
REVIEW OF DECISION TO RELOCATE THE CENTRAL LIBRARY SERVICE

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Nick Wallis,
Leisure and Local Environment Portfolio**

**Responsible Directors - Paul Wildsmith, Managing Director and
Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. At the request of Cabinet, consider the implications of not implementing the agreed decision to relocate the Central Library from Crown Street to the Dolphin Centre. The context for this review being the rapidly changing Town Centre environment and the better financial position of the Council in comparison to when the original decision was taken.

Summary

2. The report responds to the request by Cabinet to review the relocation of the Central Library decision and produces an alternative proposal for Crown Street with some limited library service available at the Dolphin Centre to help improve access for the young and hard to reach groups. The alternative includes modernising and repairing the Crown Street building which would increase the approved budget by £220,000 a year. The existing Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) could accommodate the extra costs in the medium term.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Cabinet consider the content of this report and decide whether to :-
 - (a) Confirm the previous decision to relocate the Central Library to the Dolphin Centre
 - or;
 - (b) Retain the Central Library at Crown Street Building, and:
 - (i) Approve the development of plans for the refurbishment of the Crown Street building and to refresh the internal design and service standards.

- (ii) Approve a consultation on the internal redesign and service standards for the Crown Street library (to run in October/November 2018),
- (iii) Release the space earmarked for a relocated central library service at the Dolphin Centre and Bennet House for other uses.
- (iv) Approve the development of a quick picks library service point at the Dolphin Centre.
- (v) Note that the Library Service Plan will need to be amended and updated to take account of the above proposals. It is planned to bring a revised Library Service Plan to Cabinet in January 2019 and thereafter to take this to Council for approval.

(c) To receive further reports about the Library Service as may be necessary

Reasons

4. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) To allow Cabinet to consider options relating to the Library service.
- (b) To meet the statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service

**Paul Wildsmith,
Managing Director**

**Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth and
Neighbourhood Services**

Background Papers

Cabinet Report of 7 March 2017 – entitled The Library Service

Council Report of 23 March 2017- entitled The Library Service

Cabinet Report of 10 July 2018 – entitled Darlington Town Centre Footfall Strategy Update

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TAB

S17 Crime and Disorder	The content of this report does not impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	The Library service does have an impact on the health and well-being of people who use the service.
Carbon Impact	The content of this report does not have an impact on carbon emissions by the Council.
Diversity	Equality Impact Assessments have previously been carried out for the Library service and subject to any future changes, will be updated.
Wards Affected	All Wards are affected.

Groups Affected	All Groups that use the Library service will be affected.
Budget and Policy Framework	There will be an impact on the budget should Cabinet decide to retain the Library service at Crown Street. The Library Plan, which is part of the Policy Framework, would need to be updated and considered by Council.
Key Decision	This is a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The Library service does impact on a number of priorities within One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.
Efficiency	Depending on decisions Members make, there will be an impact on the Council's Efficiency agenda.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Update

5. The Council successfully defended the Judicial Review (JR) against the Library relocation, therefore there is no legal barrier to implementing the agreed Council decision. However, a complaint by a member of the public to the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has yet to be resolved. The complaint being that the after relocation the Council will not provide a comprehensive and efficient library service as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Officers have supplied DCMS with evidence and have had visits from DCMS officials. DCMS were reluctant to make a decision whilst the JR was unresolved, contact has been made post the JR and DCMS have informed the Council that a final decision on the complaint is unlikely to be before October 2018.
6. The Council could have started the relocation following the successful JR, however it would have been unwise to do this whilst the outcome of the complaint to DCMS is not resolved. The timescale to relocate the Library from Crown Street to the Dolphin Centre from the point of submitting a planning application to completion is approximately 12-13 months.
7. A final issue in relation to delivering the project in full is identifying an alternative use for the Crown Street building. The decision on this is a matter for the Trustees (Cabinet) the process as envisaged would entail:
 - (a) A Trustee meeting to decide on what action required. Trustees have indicated that a community use is preferable and if not possible to achieve then

commercial disposal with the receipt being used to establish a trust fund.

- (b) Post the agreement of the Trustees a period of consultation to identify a community use and then, if identified, a period of consultation with the public and Charity Commission.
 - (c) If no suitable community use is found, then similar consultation required about disposal and use of any receipt.
8. The process will be along similar timescales to the relocation but clearly could take longer dependent on such things as the Charities Commission approval and potential for challenge.

