

## FUTURE LIBRARY SERVICES

### REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with the findings of the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel in regard to the Future Library Service (**Appendix 1**)

#### 2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting of 13 March 2013, the Scrutiny Committee was informed of the review of library provision in Sunderland, including details of the extensive two stage consultation and engagement programme being undertaken.
- 2.2 The Scrutiny Committee commissioned the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel to be consulted on the Future Library Service on its behalf. The Panel met on 23 April 2013; the response is attached as **Appendix 1** for the Committee's consideration.

#### 3.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 Substantial consultation and engagement is being undertaken with all stakeholders about the types of neighbourhood and overall provision that best suit their needs. In this context, stakeholders refer to library users, non-users, residents, elected members, current library staff and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- 3.2 The consultation has taken account of the need to increase the overall access and use of the service, particularly amongst those who would most benefit, and the requirement to reduce costs. Areas for consultation include:
- Articulating and refining the overall Vision
  - Identifying appropriate locations to increase access to services via a community outreach approach which incorporates activities delivered in non-traditional library settings across the city
  - Determining the Library Hubs, overall offer and opening hours
  - Making appropriate and adequate provision for those otherwise unable to access services in their community
  - Advising on reader development activities for all ages and further learning opportunities and related programme
  - Enhancing services to schools, for example to include increased structured class visits and library instruction

- Developing a network of volunteers to add value to the overall service offer

3.3 A two stage consultation approach has been adopted with residents (including children and young people), users and non-users, staff, partners, voluntary and community groups and members. Feedback from all groups will be used to inform the future library service offer.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 Members are requested to consider the findings of the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel as part of the consultation process.

#### **5.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

5.1 The following background papers were relied upon to compile this report:

- Scrutiny Committee Minutes, 14 March 2013

## **Appendix 1**

### Library Services Consultation – Findings of the Public Health, Wellness and Culture Scrutiny Panel

The Panel did not have access to the full findings of the consultation, although headlines were provided, and was therefore only able to comment on the consultation document, the size and scope of the consultation and some key headlines.

The Panel acknowledged that Sunderland City Council has one of the highest numbers of libraries relative to comparative local authorities and has continued to supply new stock, despite the ongoing efficiency savings across the council.

The consultation was significant in scale and considerable efforts had been taken to engage non-library users in the consultation. The Panel agreed that it is useful to have a focus on young people going forward, and agreed that it was useful to encourage different groups of people to access services, but it was noted that older people are the current main users of traditional library services and it was felt to be important not to disengage current active users.

The Panel felt that current library users may have been less engaged in the consultation than non-users who were targeted in a range of settings. Hard copies of the consultation document had been available in libraries; however, a member of the Panel provided an example of library staff not encouraging library users to complete the form. It is possible that those most directly engaged with the service currently, and those who may be most adversely affected by the change, may not have commented on the consultation questions.

Nevertheless, the Panel noted that a large number of responses had been submitted, and congratulates all those staff and other interested parties who worked hard to achieve such an impressive number of responses.

The Panel commented that it was not necessarily clear from this phase of the consultation that the information provided by respondents would ultimately contribute to a move away from some library buildings, however, the service considered that the information about required efficiencies was very clear in that respect.

The Panel felt there was a level of uncertainty and risk associated with achieving the savings from the use of volunteers if the capacity was not forthcoming.

The Panel felt there was a mixed message about services as a number of programmes are being promoted around book lending while at the same time services were being moved in a different direction towards use of new technology. The Panel supports a stronger emphasis on internet accessibility and linking this to job-hunting, training, literacy classes, and facilities for those families who cannot afford to buy the latest computers or smart phones although a traditional service will still be required.

Generally, Panel members were supportive of a move towards multi-use community buildings although they remained concerned that there are gaps in community facilities across wards. An equalities analysis will be essential in this regard. In view of the proposed enhanced role of libraries as community hubs, the Panel felt it would be important that computer suites are in prominent positions in locations used for libraries to reflect the importance of this aspect of service provision.

### Conclusions

The Panel concluded that the final proposals to the Cabinet should include an equality impact assessment covering areas of need, together with alternative options and the financial details of how the efficiencies will be realised.

Furthermore, the Panel recommends that arrangements should be in place to support ward members in their community leadership role during implementation.