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Future Libraries Programme

Purpose of report

For discussion

Summary

This paper updates members on the development on the libraries improvement programme, led by the LG Group, working with MLA and DCMS. This work, now called the Future Libraries Programme, was launched on 16 August 2010.

Recommendation

That members note the report and discuss progress.

Action

Officers to bring regular updates on the programme to future meetings of the Board.

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Future Libraries Programme

Background

1. At the July 2010 Board, Members agreed to support the development of a sector-led libraries improvement programme, to be delivered jointly with MLA and supported by DCMS. Members also asked that a report on progress be brought to the September meeting of the Board.

Progress

2. The improvement project, now called the Future Libraries Programme, was launched on 16 August. The Programme is formed of a partnership between national and local government, and is driven by councils themselves. It aims to help the library service during the current challenging financial situation, with an ambition to ensure libraries play a central role in helping communities to build the Big Society.
3. The Programme received 51 submissions, representing over 100 local authorities. Ten projects were selected by a joint Local Government Improvement and Development / MLA panel to take part in the first phase. These projects, representing around three dozen local authorities will be offered practical support and advice to develop new ways of working that can help all library services to modernise and adapt to cuts in public spending.
4. The ten successful projects were assessed on their individual strengths, but also to ensure a balance of the type of project, geographical spread, and rural and urban mix to help ensure the programme shares learning nationally. The ten phase one areas – summary descriptions of which can be found at **Annex A** – are:
 - Northumberland with Durham;
 - Bolton, with Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan;
 - Bradford;
 - Lincolnshire, with Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincs, Peterborough;
 - Suffolk;
 - Oxfordshire with Kent;
 - Herefordshire with Shropshire;
 - Cornwall with Devon, Plymouth, Torbay;
 - Lewisham with Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark; and
 - Kensington & Chelsea with Hammersmith & Fulham.

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5. Central to the programme is the vision for library services to have greater connection with other local services and an ambition for services to be designed around the needs of the public, rather than based on organisational boundaries.
6. On 19 August, Cllr White, on behalf of the Board, wrote with the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Ed Vaizey MP, to leaders of library authorities. The letter, which is enclosed at **Annex B**, describes the ambitions of the Future Libraries Programme and highlights the value of library services to all communities. It calls on Leaders to consider all available efficiency options – including radical ones – before making any reduction in service levels.

Next steps

7. The LGID and the MLA have already begun work to create packages of support and advice for each of the projects. Sector peers and a mixture of consultancies, including LGID Improvement Services, have been engaged to provide the capacity necessary to deliver the programme.
8. Planning for the second phase of the Programme is also underway. This phase will see the learning from Phase one projects extended to around 40 further library authorities, and beyond these to the rest of the sector.
9. The Board Chair will also meet Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Ed Vaizey MP, in October, to discuss progress and next steps for the programme. The Future Libraries Programme reports jointly to both the LG Group CTS Programme Board and the Minister.

Financial Implications

10. None to the LG Group. The cost of the Future Libraries Programme are met from MLA improvement funds.

Future Libraries projects – summaries of the ten phase one pilots

Working Together - Greater Manchester Libraries (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan)

The project will conduct a feasibility study and options appraisal to identify efficiency savings and customer service improvement opportunities and consider alternative governance models. This work will identify business models for a collaborative approach to library services for the Greater Manchester Region that will maintain and improve these statutory services. These models would be flexible enough to allow involvement of other library authorities and/or cultural organisations within the NW region.

The future model whilst acknowledging local accountability will go beyond delivering current services at less cost. It must release capacity to transform the services in order to invest in new developments that fit with social, economic and technological change. A vibrant, high quality, relevant and economically sustainable service for the 21st century is the ultimate aim. Improving services together; Enhancing quality together; Achieving value together.

Going Digital, Going Local; transforming libraries in Northumberland and Durham

Faced with similar issues relating to broadband access, digital exclusion and rural outreach, Northumberland and Durham County Councils have joined together on a project which will put libraries at the heart of their communities. The two councils wish to make use of shared arrangements relating to IT and professional support to enable their libraries to offer access to a range of councils and other services. Local communities will be able to use libraries to learn, make transactions, obtain the best sources of information and develop information handling skills, as well as accessing employment opportunities. Community engagement will be central to the project. Particular emphasis will be given to improving IT skills and confidence through the use of volunteers, testing how on-line borrowing challenges can be overcome, and looking at new models for the rural offer including work with rural community transport providers.

Modernising Library Services in two sparse rural counties (Herefordshire and Shropshire)

Herefordshire and Shropshire Councils face many similar challenges not least delivering services to sparse populations in highly rural areas, but also a number of opportunities to create modern and effective library services. The two unitary

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authorities share a common approach and understanding in the delivery of services at a local level. Therefore, the project will consider the use of new models of service delivery building on both authorities' experience in working with communities to deliver and improve services. The programme will look at a range of delivery and management options that will shape sustainable services, including the options of charitable trust status and neighbourhood run libraries. While these approaches are also being tested elsewhere this project will ensure that they meet the needs of predominantly rural counties and build on the innovation and best practice found in both authorities. The project is a joint partnership with equal weight given to both partners, Herefordshire Council being the nominated lead authority.