Context of Request from Cabinet

9. Cabinet have requested officers look at options and produce a report so they can reconsider their original decision to relocate the Central Library to the Dolphin Centre. In doing so, Cabinet have in particular been mindful of the rapidly changing face of retail and the town centre over recent months. Darlington has seen the confirmation of the closure of Marks and Spencer and Binns (House of Fraser) although the latter is still subject to ongoing commercial discussions and negotiations.
10. The national picture of town centres is changing and Darlington is no different, however due to its relative success in recent years it is being hit quite hard now by national and international decisions on the future of retailing. The Council has started reviewing the long term vision for the town centre and will be consulting in due course, however, what is clear to all is that in future the town centre retail element will become smaller and buildings will require a change of use, leisure and housing being the most likely re-uses of retail property.
11. The town centre currently has 85% occupancy but maintaining or improving this level will remain challenging. The town centre continues to see new entrants and relocations within and there remains a vibrancy; in recent months footfall has plateaued and car park usage increased which are positive signs but it is very clear changes are upon us.
12. Cabinet have expressed their concern about the future potential use of the Crown Street building given the changing nature of retail and leisure within the town centre. The changing environment and likelihood of more vacant buildings within the town centre will undoubtedly increase the challenge of finding a suitable alternative use for the building therefore increasing the chance of it remaining vacant. However without testing the market it is not possible to be certain how likely finding a use is. Such market testing would not be easily undertaken given the Trust legal situation as it is unlikely a true market position could be ascertained without the full decision process of the trust being undertaken as described earlier in this report.
13. Cabinet in requesting this review also considered the financial position of the Council however, they remain aware that although improved the financial position

remains very tight and any significant changes could de-stabilise the MTFP.

14. In summarising the context of this decision it would be appropriate to say that the likelihood of finding an end use for Crown Street has diminished since the original decision was taken and the town centre is less buoyant. In addition, the Council is in a better financial position.

Implication of not implementing the original decision - Operational

15. The key benefits of relocation are set out below and by not relocating the following benefits would be lost should the current Crown Street building remain in its current form:-

- (a) Co-location benefits - combining both services into one building provides the opportunity for a sustainable library and Dolphin Centre (a refreshed and modernised service could broaden the reach of the library service to new users as well as existing users. Existing library service users may become more interested in using Dolphin Centre services).
- (b) Improved baby changing facilities.
- (c) Improved toilet provision.
- (d) Further develop the family learning experience.
- (e) Availability of catering facilities.
- (f) Availability of break-out social spaces.
- (g) Ability to expand the number of programmes particularly for children and young people.
- (h) Updated and increased ICT provision.
- (i) Improved access to facilities for the majority of residents.
- (j) Extended opening hours.
- (k) Improved library service offer for young people combined with the Dolphin Centre offer.
- (l) More appropriate, modern, vibrant facilities.

16. However beyond the potential for the Crown Street building being vacant and no longer used as a building there are positives of non-relocation.

- (a) Art Gallery would remain.
- (b) Local Studies would be co-located and operated at existing levels.

- (c) The space allocated to the library would be slightly greater than at the Dolphin Centre.
- (d) All books could be stored in one building.
- (e) Dolphin Centre space earmarked for the library and Bennet House could be put to alternative uses.

17. In terms of library usage at Crown Street this continues to fall as illustrated below :-

Year	Visits	Book Loans	*Active Borrowers	ICT Sessions
2011/12	278,125	343,789	18,696	73,445
2012/13	255,050	296,851	17,355	63,490
2013/14	263,375	272,943	16,923	67,455
2014/15	255,489	230,410	13,136	62,120
2015/16	194,375	232,072	12,710	53,191
2016/17	207,150	210,003	9,555	46,013
2017/18	188,600	208,143	9,263	41,158

*Active Borrowers figures are for both Crown Street and Cockerton

18. The relocation and reinvigoration of the central library at the Dolphin Centre was expected to increase usage particularly within the younger and harder to reach elements of the population. An un-amended service at Crown Street would not have the same potential to reduce the decline of usage.

