

LIBRARIES SERVICES TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

31 October, 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors KE Kelly, Tostevin and Wright.

OFFICERS – Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services and Steve Petch, Place Policy Manager and Lead Officer for Place Scrutiny Committee.

LS2. LIBRARIES SERVICES OVERVIEW – The Group met to receive an update on the MTFP proposals to move the Library Service to the Dolphin Centre, with a focus on the design and service standards problems.

The Assistant Director Community Services advised the Group that he intended to provide a detailed overview of the intended layout and level of service; any decisions had been set aside until the consultation period had ended on 11 November; and a report would then be submitted to Cabinet and Council during January 2017.

Members were informed that detailed information on the 25 proposals was on the Council's website and the public was invited to make comment against all of those proposals.

It was also reported that several Focus Group sessions had been held with parents, local schools, colleges, looked after children and dementia friendly groups with more positive feedback being received. The Education Village had also been visited to gain the views of autistic groups.

Information Boards were provided for Members highlighting a proposed fresh and vibrant design layout for both the ground and first floor levels. Proposals for the Ground Floor included the Local Studies and a Library Storage area with the First Floor incorporating the main Library Area. The Quick Picks was proposed to be located in the Healthy Hub area of the Dolphin Centre. Subject to feedback, layouts would be finalised and designs completed.

Members welcomed the location of the Reference Library being in the quiet, older part of the building and having a more traditional feel, with the remainder of the service having a more modern and vibrant feel for young people.

In relation to access it was confirmed that Officers were exploring access to the lift located in the Bull Wynd entrance as a disabled access and access for parents with buggies with any security concerns regarding access to the Dolphin Centre being addressed during this work.

In relation to the IT Suite it was confirmed that a further ten work stations would be located within the Hub, in addition to the existing equipment which would be placed in several areas within the library under the proposals.

Local Studies housed 200,000 items which were relevant to Darlington. Proposed opening hours were Tuesday to Saturday between 9.00am to 12 noon and 12.30pm to

3.30pm and due to limited storage some information would be offsite with an appointment having to be made to access.

Members were advised that there were no plans for an Art Gallery at present however storage of the Art Collection would be within the Town Hall building.

As part of the proposals there would be a reduction in the number of squash courts at the Dolphin Centre however there had been limited feedback on this proposal and there were private courts available behind Yarm Road Retail Park.

In relation to staffing there would be a possible reduction of up to 50 per cent although with the introduction of the self-service technology the impact would not be as significant and staff will still be available in the library to support users.

The Assistant Director, Community Services advised that the Crown Street Library had a catalogue of 77,000 items with 46,000 on display on the floor, the Dolphin Centre would have 40,000 on display, a reduction in shelf space of around twelve per cent, however the catalogue would still have 77,000 items with the remainder being stored at either the Dolphin Centre or Bennett House.

In relation to Cockerton Library, Members were informed that a Working Group, led by John Whitehouse, was seeking interest in the local community and working with Darlington for Culture with a view to retaining a library in Cockerton.

Reference was made to the mobile library service which had failed to attract any form of sponsorship. Service users had been advised that the service would cease at the end of September 2016 but that a home delivery service was available for people with a genuine need. It was also confirmed that the ten year old vehicle was still in Council ownership.

Members were also advised that the Council stocked sheltered housing accommodations with books and that the service would continue. A Member also highlighted that there was a community library located at The Grange, Hurworth where residents left books for others to read.

Particular reference was made to noise and Members were advised that work was ongoing with a Noise Engineer in order to mitigate and that timetabling and venue options for certain activities were being investigated.

It was reported that, subject to a decision being made in January 2017, it was anticipated that the service would be fully relocated by March 2018, however, there was the possibility of one week without a library service due to the moving of books and IT equipment to the Dolphin Centre.

The procurement process was delegated to Officers; and Council Building Services would undertake the necessary works with the Council's Architect undertaking the design works with a specialist Library Design Consultant. There was also the opportunity to refresh and slightly enlarge the soft play area as part of the proposals.

Finally the Assistant Director, Community Services highlighted the proposed extended opening hours of 9.00am to 7.00pm Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm Saturday and

10.00am to 3.00pm Sundays, a total of 14 more hours than the current service; ongoing work with Groups, organisations and schools in relation to the proposals; and children's activities continuing and possibly extending in the new location.

Members suggested that an Art Gallery could be provided within the Visitor Centre, as part of Bank Top Stations Refurbishments, with a view to showcase Darlington's art to both visitors and residents and the possibility of an approach being made to The Majestic regarding display of art work.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the proposals and information provided be noted.

(b) That the comments received during this meeting form part of the consultation process on the service.