

6 January 2015		ITEM: 5
Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
2014/15 Savings - Libraries		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Cllr John Kent, Portfolio Holder, Libraries, Children's Services		
Accountable Head of Service:		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director, Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

It was agreed at the Overview & Scrutiny meeting in July 2014 that a paper would be brought back to the group with proposed options to be consulted on with the community on how up between £400k and £569k of savings could be achieved in 2015/2016. A number of options for public consultation are put forward including a reduction in the number of libraries; partnering libraries where possible with community hubs building on a recent successful Transformation Challenge Award; and Community Partnered libraries without a Community Hub structure in place. The options are recommended for consultation and the final outcome could be a combination of the options subject to public and staff consultation.

Recommendation(s)

1.1 That members consider and comment on the options put forward.

1.2 That members agree for a public consultation to take place

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The library services are highly valued by the communities they serve. In 2011 a public consultation in Thurrock on the future shape of library services showed strong support for library services and an understanding by the public that future financial constraints might mean community supported libraries would help libraries to stay open in the future. However, alongside other public sector services Thurrock is facing enormous financial challenges and libraries are not immune from the significant cuts in the resources available to the Council.

2.2 The library service went through a major restructure in 2011/12 when £350K savings were achieved. Library budgets are not at a minimal level with

regards staffing and resources for each library. To achieve the current requirement for £400k - £569k will mean some difficult decisions will need to be taken. A breakdown of budgets per library is shown in Appendix 2. The accountable budget for the directorate totals £1.46m. Therefore to take £400k would mean a reduction in accountable budget of 27%, while at the upper limit of budget savings of £569k this would amount to a 39% cut in budget. This is a significant reduction on an already pared down service. Thurrock is a low spending Authority with regard to the library service as can be seen in recent CIPFA data.

2.3 Whilst designing three options a set of principles were used which are as follows:

- Closures of libraries within 3 miles radius of each other
- Current usage
- Current footfall
- Current budgets
- Facilities offered in each library
- I.T provision
- Serving disadvantaged areas
- Alternative ways on keeping all libraries open
- Size of library

A matrix is attached in Appendix 4 which provides a breakdown of information relating to some of the above. All options include ceasing the mobile service as although highly thought of there is very low usage (Appendix 2) and investment would be required if it were to be retained. The mobile will need replacing in the near future. The mobile has also been off the road for a long period of time recently and there were very few complaints arising from this. The library service would continue to offer a home link service, where resources are delivered by volunteers to vulnerable residents that live in homes and are unable to visit libraries. A full equality impact assessment will be undertaken to ensure that any consequences for protected groups are taken into account.

2.4 The Council is under a legal duty to provide a library service under section 7 of the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964. It is the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.

3. **Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 Three options are being put forward for consideration in Appendix 1

4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 As part of the overall savings that the Council is required to make due to reductions in funding the library service which sits within Children's Services are required to identify options to achieve savings totalling between £400k and £569k in 2015/2016.

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

- 5.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny to consider the proposals in December. This was postponed from the earlier meeting in November owing to the pre-election guidelines taking into consideration the Aveley Council by-election. A public consultation will take place during January/February 2015. Consultation with staff during February/March 2015.
- 5.2 The outcomes of the consultation will be collated and fed back to O&S in 2015 In order for consideration to be given on the preferred option in order to achieve the savings.
- 5.3 There will be internal consultation with staff on specific proposals particularly where there is a re-structure which will be in line with HR policy and guidelines.

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

- 6.1 The proposals set out in this report have wide ranging implications for the council with regard to the provision of library services. The impact of implementing these savings will mean a reduction in library premises, staff and resources (physical books). This will have an impact on communities.
- 6.2 The Council has to commence a voluntary redundancy process with staff. The outcome from the process and full impact of the savings proposals on staff will be known over the next few months feeding into the implementation of management actions and decision making for savings proposals.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**
Head of Corporate Finance

The council is required to make significant reductions to the operational costs of the library service in order to meet the reduced budget envelope for the coming years as a result of government spending targets. The service is required to make between £400k and £569k of savings for 2015/2016. This will be mitigated by looking at alternative means of delivering library services to communities as far as possible.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Paul Field**
Senior Corporate Governance Lawyer

As observed in the body of this report there is a legal obligation on the Council under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 on the Council to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who desire to make use of it. This matter has been subject to recent review by the High Court this year in Draper v Lincolnshire County Council [2014]. In that case the County Council was found in particular not to have taken proper account of the effect of withdrawal of on-line facilities to the community. The implication is that the Courts expect a through consultation with the community and that the response is properly considered by a local library authority before action is taken. Furthermore there will be other matters which need to be taken into account , which can be summarised as:

- any existing contractual obligations covering current service provision. Such contractual obligations where they exist must be fulfilled or varied with agreement of current providers
- any legitimate expectations that persons already receiving a service (that has been identified as potential savings area) may have to either continue to receive the service or to be consulted directly before the service is withdrawn
- any rights which statute may have conferred on individuals and as a result of which the Council may be bound to continue its provision.
- the impact on different groups affected by any changes to service provision as informed by relevant equality impact assessments
- having due regard to any consultation undertaken

7.2.2 In relation to the consultation, impact on different groups it should be noted that the Equality Act 2010 provides that a public authority must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity between persons who do and those who do not share a relevant 'protected characteristic'. This means an assessment needs to be carried out of the impact and a decision taken in the light of such information.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities
Manager

A full equality impact assessment is being carried out to take into account the impact of any reduction in service on people with protected characteristics.

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

There are implications for staff identified within the body of the report.

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):

- Not applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Options for Public Consultation
- Appendix 2 – Current services available in Libraries
- Appendix 3 – Budget breakdown per library

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Children's Service