An Alternative to Relocation

- 19. Cabinet have requested that officers develop in outline an alternative to relocation that works towards mitigating some of the lost benefits of not relocating and takes full account of the costs of ensuring the building is repaired and well maintained into the future.
- 20. In original reports an outline alternative to relocation including changes to the service and building were presented, below, this is expanded and enhanced to include some mitigations and building sustainability.
- 21. To deliver a modern and vibrant service within the Crown Street building and to alter the internal structures to facilitate modern working leading to reduced staffing levels investment of circa £800,000 to £1m would be required. This would involve removal and amendments to internal walls, new furniture and decoration and modern integrated ICT. This would significantly change the internal feel and uses of the building to deliver some of the anticipated benefits of the Dolphin Centre. As far as possible facilities such as toilets and welfare facilities would be enhanced but clearly there are limitations.
- 22. If such investment is to be made in the Crown Street building it would make financial and operational sense to complete all other major structural works at the same time, in particular mechanical and engineering and the roof which need major works. A full survey is being undertaken but at this stage investment of £1m should be earmarked. Alterations and repairs of this magnitude will undoubtedly have

significant operational issues for the service as it will not be possible to undertake the work whilst having a fully operational library so there will be the need for service reductions during the building works.

23. To further mitigate the falling use and increase attractiveness of the library service in particular to young and hard to reach groups of the population, it is proposed that within the Dolphin Centre a “quick pick” facility is established together with a “window” into the library service for young people.
24. Clearly at this stage full works and feasibility have not yet commenced and if Cabinet wish to proceed more detailed work will be undertaken.

Alternative Uses for space allocated for the Library at the Dolphin Centre

25. The remodelled Dolphin Centre following relocation was dependent on investment of £1.1m funded by the revenue savings achieved by the relocation. The net saving of the move of £310,000 was after the cost of repaying the £1.1m investment. Therefore there are no funds available to create the new spaces identified including the mezzanine floor above the soft play area behind the café, consequently the only space available is that previously used by the Registrars service. The creation of any further space and/or reconfiguration would require capital investment and given the financial constraints would need to be on an income generating business case basis to recover the cost of investment.
26. Alternative income generation plans will be reviewed including potential service relocation and/or use of space by partner agencies.
27. The non relocation would free up Bennet House for disposal or rent.

Financial Implications of Non Relocation

28. Set out below is a comparison of the savings for relocation compared to those of the alternative at Crown Street

Budget Savings	Dolphin Centre £	Crown Street £
Staffing	220,000	150,000
Book Fund	60,000	60,000
Premise Costs	120,000	
Less Storage	(25,000)	
Less Refurbishment Work	(65,000)	(60,000)
Less Major Repairs		(60,000)
	310,000	90,000

29. The annual cost to the Council will therefore be £220,000, this may be offset by rental income from Bennet House and the Dolphin Centre. Clearly all estimates of costs and savings are subject to further feasibility work, at this stage it would be prudent to estimate for additional annual costs of £220,000 within the MTFP.
30. The Council MTFP has three years remaining and as a result there will be total cost to the current MTFP will be £660,000 with ongoing annual costs of £220,000 p.a.

The £660,000 can be funded from additional reserves created following the 2017/18 outturn and 2018/19 rebasing however it must be noted that the use of these balances will reduce the ability of the Council to balance future years MTFP's will the lower level of annual savings.

Risks

31. As noted through the report there are a number of unknown factors at play, survey works are currently being undertaken at Crown Street and the cost of refurbishment work and repairs could be higher than anticipated. Also feasibility works have not yet commenced in regard to the alternative space use in the Dolphin Centre which could require investment. There is a risk both these areas may need additional funding which has not been taken account of in the financial implications.

HR Implications

32. Both options have staffing implications and there would need to be consultation on revised staffing structures. In both cases there would be a reduction in staffing required, however this has been mitigated to some degree as vacancies that have occurred during this period have not been permanently filled and self-serve has been introduced.

Outcome of Consultation

33. Consultation on the proposed designs and service standards will take place in October and November 2018, for a six-week period. Design proposals and service standards will be available on the Council's website for interested parties to feedback on. Alongside this, the proposal will be available within the libraries with feedback forms and a number of drop-in sessions will be organised for people to attend and provide feedback. The outcome of this consultation will be fed back to Cabinet in January 2019.

Decision making

34. As indicated above, it is proposed that Cabinet receive a further report about the Library Service proposals and the consultation in January 2019. The current Library Service Plan, includes the provision of the central library from the Dolphin Centre. This will need to be revised and updated if the central library service is to be provided from the Crown Street building. It is therefore proposed that in January 2019 a revised Library Service Plan is also considered by Cabinet. Subject to approval by Cabinet, the Library Service Plan can then be recommended by Cabinet for adoption by Council. This can then be considered by Council in January 2019.