Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 3 August 2022

Title of Agenda Item: Libraries Transformation

Report of: Director of Sport & Culture and Head of Culture & Libraries

1. Purpose

This report provides the opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the responses, feedback and analysis from the consultation on the proposed transformation of the library service, and make recommendations to help shape the final proposals to be considered by Executive Board in the Autumn 2022.

2. Action Required

To review the attached appendix report considering the following questions:
- Was the consultation robust and undertaken in line with the requirements placed on the Council by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in relation to consultation on any proposed changes to library services as outlined in section 8?
- What would be the potential impact of the options presented for consultation on library users, residents and partners?
- Which of the options outlined in section 6 of the report would best respond to key issues raised through the consultation whilst delivering the proposed outcomes for the transformation of the library service and the Council's medium term financial strategy.

3. Background Information

In March 2021 the Council's Library Service embarked on a comprehensive piece of work to help better understand what our communities require from a modern library service and to develop a transformation programme for the service. This led to the production of a Library Needs Assessment which was based on engagement and consultation to help shape a transformation programme. This engagement and consultation included an online public survey, stakeholder interviews, public focus groups, workshops with partners, workshops with staff and discussions with children and young people. Alongside this an analysis was undertaken of demographic and socio economic data, library performance management information, national trend data, and best practice examples from across the libraries sector.

A report 'The Next Chapter' Library Needs Assessment (LNA) was produced and presented to Executive Board on 18 January 2022. This provided a review of library

provision and need across the city and set out a long-term strategic plan for the library service and also included a budget saving target of £233k.

It recognised that library usage and the ways people access services was changing. Therefore this review was not just a cost saving exercise but a longer-term modernisation programme for the service.

Outlined in the report were a set of proposals for the transformation to be tested through a 12 week consultation exercise. In summary these proposals were:

- **Modernising and rationalising the library network** including specific proposals to close Radford Lenton Library, Basford Library and for Aspley Library to be repurposed as a hub for specialist and outreach library services but be closed to the public.

- **Building partnerships and collaboration:** including exploring the use of shared spaces across services and closer working with partners

- **Flexible and adaptable approach to working: involving the effective** use of resources, training and development, and increased use of volunteers.

- **Making the most of technology:** Exploring the introduction of Technology Enabled Opening along with development and growth of the website and on-line digital offer.

No decisions had been made regarding the future of library services, ahead of the consultation. The purpose of the consultation was to gather people's views with feedback to be reviewed and fully considered as part of the decision-making process.

4. Consultation process.

The consultation exercise took place between 31 January – 26 March 2022. Full details of the consultation are set out Appendix 1, but it included the following elements:

- On line Survey Questionnaire (hard copies made available at all libraries)
- Public events - 5 public events were held, including at each of the libraries proposed for closure.
- Engage Nottingham Hub: This provides information on consultation activity being undertaken by NCC with the opportunity for citizens and stakeholders to 'have your say'.
- Nottingham Libraries Website has a dedicated landing page about the transformation proposals, including Frequently Asked Questions. The Next Chapter dedicated web page saw over 5,575 visits during the consultation period.
- Direct emails sent to 29, 432 NCC library users, 15, 878 Library Newsletter subscribers, Nottingham City schools, a range of internal and external networks

including Action Champion Equality (ACE), BAME, Disability and LGBT+ staff networks, and a range of community partnerships
- Direct letters were sent via email to a number of national and regional partners and stakeholders involved in the library sector including Art Council England (ACE), Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), East Midlands Libraries Consortium (EMLIB) and UNESCO City of Literature
- Leaflet drops took place in the immediate vicinity of the 3 libraries proposed for closure Radford Lenton, Basford and Aspley
- Nottingham City Libraries social media channels were used to promote the consultation including on the Library Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram feeds.
- Staff engagement workshop sessions. Three staff engagement sessions took place during March 2022.
- Youth Parliament. The Library transformation consultation was an item on the agenda at a Youth Parliament event which took place in April 2022.

