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Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee 3 September 2012

LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF LAW AND CULTURE

Background

1. Oxfordshire Library Service is committed to delivering a cost-effective, high quality library service that is fit for the 21st century and that will meet the needs of those living, working and studying in Oxfordshire and that will satisfy the Council's duty under section 7 of the 1964 Act.
2. The Library Service is highly valued by users and stakeholders, delivering services that meet customer need and that contribute to the delivery of the corporate goal of a Thriving Oxfordshire. The Service will now position itself to be sustainable, relevant and available to present and future generations through the delivery of the overall Library Service Strategy as set out in the report to Cabinet of 12 December 2011.

Library Service Strategy

3. The report to Cabinet set out the Strategy that will be delivered between 2012 and 2015 under a project management framework that will be overseen by the Library Service Management Team. The key elements of the Strategy
 - Rationalising management support
 - Expanding the use of volunteers
 - Continuing to exploit existing and new opportunities to generate income
 - Working collaboratively with other service providers and community groups to reach target customers
 - Working collaboratively with developers and businesses to address changes in population
 - Continuing to work with other library authorities to contribute to and benefit from best practice
 - Improving and extending digital library services
 - All libraries will remain open and
 - have a good book stock, public access computers and online resources
 - have self-service as standard
 - offer a broad range of services relevant to that local community
 - work closely with the community and stakeholders
 - encourage the use of library buildings as community spaceshave been incorporated into the Library Service Plan for 2012-2015 and linked to our Service priorities as specific objectives or cross cutting themes.

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Rationalising management support

4. Between January and April this year the Library Service underwent a significant restructure of its management, professional and support services staffing. The new Library Service Management Team is working successfully to deliver change leadership and the Service is benefitting from excellent support provided by the Organisational Development Team within HR.
5. The Service now has a structure that can equip and empower staff to take new and different approaches to ways of working in our delivery of a customer focused service that supports Library Service and Corporate priorities. The restructure was completed with full effect from May 1st and has led staff to embrace a culture shift and work more closely with colleagues within the Library Service, with colleagues across directorates and with external partners and other service providers. Staff are settling well into the new structure and are developing service wide new ways of working with enthusiasm.
6. Our Summer Reading Challenge this year was the first opportunity to work in this way. Library Managers and Librarians have worked across team boundaries to deliver the traditional Summer Reading Challenge for children and young people across the County and to offer an additional, new reading challenge to families and adults from Oxford Central Library, which means this is open to everyone as Oxford Central Library is used by residents from across the whole County. The Reading Challenge and its associated fun activities raise the profile of reading, encouraging the reading habit to support attainment, aspiration and achievement and contribute to the agenda of Every Oxfordshire Child a Good Reader. Activities have been led by Librarians, Library Managers and volunteers and also delivered in partnership with Friends Groups, the Story Museum and Oxfordshire Skills and Learning Service. Readers have enjoyed a wide range of fun reading development activities. Oxford Central Library has offered Bring and Share for adults, Puppet Making and Story for families and Attention Grabbers Graffiti Boards for all ages to pass on their favourite opening lines from books. Wantage Library hosted a Pyjama Party, Chinnor Library worked with Oxford University Museum and invited children along to the library to create their own stories and Bampton Library held activities around the storylab theme with families experimenting with words and ideas to create a story together. Celebration events to mark the achievements of participants will be held across the County and our Summer Reading Challenges at Oxford Central Library will culminate in a celebration event for adults with folk musicians entertaining the library audience and a medal and certificate ceremony for children accompanied by the Hurdy Gurdy Man.

Expanding the use of volunteers

7. Volunteers currently and traditionally have supported the work of the Library Service by helping their local communities and adding value to

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existing library services, acting as Computer Buddies, Home Library Service helpers and rhymetime helpers and leaders. This year the Service has worked closely with partners and individuals to create summer volunteering opportunities for young people to act as champions for the Summer Reading Challenge supporting and encouraging children to join in and enjoy reading activities throughout the summer holiday. This is a mutually beneficial new way of working for us, giving us an opportunity to involve and learn from young people and giving young adults an opportunity to add to their experience, develop their skills and have a good time.

8. The Library Service plan 2012-2015 will look to expand and develop volunteering opportunities that will respond to the decision taken by Cabinet around Community and Community Plus libraries.
9. As was always the intention, the three year process to develop our community library model began in earnest from April and conversations are now taking place between local groups and the Library Service – with some positive meetings so far - about the practicalities of working together.
10. The Library Service Manager has started to meet with Friends Groups to begin the process of moving towards a shift in the balance of staffing in Community and Community Plus libraries by April 2015. Solutions will be different in each case and worked out on a library by library basis, reflecting local need and local circumstances and be very much by negotiation and in partnership.
11. It is important to stress that it was never intended that the shift in the balance of staffing in these libraries would have been implemented by this stage in the three year process. The speed at which this work will progress will be governed by local factors. Some communities have existing Friends Groups who will work with us to support the delivery of their local library service; some communities have existing Friends Groups who may prefer to retain their traditional remit but will facilitate engagement with the community for us to develop a group who may; and in some communities there are no existing Friends Groups so we will be starting to work with stakeholders to begin the process of community involvement in the delivery of library services. However, there is now good progress with work around such issues as: what the role of the volunteer could entail; the practicalities of and needs for training; and what compacts and agreements between the Service and the Community could look like – all with input from the community groups involved.

