed in all venues for vulnerable residents to contact the council directly.

3.3.3 A performance framework is in place to improve the collection of statistical data and combine data from libraries and hubs. Training and a methodology to collect qualitative impact stories is currently in development and this will feed into a marketing strategy.

3.3.4 We intend to review the current KPIs and comments are welcome to shape our approach in the future.

3.4 Recommendation 4 - Continue to develop and network

3.4.1 The 2018 public consultation was invaluable to identifying views of the wider community. Now we need to develop an on-going methodology to ensure a continuing dialogue with residents. This will build on the existing relationships with hub steering groups and community forums and make use of the new council consultation portal.

3.4.2 We will consider developing a Friends network ensuring this is complementary to existing networks.

3.4.3 Comments are welcome to shape this approach.

3.5 Recommendation 5 – Develop one brand with shared understanding

3.5.1 Libraries and hubs have shared one management structure for a comparatively short period and much has been achieved with all hubs reporting a positive team spirit. Work remains to be done not least the decision how buildings should be named to reflect their changing role while not losing the established and trusted branding that the term 'library' affords to residents.

3.5.2 We recognise that residents are not always aware of all the services libraries and hubs provide. We do not always celebrate achievements in the wider world and promote Thurrock libraries as a progressive library service. For example, new initiatives this year have included the establishment of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) sessions in partnership with the Thurrock Adult Community College and a new job club at South Ockendon to support economic prosperity.

3.5.3 Revenue support is required to develop a marketing strategy and branding to promote the library and hub offer ensuring the community led approach is paramount.

3.6 Recommendation 6 – Recognise the contribution that libraries can make to literacy, digital literacy and educational attainment

3.6.1 The Peer Challenge team commented that the contribution that libraries can make to literacy, digital literacy and educational attainment is not always recognised. Additional training and development is planned to ensure staff and volunteers are confident in their understanding and able to communicate effectively the benefits of the library programme to residents and partners and demonstrate how they contribute to wider council agendas.

3.6.2 Three staff training days have been arranged for 2020

3.6.3 We recognise libraries can contribute more to support business development

- Staff and volunteers support residents using computers to complete job applications
- Libraries contribute to the work of the Economic Development and Skills Partnership delivery group
- A job club has started at South Ockendon with plans for a second one at Chadwell
- Two Apple MACS will be installed in libraries as part of the new technology roll out to support emerging businesses.

3.6.4 Comments are welcome to contribute to this development.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To introduce the Peer Challenge report, reflect upon its recommendations and request support to proceed

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

5.1 N/A

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

6.1 The Peer Challenge process seeks to complement and support a council's own performance and improvement focus. The recommendations reflect the agreed position of Thurrock's library service and the 'Communities First' strategy which is to continue to meet community and corporate priorities in accordance with policy and process and provide a progressive, inclusive and collaborative library service and hub offer to residents.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**

Finance Manager

Funding through the capital programme has been allocated to support the acquisition of digital technology and improvements to infrastructure at Aveley. Options regarding proposed changes to the staffing establishment and book fund will need to be presented in future detailed business cases to determine the potential ongoing budgetary impact and funding options. There is no ongoing new funding identified within the MTFs. A review of all fees and charges and income generation opportunities will be carried out as part of the 2020-21 budget setting process.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Acting Head of Law, Assistant Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

There are no direct legal implications. Any legal implications arising from the proposed library staff restructure would be advised upon as necessary at the relevant time.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

The peer review acknowledged the diversity of the combined library and hubs offer that is available to all local residents regardless of their protected characteristic/s and in line with duties set out in the Equality Act 2010. A range of inclusive provisions and services are currently in place across the libraries and hubs network and accessible to residents - these are not limited to a balanced range of stock, applying for parking permits, blue badges and bus passes as well as accessing Adult Social Care's Community Led Support Teams and Local Area Coordinators. The Communities First Libraries and Hubs strategy prioritises the importance of maintaining and expanding the service commitment to community engagement with a range of mechanisms now in place to support the evolution of libraries and hubs working with local residents and the wider voluntary and community sector to realise locally determined priorities.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

None

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):

9. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 – Library Peer Challenge Report August 2019

Report Author:

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