4.1. Headline findings from the Consultation

A total of 2,979 individual submissions were received via the Phase 2 questionnaire this included online and paper copies, plus responses from five public engagement sessions that saw 220 attendances. A number of letters were also received from key stakeholders such as Arts Council England and The Library Campaign (TLC), a national campaign group. Local interest in the proposals saw the establishment of a local campaign group, Save Nottingham Libraries, along with 2 petitions being initiated.

Representation of responses from across the city showed a high return from areas where closures were proposed compared to the spread of responses from phase 1

4.2. Consultation Feedback

Feedback gathered from both the questionnaire, public meetings and library sector stakeholders raised a number of consistent themes and messages. The responses have been grouped under the transformation themes. Again these are set out in the full appendix report but in summary are:

Importance of Libraries: The findings re-emphasised the importance of books and specifically the importance of introducing children to books in support of children's education. People valued libraries even by those who didn't use libraries regularly. Key factors for this view were the need to have a "community hub" and a local, welcoming community space. Having access to services free of charge alongside free access to computers and the internet to support people and families on a low-income were also raised as important factors as to why libraries were important to residents.

Use of Technology: The majority said that they would welcome the use of technology as long as physical books and library buildings remain. A large quantity of the responses in favour of developing the digital offer also added that they didn't want the digital offer to replace the current offer, rather that it should be in addition to

what is currently provided. The use of Technology Enable Opening (TEO), using swipe cards to access library buildings and self-service options, were only commented on by a small percentage of people but those that did were largely in favour.

Library Closure Proposals: The majority of all the responses showed disagreement with the proposals. For Basford this was 69%, and for both Aspley and Radford-Lenton 67% of responses showed that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to close libraries in these areas.

The main reason cited for disagreement with the proposals was around closing libraries in areas of relatively high deprivation when compared to other parts of the city. Other issues raised included reduced access to services with particular reference to digital access, cost of transport and travel to access to alternative libraries, loss of community facilities impacting mental health and community relationships and the impact on children and young people's literacy. A number of people also referenced the temporary closures of Sherwood Library and Central Library in reducing options for alternative provision.

The minority (8%) that agreed with closures said that if the facilities are not well used then money should be spent more efficiently. The other key point highlighted was that there are other libraries nearby.

In response to the proposals, alternative suggestions were put forward. By far the biggest suggestion was to have the library buildings to remain as spaces that could be used by community groups and organisations and find ways to bring in income. A holistic approach, working together to bring services back into the communities and better linking communities with partners and the Council become an emerging theme.

Partnerships: The majority were in support of partnership work. There were a large number of ideas of how that partnership work would look like but with no real themes emerging. The main concern raised about increasing partnership working was that there would be less room for books and the potential loss of quiet areas where people could read/study.

Shared Spaces: Most respondents understood the opportunity of how council services and buildings could co-locate and make efficiencies through the use of shared spaces. The top suggestion was linked to health services, followed by advice and support services.

National stakeholder responses: Detailed feedback from the national stakeholder and partners is set out in the Appendix 1. The key points identified from their responses were:

- All stakeholders recognised the importance of having a Central Library as part of the library network as well as to support existing regional agreements and commitments. The swift completion and opening of the new central library was therefore essential.

- The DCMS re-emphasised that any decision being made needs to ensure that the authority continues to meet its statutory duty of providing a comprehensive and efficient library service and that these decisions are based on a strong evidence base involving feedback and views from Consultees.
- Arts Council England (ACE) raised concerns over the proposed closure of 3 libraries in areas where health inequalities and deprivation is already high and that the implications of the cuts could mean Nottingham is less well positioned to apply for and obtain funding to use these spaces to support the delivery of wider objectives of the council to support these communities.

Save Nottingham Libraries Campaign Group
The Save Nottingham Libraries group set up a 'Save Nottingham Libraries' petition via the action network. https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/save-nottingham-libraries.
The petition calls on "Nottingham City Council to guarantee the survival and development of Basford, Aspley and Radford/Lenton Libraries and other neighbourhood libraries, so that they and their users may flourish".
The petition of 2800 signatures was submitted to full council on 11th July 2022 by Cllr Phil Jackson on behalf of the campaign group.

