CABINET
Meeting date: 15 September 2011
From: Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Local Services Corporate Director – Adult & Local Services

LIBRARY SERVICE REVIEW : NEXT STEPS

PART A - RECOMMENDATION OF CABINET MEMBER

1.0   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1   *The County Council began a detailed review of the Library Service last year with the aim of addressing the long term decline in public use through the investigation of various options for the modernisation of service delivery. Earlier this year a consultation exercise began that sought the public's views on a range of options and over 4000 comments have been received in verbal, written and on line contacts. This paper sets out proposals for taking the modernisation process forward in light of the analysis to date of the feedback received from this wide range of respondents.*

2.0   STRATEGIC PLANNING AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

2.1   *The Library Service is a statutory service that provides a first point of contact with Cumbria County Council for about 100,000 Cumbrians each year. It also plays an important role supporting the delivery of Community Strategy and Cumbria Agreement outcomes and Council Plan priorities, which are*

   Challenging poverty in all its forms;

   Ensuring that the most vulnerable people in our communities receive the support they need; and

   Improving the changes in life of the most disadvantaged in Cumbria.

2.2   *The proposals contained in this report are intended to enhance the role of the Library Service in supporting the County Council's strategic priorities through the modernisation of the Service itself. If agreed by Cabinet, development and implementation of some of the range of proposals contained in the report can begin immediately. This will involve the details of the specific modernisation projects being agreed*

at a local level with Local Committees in cooperation with Local Youth Councils. In principle the modernisation work will be carried out within existing budgets and will not impinge adversely on existing standards of performance or performance indicators. The overall aim of the process will be to enhance the quality of service delivery(in line with the County Council's new Customer Services Strategy) through the greater engagement of current service users and non users thereby addressing the underlying problem of declining use.

2.3 *Although the Library Review was not predicated on the need to react to reductions in the budget as was the case in other parts of the country, nevertheless Cumbria County Council faces the prospect of sizeable reductions to its budget in the coming years. With this in mind it is essential for the changes proposed for the Library Service to take every opportunity to deliver greater efficiency and economy by whatever means possible, including the exploitation of opportunities created by other strategic transformation and modernisation initiatives including the relaunching of the County's CDC network, Better Places for Work, Super fast Broadband, Carbon Reduction amongst many others.*

2.4 *The modernisation of the Library Service is intended to make the Service more inclusive than before. The Service has already developed a good reputation because of its traditional commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity but the long term decline in use requires that the Service critically reviews the nature of its service delivery and the levels of provision across the County. The high level proposals to work locally will be subject to an EIA and each of the modernisation projects will be subject to a separate EIA's as they develop.*

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 *That Members endorse the range of proposals contained in this report and specifically endorse the approach advocated, i.e. to work on a localised basis with Local Committees in the development of projects to modernise the Library Service and to receive subsequent recommendations for Cabinet decision making. Wherever and whenever possible these projects are to be required to take full account of opportunities to work across the County Council's Directorates (and beyond) in order to ensure that the County Council and its partners are able to deliver modern responsive customer focused services but in the most cost effective and efficient manner possible.*

Gary Strong, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Local Services

PART B – ADVICE OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR – ADULT & LOCAL SERVICES

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The initial phase of the public consultation exercise regarding the review of the Library Service took place between April and June 2011. During the three month period many thousands of contacts were made with members of the public at scores of events around the county and 4000 individual comments were recorded as part of the feedback process.

4.2 Our complete analysis of this feedback is still underway but the key messages received were:

- Library users were generally supportive of the range of services and the staff at their local library;
- The general public felt that libraries were social hubs that offered more than just books;
- There is scope for modernisation and change to reflect the way that society and communities now operate
- There are a number of improvements to the service that people would like to see. These suggestions range from changes in the loan arrangements for DVDs, changes to opening hours to reflect better access for people in employment and greater range of on-line services through to, in some instances , operating from a different building.

4.3 It became apparent that many people who used libraries were averse to change simply because they were fearful of losing access to a valued service and their negative perception of change stemmed from the belief that it was driven by the need for budgetary cuts and savings. However, when it was explained that library use nationally is in long term decline and that it was necessary to explore alternative methods of service delivery in order to sustain the Library Service, people began to engage with our proposals for change in a more constructive fashion.

4.4 For example, very few people questioned the merit or usefulness of the Library "Extra" concept particularly as local access points for wider Council services and generally people were supportive of the idea of the Library Link, the book drop and the Community Librarian approaches to the modernisation of the Service.

