

Subject:	Libraries Strategy – Process for Consultation, Engagement and Development		
Date of Meeting:	11th March 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 The report is seeking agreement from the Committee to the process for the development of a Libraries Strategy for Brighton & Hove City Council. This report sets out:
- Some general principles that will inform the development of a Libraries Strategy
 - Process of consultation and engagement as part of the development of a Libraries Strategy
- 1.2 The last Libraries Plan ended in 2020, and the consultation to inform the development of a new plan was halted in March 2020 because of the Covid 19 pandemic. A Libraries Strategy is needed because public libraries are highly valued in the city and are integral to the delivery of council and city-wide priorities. The Strategy will be based on clear principles as set out in this report and will be informed by comprehensive public and stakeholder consultation and engagement.
- 1.3 The Libraries Strategy will be considered by full Council in accordance with the current constitution, as an important strategic document. It will be a succinct high-level document that will inform the more detailed actions of the annual business plans created by Libraries Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee approve the general principles that will inform the development of the libraries strategy as outlined in para 3.3
- 2.2 That the committee approve the process of consultation and engagement as outlined in paras 5.1 to 5.9

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Public libraries are a statutory service under the [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#). The Act requires library authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient service” for people who live, work or study within the authority area. A comprehensive independent review of public libraries in England was carried out in 2014 and the [Libraries Taskforce](#) was established to implement the [Independent Library Report for England](#), providing leadership and helping to reinvigorate the public library service. It is led jointly by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Local Government Association. In 2016, the Libraries Taskforce published ‘[Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021](#)’ in which it sets out the strategic vision and commitment to public libraries in England, recognising the challenging times that councils are facing running library services, calling for radical thinking to protect frontline library services and acknowledging the need for councils to work in ‘new and different ways’ to ‘thrive and not just survive’.

3.2 The Libraries Taskforce recognises that local libraries provide a unique ‘cradle-to-grave service’, offering significant reach into local communities and a cost-effective way of ensuring that people are connected to local services. The report sets out an ambition for everyone to:

- Choose to use libraries, because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so;
- Understand what library services offer, and how they can make the most of what’s available to them;
- Be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills and information they need to improve their quality of life;
- Receive trusted guidance through the evolving sources of information and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world.

3.3 The proposed guiding principles for the development of Brighton & Hove’s Libraries Strategy are based on the Libraries Taskforce’s ‘common design principles’ so that public libraries:

- meet legal requirements
- are shaped by local need
- focus on public benefit and deliver a high-quality user experience
- support the delivery of council priorities
- meet agreed access criteria
- make decisions informed by evidence, building on success
- support the delivery of the national Universal Library Offers
- promote partnership working, innovation and enterprise
- use public funds effectively and efficiently

3.4 The proposals for consultation and engagement are set out in section 5 below.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 The last Libraries Plan covered 2016 to 2020. The ‘do nothing’ option of not producing a new library plan would leave the Libraries Service without any

strategic framework for its operation or development and would fail to meet the council's constitution which requires a council approval for library development plans. This option has been discounted for these reasons.

- 4.2 The option to further delay the development of a Libraries Strategy until libraries are fully open again after recovery from the pandemic would miss the opportunity to learn lessons from the last year, and plan effectively for the future.
- 4.3 The current proposals are to restart the consultation process while libraries are likely to be recovering from the effects of the pandemic and there is uncertainty about when they will be able to open fully again. However, this enables the service to consider the lessons from the last year and to engage with as many stakeholders as possible through the various innovative ways in which the service has communicated with residents. The disadvantages of starting the consultation with users online can be overcome by extending the consultation period to more than double the usual period, so enabling those who prefer a paper-based consultation to also give their views.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the consultation and engagement period will run for 15 weeks, starting Monday 22nd March to Sunday 4th July. The primary consultation tool will be detailed surveys of library users and non-users using three age related questionnaires:
 - Libraries Survey for adult 20 years old and over
 - Libraries Survey for young people 13 to 19 years olds
 - Libraries Survey for children 12 years old and under
- 5.2 The surveys will be online and will also be available in hard copy in libraries once they are open again for public use. The surveys are seeking people's views on detailed aspects of the full range of libraries services, including asking why people do not use these services. They include detailed questions on library stock in all formats from books and newspapers to digital resources.
- 5.3 Working with the council's Communications team, the surveys will be extensively promoted through the website, social media, community-based publications, and other ways of messaging so that Brighton & Hove residents know that the consultation is happening and how to engage. Libraries will work with local partner organisations to encourage people complete the survey and promote the consultation through other council services and councillors.
- 5.4 Libraries Services work with over 200 partner organisation and a short questionnaire on collaboration and partnership working will be sent to each of them, so that libraries can gather the views of these key partners as well as asking them to promote the survey to their clients or members. These organisations cover for instance:
 - Community and third sector organisations and local groups
 - Organisations working with specific client groups
 - Schools, colleges and universities, and other learning organisations
 - Creative and cultural organisations
 - Other public service providers including other council services