5. Other considerations and emerging developments

Covid impact on Library Performance: Excluding the figures for Central and Sherwood Libraries, closed for redevelopment, physical issues of books across the service remains currently down by approximately 13%. Up to end of March 2021 visits to libraries had only recovered to 35% of pre pandemic levels.

As libraries reopened, levels of e-Resources reduced from the increases seen during the pandemic however, figures still remain high and 2021/22 figures show a 75% increase in e-resource use compared to 2019/20. Computer/PC use is currently at approximately 60% below pre-Covid use, excluding Central and Sherwood usage.

It has been difficult to access and understand the full impact of displaced usage, ongoing change and recovery rates with Central Library and Sherwood Library being temporarily closed. The full picture will only start to emerge when the network is in place later in 2023.

Notwithstanding this, the emerging picture of the use of libraries has been heavily influenced by the pandemic. Libraries are back to providing many of their services in person, however there has been a shift towards a blended service. This has maximised the benefits, flexibility and growth of the digital online offer, whilst retaining physical access to books and the community library spaces for activities and events.

The library service has also been identified as playing a central role in meeting the needs of individuals and communities who may be struggling to overcome the impact of the pandemic. Some of these needs include:

- Economic recovery with help and training for job seekers
- Education support for children and students who struggle to work at home
- Help isolated individuals and vulnerable groups reconnect with their local community
- Digital inclusion for residents who lack IT skill or have no access to the internet

Transport and Access: Calculations have been undertaken to enable a better understanding of how the potential library closures would impact on the number of residential properties in Nottingham City in terms of length of journey time to a library using public transport. Out of a total of the city's 146,223 residential properties, 98% would be within a 20 minute travel time of a library even if the three libraries proposed for closure were to close.

However, it is worth noting that in the consultation on the Libraries Needs Assessment, responses showed that 59% travelled on foot to their preferred library, with bus and tram travel accounting for 33% and 9% respectively and the cost of living and concerns over transport cost mentioned in the consultation.

Currently 83% of residential properties are within a 20 min walk of a library. If the three libraries proposed for closure were to close, this would reduce to 72%.There is no statutory guidance on what is an acceptable time and distance to access a local library. This is left for library authorities to decide based on need

Acknowledging the issues raised about access to a local library through walking, the proposals if approved would still enable the Council to deliver a network of libraries in the City to the majority of residents.

Central Library and Sherwood Libraries: In May 2022 the Executive Board approved the funding and delivery of a New Central Library.

The transformation of the library service was always predicated on the Central Library being the hub for the development and delivery of high calibre events and programmes that can be rolled out across the community library network.

The anticipated opening of Central Library in Summer 2023 along with the opening of new Sherwood Library early in the new year 2023, strengthens significantly the network and overall library offer, providing wider opportunities and access for library users

The inclusion of a new Central Library in delivery of the city's overall library service – was supported by feedback in the public consultation. Many residents used the Central Library as well as their own local library and valued the special function it plays in supporting the whole service.

Revised financial position of the Library Service: At the time of embarking on the Library Needs Assessment and transformation programme, the 2021/22 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) included revenue savings for the Library Service of

£233,000 spread of over three years. To meet this £233,000 saving, £154,000 was achieved in 2021/22 by a staff restructure. This has left outstanding £46,247 to found this financial year (2022/23) and a further £32,633 to be achieved in FY 2023/24. Any final proposals for the library transformation will need to address this outstanding budget saving commitment over the next 2 years.

Cost of living: In April 2022 (ONS, CPI) inflation rose to 9%, its highest level for more than 40 years as the rising cost of gas, electricity and electricity pushed household energy bills to record level. The escalating cost of food and transport has also contributed to the rising cost of living deepening the crisis affecting families on low incomes and in the most deprived communities in the city. Any decisions regarding libraries will need to be taken within this context.

Emerging funding opportunities for the Library Service: There are a number of current funding opportunities that fit with the libraries offer and align with the transformation proposals. Two immediate opportunities which are currently being pursued are:

> **Library Improvement Fund (LIF) -** Following the successful LIF round one bid earlier this year a round two is to be submitted will look at conversion and introduction of technology enabled access to sites to extend operational hours and reconfigure sites to enable community hubs to be developed in libraries.