Income generation

12. Work will continue to review existing and new opportunities to generate income and the Service is currently looking to introduce the facility of payment by card for library customers, which will deliver choice for our customers.

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Working to deliver facilities and buildings that meet changing local need

13. Work planned to deliver our service priority of library buildings and environments that are customer facing, fit for the 21st century, safe and perceived as a valuable community asset is being implemented.
- The County Council is engaged with partners to look at locality development planning for Abingdon, Banbury, Berinsfield, Bicester and Didcot which may bring opportunities to improve library provisions
 - The Service is working with Friends Groups, community groups, service providers and partner agencies to maximise the use of community buildings and encourage their development as community spaces
 - The Service is working through the transition to our new facilities management provider and with the Corporate Landlord to ensure that library buildings are attractive, fit for purpose and safe
14. Following the decision to have self-service provision as standard across all libraries in the County, the Library Service has implemented a roll out programme due to complete in Spring 2013. The implementation of self-service enables individuals to manage their own library transactions and will be a vital tool that volunteers can use to assist library customers. Library customers are still able to choose the traditional, counter service but the track record of self-service in our libraries so far shows: high customer satisfaction; faster transaction time; customer privacy; more efficient stock management and a contribution to the delivery of a high quality and efficient library service fit for the 21st century. The roll out of this phase of implementation has already included libraries at Grove, Wychwood, Hook Norton, Carterton, Blackbird Leys and Chipping Norton where the installations have been welcomed by both library customers and staff. We were also able to undertake significant refurbishment work at Chipping Norton to deliver a greatly improved library environment which has been needed for some time.

Development of the digital library services

15. Delivery of the service plan 2012-2015 will ensure that more people access online library services by improving and enhancing our web content, online services and electronic communication channels and that more people are supported and equipped to participate in the digital society.
16. Our eBook lending service was launched in February 2012 and has been well received with 3581 issues to date. It is interesting to note that the majority of our ebook customers come to the digital platform directly via the OCC website and not via other routes. Our full eAudio service is planned to come on stream this Autumn. This is an important development as it is a core service for visually impaired customers and those unable to access printed media.

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17. We are currently working with the Early Intervention Service and sit on the OXME steering group to help develop the Boombox and Oxcentric websites. These are Oxfordshire's websites for young people; Boombox for children aged 8 to 12 and Oxcentric for 13 to 19 year olds and are designed as reliable sources of information about local services, news and projects for young people. Helping young people to access library services is a key function of both websites, giving them an accessible portal to the Library Service's online services. Helping young people to find volunteering opportunities is a recent addition to the websites, linking to the Library's Summer Reading Challenge project this year. Importantly, this work has involved young people and modifications to the sites are being made as a result of their contribution.

Collaborative working

18. Collaborative and partnership working with community groups, other service providers and other library authorities to reach target customers, to deliver services more effectively and to contribute to and benefit from best practice are cross cutting themes throughout all Library Service planning and delivery.

19. We are working with partners to support the skills and employment agenda.

- We are lead partner for the Neithrop Job Club Project that will be delivered to engage unemployed young people and support them into work or training. This is a new way of working for us, acting as lead partner rather than in our more traditional role of support. The project will run for 12 months starting in the Summer and arose from our participation in existing Job Club initiatives and the multi agency Back to Work group chaired by JCPlus and is a recognition of the contribution the Library Service can make to achieving this agenda
- Oxford Central Library and other libraries across the county host advice sessions provided by the National Careers Service for job seekers

20. Our activity to deliver against our Service priority to promote books and the value of reading contributes to raising educational attainment and initiatives are often developed and delivered in partnership.

- We will be working with other directorates, Children's Centres, schools, Early Intervention Hubs and colleagues in the Oxford Skills and Learning Service to support the Every Oxfordshire Child a Good Reader initiative and with other library authorities to deliver the national Universal Reading Offer in Oxfordshire
- We are continuing to deliver a mobile children's centre facility under service level agreement with CEF Directorate

21. Our activities to deliver the national libraries Health Offer will contribute to the Health and Wellbeing agendas, building on our successful partner initiatives such as Unwind Your Mind, Books on Prescription and Get into Reading.

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- The Quiet Volume: Monday 1 to Saturday 20 October. Oxford Central Library working with the Oxford Playhouse will be host venue for one of their PlaysOut productions. Promoted by the Playhouse as "an intimate and perfectly formed show for two, which exposes the strange magic at the heart of the reading experience", this is a new way of working for the Library Service and is moving on from other collaborations with arts organisations that will bring benefit to all partners
- The Library Service will work with the Arts Council to apply for funding through its Grants for the Arts programme to deliver initiatives designed to attract people to arts and cultural activity through libraries. A funding imperative is that libraries work in partnership with artists, arts organisations and cultural bodies. Grants will be available from September

22. As the Service moves forward to deliver the Library Service Strategy we will continue to develop existing collaborations and to work with new partners across Oxfordshire to position the Service as a cost-effective, high quality customer focused service, able to contribute to the delivery of corporate priorities as a key delivery partner.

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