

Communities & Environment Scrutiny Committee
4 December 2024

Shape the Vision – Consultation on Library Service Budget Proposals

Report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the information presented within the report and at the meeting setting out the findings from the public consultation on the Library Service proposals that took place between 28 May and 19 August 2024 around achieving the budget saving agreed in the MTFP and consider whether any recommendations to the Executive Member for Carbon Reduction, Leisure and Culture arise from the discussion for consideration towards reaching final recommendations to take forward for Executive Board decision.

2 Action required

- 2.1 The Committee is asked:
- 1) to make any comments or recommendations in response to the report from the Executive Member for Carbon Reduction, Leisure and Culture;
 - 2) to consider whether any further scrutiny of the issue is required (and, if so, to identify the focus and timescales).

3. Background and Context

- 3.1 As part of the approved 2024-2027 MTFP The Library Service is required to make budget savings between 2024-2026 of £1.524m. The service must make these financial savings whilst continuing to provide its statutory duty as part of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.
- 3.2 Due to the size of the saving to be achieved, equivalent to 38% of the total library budget, the library service will need to fundamentally transform its service offer and as part of this, review every aspect of the current delivery. In line with the aims of Nottingham City Council's Performance and Improvement Plan the library service needs to become more financially sustainable whilst consistently delivering a service which residents can trust and rely on.
- 3.3 Where any significant changes are to be made, and to mitigate against community challenge and judicial review, the Library Service needs to demonstrate to the community, DCMS and other stakeholders that these changes continue to deliver its statutory duty of providing a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who live, work or study in the area. This requires following a robust process, including extensive community consultation, providing an evidenced based

rationale, and equalities impact assessment in line with DCMS statutory guidance.

- 3.4 Following the Council's full budget consultation held in Dec 2023 – Jan 2024, it was agreed that a more detailed presentation of proposals would be developed for public consultation.
- 3.5 The proposals developed for consultation considered a range of factors and criteria including: usage and performance, building costs and maintenance; needs of neighbourhoods, accessibility & nearness to other facilities and financial performance & value for money to ensure the library service can deliver a sustainable comprehensive offer within reduced resources.
- 3.6 Additionally, in developing the proposals, several other options have been considered including community/volunteer run libraries; use of self-serve Technology Enabled Opening (TEO) libraries; and transfer of the service to another provider. These have been assessed against deliverability of the budget target, alongside other statutory, community and operations risks/considerations. These are to be presented as part of the final recommendations for decision.
- 3.7 Throughout the consultation we have been mindful of the equalities considerations that need to shape and inform any future delivery model. An equality impact assessment of the consultation was completed, see Appendix 2, to ensure as many citizens, colleagues, and stakeholders as possible engaged with the library consultation process. Emerging issues from the consultation are being considered and wherever possible mitigations that can be put in place. These will be detailed in Equality Impact Assessment on the final recommendations for the decision report finally taken to Councillors.
- 3.8 It's vital the future service provides modern, warm safe spaces, continues to be a gateway to support services and enhances digital inclusion whilst providing library services in areas of deprivation and economic need.
- 3.9 The proposals put forward for consultation were as follows:
 - Reducing the number of libraries from 15 to 11. With the proposed closure of 4 libraries – Aspley, Basford, Bilborough, and Radford-Lenton.
 - Reduction in opening hours across the network by 123.5 hrs per week, Full details of proposed changes is set out in Appendix 1
 - Reductions around staffing.
 - Reducing the budget for books, IT and other overhead operating costs.
- 3.10 The measures proposed are projected to save £1.524m, allowing the Council to deliver a sustainable library service.

4. Consultation process.

4.1 The consultation exercise on the above proposals took place between 28 May – 19 August 2024. The principles of the consultation were as follows:

- The starting point for the consultation was that ‘No decisions have been made’ and all responses to the consultation will be considered before any decisions are taken about the future of Nottingham City Libraries. This message was reiterated throughout the 12-week process.
- The consultation involved working with organisations and networks across the city to ensure as many people as possible who live, work or study in Nottingham could engage.
- The consultation was also designed to seek innovative solutions’ asking citizens and partners to propose alternative strategies for delivering efficient, comprehensive library services within the budget constraints.

4.2 The consultation programme included the following elements:

- Online Survey Questionnaire (with hard copies available at all libraries).
- Public events - 5 public events were held, including 2 drop in sessions at community venues - with over 100 attendees in total
- Engage Nottingham Hub: Providing information on consultation activity being undertaken by NCC with the opportunity for citizens and stakeholders ‘have their say’.
- Nottingham Libraries Website has a dedicated landing page about the proposals, including Frequently Asked Questions. This dedicated “Shape the Vision” web page saw over 7,000 visits during the consultation period.
- Direct emails sent to 31,000 library users, 19,162 Library Newsletter subscribers, Nottingham City schools, internal and external networks including ACE, BAME, Disabled and LGBT+ staff networks, and a range of community partnerships.
- Direct letters were sent via email to 132 local, regional, and national 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
- Nottingham City Libraries social media channels were used to promote the consultation including on the Library Facebook page, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram feeds.
- Staff Engagement Workshop Sessions – two staff engagement sessions took place during August 2024.
- Stakeholder workshop - held 17^h July 2024 with attendees from different NCC departments plus representatives of University of

Nottingham, Nottingham Trent University and UNESCO City of Literature.