- **Visa Biometrics Central Government Contract.** – The Library Service is currently working with Libraries Connected with a proposal being submitted to Central Government for delivering Visa Biometrics managed by Sopra. If successful this will secure a significant income stream for the service over the medium to long-term.

Notwithstanding this, the council will need to be able to ensure that the council is able to deliver the required savings as outlined in the Council's medium term financial plan

6. Conclusion from the consultation and analysis
The options outlined in section 7 need to consider carefully the views and concerns raised by individuals and communities and the strong opposition to closure. However, any decision also need to enable the transformation to create a modern library service that remains relevant, and respond to financial pressures facing the local authority, which may include the exploration of:

- Improved co-ordination with other services delivered at the neighbourhood level and with stronger partnership working;
- looking to move away from the more traditional 'one size fits all' library offer, taking more considered and tailored approach to respond to needs of the community and to reflect the cost of that delivery;
- the development and more effective use of technology and digital access realigning buildings, staff and e-resources to respond to evolving need and demand and;
- Utilising available funding for developments and securing new income streams.

7. Options which have emerged from the consultation for further consideration

In responding to outcomes from the consultation and feedback and concerns raised by communities and citizens a number of options have been put forward as alternatives to the proposed closure of the 3 libraries. These would require further work and exploration.

7.1. Community Delivery Model
This involves a library being managed by community partners or volunteers. This could enable a library offer to continue to be available when the building is open and being used by the community or local partner organisation secured. Existing self-service technology could be used for the loan and return of books. Additionally, specific planned library activity and events can take place as part of a broader outreach programme by the library service working alongside the community organisation managing the building.

Benefits:

- Financial savings through operating efficiencies
- Libraries are retained as part of NCC network
- Community facility retained
- Potential alternative response to issues and opportunities raised during the consultation
- Needs led service offer defined and delivered by the community
- Access to funding opportunities available only to community organisations

Risk and Issues to address:

- Reliance on finding a network of and securing of suitable / sustainable partner(s) or community organisation(s) to use / manage the building
- The time taken to find a sustainable option and delivery partner may not be achievable within the timeframes outlined in the medium term financial plan of the Council
- Capital investment may be required to facilitate which is currently unfunded
- Resources will be need to support any transfer to community groups
- Resourced programme for support and training to facilitate community management

- Agreements need to be reached around who retains the responsibility for the liabilities of buildings and provision of resources.
- Ongoing resource requirement to supply books and equipment
- Loss of specialist staff skills and resources.
- Limited savings would be realised following this model.

7.2. Shared use of community buildings

This involves exploration of shared use of NCC owned and managed local community buildings operating a library offer within a shared space.

Benefits
- Community: Aligning shared community benefits and outcomes
- Cost efficiencies: Shared staffing skills, shared building costs, space utilisation, joined up service delivery
- Retaining a service offer in areas of high deprivation andneed
- Potential alternative response to the issues raised during the consultation

Risks and Issues to address

- Finding the right partner
- Potential need for building redesign / suitability of shared space and associated costs which are currently unfunded
- Security and safety of staff and users
- Inclusive accessible space
- Aligning costs and budgets for shared delivery
- Some ongoing revenue cost for staff and library resources
- Timely sale and disposal of vacated building
- Less space would be available for library books, computers etc.

7.3. Asset Transfer to a third party

Through sale or long term lease, with defined heads of terms that could include the provision for a publically accessible library offer

Benefits:

- Potential transfer of maintenance and building liabilities
- Reduced revenue costs
- Building retained as a community facility with public access offer to be determined
- Potential response to issues raised during the consultation

Risks and issues to address:

- Property / legal / finance implications for the basis of the transfer
- Negotiation required on potential for community library offer as part of transfer
- Project Management capacity to deliver asset transfer
- Finding a partner with similar community aspirations for the area
- Loss of council control of the library service offer
- Potential time-lag for achieving budget savings

7.4. <u>Technology Enabled Opening (TEO)</u>
This will enable a library to be accessible whilst unstaffed on site. Entry to the library would be via a library card and Pin, with CCTV aiding security and self-service machines/computers allow usage without staff. TE's have been shown to increase library footfall and usage, and help reduce running costs. Increasing opening hours and more accessible service will help reach non-traditional users, growing our core base in a sustainable approach whilst maintaining a quality library service.

