

To: Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member and Amanda Honey,
Managing Director, Communities

Date: 18 November 2011

Subject: Kent County Council – Delivering Sustainable
Libraries

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This report outlines the approach being developed to deliver sustainable library services for the future

FOR INFORMATION

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964.....sets out the statutory duty for Kent County Council to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service”, set in the context of local need.
- 1.2. Discussions have been underway for sometime to agree an approach that allows us to meet these obligations while recognising key drivers for change.
- 1.3. The approach now described in this paper has been informed by discussions with members and senior officers within KCC as well as emerging information on the approaches favoured and, in some cases, starting to be implemented in other local authorities.
- 1.4. Our key drivers for change are:
 - the desire to support a process of engagement with communities over the shape and local delivery of library services; and
 - the need to secure affordable local solutions, tailor made to the needs of each community, which allow us to continue to provide an excellent local library service in these communities.
- 1.5. Our approach must enable KCC to:
 - Find and implement innovative and efficient delivery models in partnership with local communities. These models should be shaped by the community and act to increase community control of and engagement with our services.

- Continue to realign library service priorities to ensure they deliver KCC's new priorities expressed in Bold Steps for Kent.
- Continue to modernise our services and exploit opportunities to offer more services online.
- Meet our statutory obligations.
- Deliver revenue savings.

2. The Approach

- 2.1.** We will engage directly with the Locality Boards (or where they do not exist with County members), providing them with all the information that will enable them to make informed recommendations as to the future shape of library service delivery in their District.
- 2.2.** Each Locality Board will be supported to lead local conversations that will enable all their residents to engage in the debate which will lead to these recommendations.
- 2.3.** Each Board will be challenged to identify ways to deliver allocated savings through this process.
- 2.4.** KCC will seek to reach agreements with each Board that allow us to:
- meet our statutory obligations;
 - shape services locally as local people want; and
 - deliver the necessary savings.
- 2.5.** We will be open to all options that meet these criteria. We will not take a one size fits all approach but seek specific solutions for each community.
- 2.6.** We believe that a wide range of options might emerge, which by way of example may include:
- Moving the library into a partner's premises, sharing premises costs with that partner and commissioning them to deliver front of house services for us. In small communities, such an approach might make a community facility like a village hall, more sustainable as we could bring income and footfall with our services.
 - In a similar way, a partner might move into our premises, which would enable cost sharing and the chance to explore joined up customer service.
 - Some communities might want to take over library service delivery through a volunteering model, supported by us.
- 2.7.** We will explore a range of possible support that we could make available to local groups or partners who would deliver services on our behalf. The scale of support in any category would need to be determined in discussion with the Locality Board and would need to be proportionate to the size of community served, and the potential saving to be delivered. Examples of such support might include:

- A core collection of stock, to which partners and communities could add.
 - Access to the County book reservation system to help local people to reserve items not held locally, and to have them delivered to the local service point.
 - Access to the appropriate ICT systems, or help and advice setting up their own ICT systems if this is more suitable.
 - An annual payment or grant to support delivery.
 - A review of premises costs and an agreement to share these costs in some way.
 - Ongoing support, engagement and training from library staff.
- 2.8.** We hope that Initial meetings to outline the process and agree timelines will take place with representatives from each Board by the end December. Following on from these meetings we will establish a pattern of dialogue between the Locality Boards and KCC officers.
- 2.9.** It is likely that different districts will progress at different speeds, depending on the approach they favour. We would expect some recommendations to have emerged in each case by June 2012, with implementation progressing beyond that date.

3. Resource Implications

- 3.1.** There are two key drivers for this proposed approach: to improve our services through closer working with local communities; and to deliver further revenue savings.
- 3.2.** We are already driving costs down in the Library and Archive Service by implementing more efficient systems and work practices:
- £2m in efficiencies are being delivered 2011 to 2014 through more efficient working including the installation of self service technology in many of our libraries.
 - Prior to 2011 and in the last few years, we had already delivered £2.3m in efficiency savings through staff restructuring and the procurement of a new (and improved) library IT system.
- 3.3.** However, such efficiencies alone will not deliver the order of revenue savings needed. We need a new approach to local service delivery.
- 3.4.** It is clear that the new approach described in section 2 above will not remove all the costs arising from the libraries where it is rolled out, as we expect to retain responsibility for a range of costs which will vary with each location.
- 3.5.** Through local negotiation with potential partners we will establish how we can further reduce the existing costs associated with local library service delivery, for example:
- Costs associated with the purchase and circulation of books and other materials.

- Premises costs.
- IT costs.
- Staff/management costs.

3.6. We anticipate that once the potential saving is established we will need to offer part of this saving as a regular grant to the prospective partner who will be taking over delivery of the service locally.

3.7. We must also not forget that KCC will retain the statutory responsibility for service delivery so there will be ongoing management costs that we will incur maintaining this relationship.

3.8. We recognise that during the period of engagement with Locality Boards and through to implementation of agreed recommendations, significant member and officer capacity will be needed to ensure effective outcomes. We will ensure that appropriate levels of officer support are available, and are confident that members will enthusiastically support this approach in their communities.

4. Equality and Diversity

We are legally required to carry out an analysis of our communities, and we do this with an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). The information we will provide to the Locality Boards and local representatives, will include an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) initial screening (see appendix) which will help them decide how to engage local communities in the debate. The outcomes of the engagement activity will contribute towards the completion of the EqIA.

The EqIA is designed to eliminate any negative consequences against groups of people who share protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. This enables us to maximise opportunities for promoting equality and inclusion throughout the process. If the assessment identifies an adverse impact on a particular group then we will take action to try to remedy the situation, by setting objectives, or reviewing or amending proposals.

5. Risk Management

We are actively assessing the potential risks involved in this approach and are ensuring that all possible mitigating action is in place to minimise these risks.

6. Conclusion

We believe that this approach represents an exciting way forward for library services in Kent. It balances the needs to meet KCC objectives; modernise our services; work with communities to find innovative and efficient ways to maintain local library service delivery; and meet our statutory responsibilities; while delivering further revenue savings. By working with Locality Boards to engage all Kent communities in the debate about, and delivery of, library services we will further develop an innovative, forward looking service that is responsive to local need and is embedded in the communities served.

7. Recommendation

7.1. Members of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to NOTE the proposed approach.

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Background documents
Equality Impact Assessment – initial Screening