- In addition, we received 517 Friends of Meadows Library comments sheets, created by the group in support of the library, which pre-dated the official consultation survey.

5. Headline findings from the Consultation

5.1 A summary of findings is set out in Appendix 1. Some are of the key headlines from this are:

- 5,378 people responded to the survey. 4,360 people/ organisations responded to the main online survey, 624 people completed the main paper survey. 394 children and young people completed the young people version of the survey either online or on paper. 42 organisations responded and 149 of the responses were from Nottingham City Council staff – the respondees were split 66% female and 29% Male. 16% of respondents identified themselves as disabled and 20% respondents were from an ethnic background other than white British.
- 75% of respondent visit a library at least once month, with Central Library being the most visited library.
- 46% of respondents walk to their preferred library.
- Main reason cited for using a library was to borrow books followed by for printing and photocopying and for studying and homework.

5.2 The majority of people were against closures and the reduction in opening hours with many expressing concern about the high levels of disadvantage and deprivation existing in the communities where the libraries were proposed for closure. They were especially concerned about the impact closures would have on children and young people, older people and those with disabilities. They highlighted it would make it harder to use/visit the library, and a vital community resource would be lost. Many expressed concern that working people would struggle to be able to visit the library with proposed opening times.

5.3 Full analysis of the responses and feedback consultation has now taken place. Careful consideration is being given to the views and concerns raised by individuals and communities and the strong opposition to closure before final recommendations are brought forward for decision.

5.4 Any decision will also need to enable the transformation to a sustainable library service that remains relevant and responds to the financial position of the local authority in line with the Improvement plan ensuring financial stability to 2030 and beyond. Some of emerging principles for the final recommendation based on the consultation findings are:

- Opportunity for Community/Voluntary sector management of library buildings as an alternative to closures
- Taking a more considered and tailored approach to respond to needs of the community particularly in relation to opening hours. This has included ensuring all libraries are open on Saturdays and a later closing each week on an area basis.
- Greater use of volunteers to further support the service.
- Closer partnership working with organisations, community groups and educational institutions to explore alternative delivery models and added value.
- The development and more effective use of technology and digital access realigning buildings, staff, and resources to respond to evolving need and demand.
- Using available funding for developments and maximising existing and new income streams.

6. Risks to Deliverability

- 6.1 To successfully implement and deliver the budget savings whilst maintaining the service's statutory responsibility, will require a fundamental change of the entire library service.
- 6.2 Deliverability depends on strong partnerships with community organisations, service agreements, greater use of and support from volunteers, and ongoing support from the Council for training and resources. A well-managed community approach can provide tailored community driven services but requires long term planning and support to be sustainable. Strong partnerships can be highly beneficial, adding resources, expertise, and potential funding streams.
- 6.3 Changes to opening hours is likely to impact on the overall service quality and on public perception of the library service. The community consultation and data driven approach used is able to help us optimise and focus on key hours of usage in order to manage costs and ensure professional support is in place for customers.
- 6.4 Use of volunteers will require training which can be time intensive and costly, and reliance on volunteers may lead to challenges with reliability and retention, however with adequate support structures and clarity of volunteer roles with professional team many of these issues can be mitigated.
- 6.5 Technology initiatives require careful planning for inclusivity and secure infrastructure. Staff training is essential for both the technology itself and digital literacy to support library users efficiently and limit the digital divide.
- 6.6 Overall success will depend on robust community engagement, well-defined partnerships and clear strategies for training and support.

6.7 Finally a key dependency, which may have implications on decisions about the future library network and operational delivery is the outcomes from the Community Centres Review. The current policy approach to community centres may result in some displaced activity, should existing community associations decide not to, or be unable to continue. Any displaced activity could potentially be accommodated by nearby library provision subject to suitable spaces or adaptations.

7. Timetable for final Recommendations for Decision

Timetable and Key Milestones for the Review of Library

Key Milestones	Date(s)
Review consultation and data analysis and update of Library Needs Assessment	August – November 2024
Development of final Recommendations and Equalities Impact Assessment	November - December 2024
Explore alternative community, voluntary and partner opportunities and alternative proposals that have emerged	September 2024 – March 2025
Approval route for final decision engagement including Overview & Scrutiny & Executive Board	December 2024 – February 2025

8 List of attached information

Appendix 1 Consultation Findings – Detailed report
 Appendix 2 Consultation Equalities Impact Assessment

9 Wards affected.

9.1 The proposals put forward for consultation and emerging recommendations will impact on all wards across the Council. The consultation therefore was designed to provide the opportunity for Citywide engagement to inform the future sustainability of the service

10 Contact information

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