Benefits:

- The technology can extend opening hours far beyond what budgets would normally provide.
- User preference: users like having the library open for longer (or, in some cases, open at all).
- Gain new users who otherwise would not have been able to use the library with older, more limited, hours.
- Improves community feel and social capital: creates trust and meeting place.
- Hours can be set to suit the library, as can other restrictions. CCTV and remotely controlled equipment means security is provided.
- Positive response to enable efficient cost efficient service offer
- Regular users out of hours may police the library themselves and assist those who need help.
- Vandalism is often feared but appears rare

Risk and issues to address:

- Absence of available support and advice from trained staff
- Equalities issues: pilots in some authorities show far more men than women are willing to enter an apparently unsupervised library
- Investment in security and safety is likely to be required e.g. CCTV
- Access for those unaccompanied under 16 needs addressing
- Cost: the system is cheaper than paid staffing but cost (especially set up) is still substantial.
- Design of building / building restrictions may limit locations where TEO can be introduced

7.5. <u>Redistribution of opening hours across the network</u>
This would involve a review of library access across the City network to a achieve a net reduction in open hours in line with the revenue saving required to be achieved

Benefits:

- Has the potential to achieve the required saving without the need to reduce the number of libraries
- More effectively respond to peaks and troughs in demand for library use

Risks and issues to address:

- Staff resource scheduling to accommodate revised open hours

- Doesn't align with the priorities set out for the modernisation and transformation of the library service
- May impact on the delivery of community events and activities currently in place
- Reduced accessibility for those citizens who want/able to the library outside of the reduced opening times
- Could result in energy and maintenance cost being disproportionate to opening hours of the building

8. Consideration of risks

A number of operational, financial and project delivery risks have been highlighted against the alternative options for the 3 libraries as set out in section 6. These need to be carefully considered in pursuing any of the options outlined.

A statutory and reputational risk remains for any decision that is made in relation to the transformation of a library service. Any decisions needs to meet obligations set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. They will be considered carefully by Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) if a complaint is made about the City's provision.

Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, local councils in England have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all people working, living or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it.

In providing this service, councils must, among other things, have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service and lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.

At a national level, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has a statutory duty to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries.

When drawing up and delivering library strategies and plans Councils should consider the range of legal obligations placed on them by the Equality Act, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, Best Value Duty 2011 guidance, Localism Act 2011, Human Rights Act 1998.

As set out in the Governments 'Strategic planning of library services: longer-term, evidence-based sustainable planning toolkit' if the Secretary of State investigates a complaint about a library service not meeting its legal obligations, he or she will expect that library authority to demonstrate that, in drawing up its strategy, it had:

- consulted with local communities alongside assessing their needs; and
- considered a range of options (including alternative financing, governance delivery models) to sustain library service provision in its area undertaken a rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of its proposals

In summary, the legislation does not specify the number of libraries to be provided in any area and challenges made to the secretary of state over closures in other cities have confirmed that the meaning of 'comprehensive and efficient' is to be interpreted in the context of availability of resources, it does not necessarily mean that every resident must live close to a library. A review of library services with a view to making major changes to its library services can be achieved in a legally compliant way. Decisions must be based on a robust strategic review which includes a comprehensive needs assessment that must be accompanied by an extensive and inclusive consultation. A failure to do this opens the Council up to the risk of challenge by way of judicial review.

9. List of attached information

Nottingham City Council Library Transformation – Phase 2 Findings Reports – June 2022

10. Published documents referred to in this report

Executive Board Report - 18 January 2022

The Next Chapter –Nottingham City Council Library Needs Assessment - Findings and Outcomes from Phase 1. January 2022.

11. Wards Effected:
All

Contact Information

Nigel Hawkins, Head of Culture & Libraries
nigel.hawkins@nottinghamcity.gov.uk
0115 876 4969