- 5.5 Some targeted focus group work will be held, either online or in person if this is possible within the timeframe. These groups will be focused on the priorities for the council and Libraries Services, such as BAME communities; people experiencing deprivation or isolation; those with poor mental health; children and young people as surveys less effective with this age group. The final list of focus groups will be agreed at a later stage following advice from Communities and Equalities Team.
- 5.6 Members will be engaged through focused workshops to identify a vision and priorities for Libraries Service, and how libraries can help deliver the wider council priorities, in collaboration with other service providers and the community.
- 5.7 Staff and volunteers will be engaged through a series of group discussions on specific subjects of library service provision, and through an anonymous survey to gather their ideas for development and change. Unions will be informed of the consultation and engagement processes and offered the chance to give their views via the partner questionnaire.
- 5.8 A report on the results of the consultation and engagement process will be produced in July 2021 and will inform the development of the Libraries strategy.
- 5.9 The feedback on libraries' stock, coupled with data about issue trends from the Library Management System, will inform a new Libraries Stock Policy giving more detailed information on Libraries' stock purchasing and the maintenance of collections.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The approval of the guiding principles for the development of the Libraries Strategy will ensure library services in Brighton & Hove are focused on the best possible outcomes for the city and that they are consistent with good quality public library services in other authorities
- 6.2 The approval of the procedure for consultation and engagement will enable the service to systematically gather the views of as many people as possible, including library users and non-users; staff, councillors; partner organisations – especially those working with disadvantaged members of the community.
- 6.3 The Libraries Strategy will be brought to the committee for approval in November 2021.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The costs of the consultation and engagement and the production of the Libraries Strategy will be managed from within the current budgets for Library services.

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date: 12/02/21

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The relevant statutory framework is set out in the body of the report.

Lawyer Consulted:

Alice Rowland

Date: 12/02/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the development of the Libraries Strategy, following this consultation and engagement process.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 The surveys and questionnaires will be carried out online as far as possible to reduce the use of paper, but paper versions will be made available where needed for equalities reasons. Any sustainability implications of changes to libraries services will be assessed as part of the development of the Libraries Strategy following this consultation and engagement process.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.5 None.

Any Other Significant Implications:

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.5 None.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.6 None.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 Support to health and wellbeing is a key Libraries Universal Offer: To promote healthy living, provide self-management support and effective signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities. To offer a range of creative and social activities which engage and connect individuals and communities, reduce stigma, combat loneliness and improve wellbeing.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.8 Libraries are a highly valued statutory service in the city and protecting libraries is a current administration commitment. Libraries support the delivery of corporate and city-wide priorities in many ways:
- Libraries new Business and IP Centre supports local small business and entrepreneurs to start and develop their businesses and recover from the economic impacts from Covid and austerity
 - Libraries continue to provide essential resources for adult and community learning, and have essential free digital access
 - Libraries have a long track record of supporting children and young people's learning and development
 - Libraries support to health and wellbeing has been outlined in 7.7 above
 - Libraries can promote environmental and sustainability awareness through information, events and exhibitions

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices: None.

Background Documents: None.