4.5 One important idea that developed through the latter stages of the consultation process was that of individual communities having a vital role to play in working with the County Council to address the problem of declining library use. The depth and intensity of feeling generated recently in a number of Cumbrian communities by the perception that their local library was under threat of closure is a powerful force that needs to be harnessed and channelled to achieve positive outcomes that may vary according to local need, circumstance and opportunity.

4.6 The opposition to proposed changes to library services elsewhere in the country has led to a natural public suspicion in Cumbria about **our** ideas for change, however well intentioned.

4.7 Taking this public scepticism into account and given the practical and logistical difficulties of implementing a range of fundamental changes to the Library Service across Cumbria simultaneously, it is proposed that Cumbria establishes a number of different but related projects to modernise the Library Service over a fixed period of time with the aim of creating a positive body of empirical evidence to support and lend greater credibility to the agenda for modernisation and change.

4.8 Furthermore, these projects should be **District based** to take full account of differing local needs and circumstances and should be undertaken in conjunction and collaboration with the relevant Local Committee, local Youth Council and with the Community Unit. Given the commitment of the Council to the concept of Locality Planning, it is vital that the Library projects take full account of the opportunities presented in each locality by other transformation and modernisation initiatives, such as Carbon Reduction and Better Places for Work, in order to ensure that the Council's broader efficiency agenda is upheld and that Services are delivered in the most cost effective fashion.

4.9 The projects should aim to develop and nurture a number of emerging ideas and themes for the modernisation of service delivery including:

- The Library Link – a means of providing isolated communities with cost effective, consistent and increased access to library services;

- The Community Librarian – a method of taking library services out into the heart of communities, targeting hard-to-reach and disadvantaged groups and changing the dynamic of service delivery from "reactive" to "proactive";

- The Friends Group – a means of harnessing local support for libraries to enhance local provision, encourage greater participation and advocate for libraries, books, reading and related activities in the wider community;

- The Community library – an initiative designed to test out the validity and practicality of a return to the idea of the village reading room, organised by the local community for the local community under the sponsorship of the County Council;

4.10 Shared Service provision – greater exploration of \ initiatives including the greater and more consistent public promotion of the range of services on offer, regular review of local opening hours, the continuation of the roll out of self- service equipment, the generation of greater income from audio visual rentals (including the introduction of downloadable audio books), improvement of the range of on-line services and the development of proposals for in-house shops and cafes on a number of sites.

5.0 OPTIONS

5.1 Cabinet could choose to disregard the idea of endorsing a menu of locally tailored projects in favour of a modernisation process that adopts a "one size fits all" approach across the County. However, this would seem to ignore the findings of the public consultation exercise which demonstrated that some ideas for modernisation were likely to be better supported in some areas than in others.

5.2 Cabinet could choose to insist on a "large scale reduction" approach to the review of the Library Service in Cumbria, citing the long term decline in use nationally and the fact that they are only used on a regular basis by about 20% of the Cumbrian population. However, the depth of public feeling for libraries demonstrated across the County recently at the *perceived* threat to their existence, suggests that there is still some way to go before the people of Cumbria would be prepared to sanction the wholesale closure of public libraries.

5.3 Cabinet is recommended therefore to select an approach to modernisation of the Library Service that forges a new partnership approach with local communities and the Local Committees in order to achieve a positive outcome for the communities, the Library Service and the County Council. This approach, however, should be adopted within the context of the concept of Locality Planning in order to ensure that waste and duplication of provision are avoided in the pursuit of modern, customer focused and cost effective and efficient services. This will also require greater co-ordination between Directorates in order to be able to maximise opportunity.

5.4 By adopting the "menu of projects" approach we will have the opportunity to test out a number of initiatives that collectively – if successful - will help to create a Library Service that is not only fit for purpose and more efficient and effective but also better suited to the needs of 21st century society generally and Cumbrian communities in particular.

6.0 RESOURCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Whilst addressing the issue of declining use has been the main driver of the Library Service Review, one of the key objectives has been the achievement of greater efficiency, effectiveness and value for money

6.2 The Library Service has a gross annual budget of £7.1m with main areas of expenditure being identified below.

Employee Costs	£4.1m	58%
Purchase of Books & DVD's	£1.3m	18%
Energy / Rents / Rates / Cleaning	£1.1m	15%
Other items	£0.6m	9%
	£7.1m	**100%**

6.3   The value of income received by the Library Service is following the national trend of reducing year on year which is putting financial pressure on the service. Over the 3 year period 2008/09 to 2010/11 income fell from £879k to £688k per annum, a reduction of £191k or 24%, should this trend continue for the next 3 years then income will fall to £538k, an average reduction of £50k per annum. Indications from the early part of this year are that the reduction could be greater than this.

6.4   Local Government generally and Cumbria County Council in particular faces the prospect of reducing budgets for the foreseeable future. Therefore any modernisation process undertaken will inevitably be required to do more for less and that needs to be clearly understood. Yet it is feasible to deliver a modernisation programme that not only results in improved service quality and access but that also delivers a sustainable financial future for the service.

6.5   The report asks for a "menu of projects" approach to be adopted within the concept of locality planning. Financial modelling will be undertaken on any such proposals once they are formulated and will become part of any future report or business case.   PT 24/08/11

7.0   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1   Local Committees have decision making powers in respect of library provision which are limited to naming and deciding opening hours.

7.2   Local Committees have a range of functions that could be used to support consultation and community collaboration prior to making recommendations to the Corporate Director or Cabinet. (SL)

8.0   CONCLUSION

8.1   Public library services stand at crucial point in their development. They are no longer regarded as the "street corner universities" of their early days and they now have to compete with a host of information and leisure services, many of them IT based, that did not exist even 20 years ago. If public library services are to survive and prosper they must adapt to change to ensure that they are as relevant to people today and particularly tomorrow as they were to our forebears.

8.2   Our Review of the Library Service has shown that we must act now to address the worrying fact that library usage is in long term decline. To use the cliché, to do nothing is not an option. However, the Cumbrian public generally are distrustful of what a modernisation process might entail as our consultation exercise has shown. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that the implementation of a number of inter-related projects each with a focus tailored to local circumstances but collectively designed to demonstrate the efficacy and credibility of the modernisation agenda as a whole is the appropriate course of action for Cumbria County Council to take.

8.3 What is proposed here is not a narrow Library Service focused re-development process but a new a approach to the delivery of 21st century public services. Our new approach will take full account not only of wider customer expectations of public services within the context of continuing constraints on public spending, but also of the opportunities to redesign services that are being presented by a wide range of other modernisation initiatives. Our over riding aim is to produce a Library Service that is responsive and sustainable and above all efficient and cost effective.

Richard Parry
Corporate Director, Adult & Local Services

2 September 2011

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Cumbria County Council Libraries review: Public and stakeholder engagement overview report
Appendix 2 Equality Impact Assessment

Electoral Division(s):   All

* Please remove whichever option is not applicable

Executive Decision	**Yes***	
Key Decision	**Yes**	
If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?	**Yes**	
Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?		**No***
If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?		**N/A***
Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny? If so, give details below.	**Yes***	
Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?		**No***
Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?	**Yes**	

N.B. If an executive decision is made, then a decision cannot be implemented until the expiry of the eighth working day after the date of the meeting – unless the decision is urgent and exempt from call-in and the Corporate Director has obtained the necessary approvals.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS
[including Local Committees]

No previous relevant decisions.

CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

If a matter has been considered by Overview and Scrutiny, this section should give details of meeting dates and any Scrutiny recommendations

20 May 2011 - Adults Scrutiny Advisory Board

> *Recommendations:*
>
> 1. *The task group is reconvened to contribute to the second stage of the consultation on the future of Library Services, when a set of proposals are released in September/October 2011;*
>
> 2. *The Library Service should retain the use of new technologies as a key area of consideration over the next few years, ensuring that the service is fit for purpose and the 21st century, whilst 'future-proofing' the service;*
>
> 3. *The service should keep an eye on emerging technologies and should ensure that it enters into the wider market for e-books, downloads and other IT-based service provision;*
>
> 4. *The task group supports to use of Library Extra enhanced facilities at 30 service centres in Cumbria, whilst service provision out with these areas should be responsive and appropriate in meeting local need;*
>
> 5. *Where there are plans to close any libraries, this should only be undertaken once alternative and suitable provision is in place, to meet local need.*

BACKGROUND PAPERS

'Time for Change? Ideas for the Future of Cumbria's Libraries' Consultation Feedback report.

RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER

Gary Strong. Community Safety and Local Services

REPORT AUTHOR

Contact: Jim Grisenthwaite. Jim.grisenthwaite@cumbria.gov.uk   01228227282