Breaking Boundaries (Lincolnshire, Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincs; Peterborough)

The project will focus on how Lincolnshire can work with neighbouring authorities and local communities to develop library services beyond their perceived traditional role and across a large geographical area. These 'product extensions' will include access to other public services, key information hubs and the provision of democratic community space. The aim is to reposition libraries as a core service of local government, making them relevant and responsive. It will ask how communities should be involved in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of library services. Solutions will be developed across administrative boundaries with Rutland and North East Lincolnshire. Shared back office and procurement arrangements will be tested with Vivacity, Peterborough's Culture and Leisure Trust. The benefits of collaborative working will be explored with Cambridgeshire by developing the SPINE partnership. There will be two core elements within the project which will focus on key stakeholders: how to involve communities in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of library services; and how to engage local councillors, the private and voluntary sectors in the development of high performing, value for money library services which meet the needs of local communities.

Local Libraries (Suffolk)

The Suffolk project is about working with community groups to support them in managing their local library. This approach aims to enable communities to take control of running their library and shape it to meet the needs of local people. These community run libraries will be supported by a countywide online service, a network which allows people to borrow from one place and return to another, as well as a 'value for money' book lending and reservation service. This approach aims to enable communities to take control of running their libraries, shaping them to fit their locality, whilst making savings in management and bureaucracy, yet retaining the networked services which are so valued in Suffolk.

Closer Working in South East London (Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark)

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The Future Libraries Programme is an exciting opportunity to deliver a step change across library services in South East London. Through it, Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark, will look at options and opportunities for improving quality and reducing costs by working more closely together.

These library authorities - members of the South East Libraries Performance Improvement Group (SELPIG) - will build on individual strengths and distinctive features, to retain and improve best practice models and introduce new solutions. Joint Delivery of library services (Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea) The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea plan to explore the feasibility of sharing library services to be delivered or commissioned jointly across borough borders. This will include investigating alternative models for delivering library services in what could be an innovative way forward for both authorities, and which, in addition, could provide a model for other London boroughs.

Library Links (Bradford)

Bradford Council is working with communities to help remodel its library service to provide major libraries in key centres across the district supported by a network of sustainable local service points – Library Links. Potentially many of these library link points will be located in shared outlets with extended opening times in partnership with a retail partner. A joint approach with a retail partner has the potential to relocate libraries into stores with excess space, redevelop existing library sites to incorporate new library facilities attached to retail stores and new developments of joint library/retail facilities. This programme will enable Bradford to develop a remodelled and sustainable library service delivered through innovative partnership working and using a joint approach which is effective and efficient for both parties.

Innovation, Collaboration and Efficiency - The South West Peninsula Library Partnership: (Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth, Torbay)

The South West Peninsula library partnership has been working together since 2009 to explore how joint working can create efficiencies, and maximise opportunities to deliver high quality, innovative and best practice library services at a time of financial constraint. This project will enable us to accelerate that work. The project will identify the scale of the potential efficiencies, explore areas for innovative service improvement across the partnership and identify appropriate governance models, which can incorporate the shared services across the four authorities whilst also retaining clear accountability and identity for the delivery of libraries at a local level. As a group of authorities, we look forward to sharing the results of our project with other local authorities as we recognise that the models we evolve may be appropriate for many other parts of the country.

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Delivering Library Services for the Future (Oxfordshire and Kent)

Two large counties are using the opportunity this programme provides to develop a new long term model for library services provided in rural counties. The model will need to substantially and permanently reduce the cost of provision, while retaining those features which are valuable to customers (good stock, access to information, community spaces and knowledgeable staff). The new model will need to deliver library services fit for purpose in the 21st century, including extensive online services such as e books, e loans and social networking, as well as provision that draws on Big Society principles of locally driven and community based activity.

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Annex B

19 August 2010
Dear Colleague

MLA/LGA LIBRARY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

As we all take on the enormous challenge of reducing the financial deficit, Local Authorities are re-modelling budgets and making plans for a tough spending round ahead. In these difficult financial times the public library service provides an opportunity to deliver policy priorities in more efficient ways. The best public libraries already do so. They work in partnership with other local services, using the library brand and network infrastructure to provide services to the community in an accessible and cost effective way.

For example, in some areas of the country libraries are helping people to find employment - a vital service during a recession. A wide range of health and well-being activity is being delivered by public libraries, providing drop in sessions with health professionals or information about treatment options through NHS Choices. Many libraries work with schools and colleges to support education and learning agendas. Some take council tax payments or offer community engagement with local police officers. All library services provide internet access and help people to get online. Public libraries are playing a key role in Raceonline's ambition to make the UK the first nation in the world where everyone can use the web, with the Society of Chief Librarians pledging to get 500,000 people to get online through the public library network. This wide availability of online access will empower more citizens to gain access to a wide range of information and public services and enable local authorities to deliver more public services online. All these connections can have positive benefits for communities and increase efficiencies within authorities.

In developing your funding plans, we believe that libraries can help to deliver priority policies and that there are efficiency options for protecting the frontline service to the public. Experience in central government has been that consultation with staff has produced some innovative suggestions for reducing cost and staff engagement with library staff could be similarly constructive.

Before reducing the library service to communities we know that Local Authorities will be considering other efficiency options, including some radical ones - shared services, merging functions or staffing across authorities or public services, use of volunteers or of other community buildings. For example, there is a huge discrepancy in the size of library authorities – some operate fewer than 10 service points while the large county councils and metropolitan authorities can have over 80. There may be opportunities for partnerships between authorities - for larger library services to deliver some or all of the service for their smaller neighbours or for smaller authorities to deliver services jointly?

On 1 July we announced a new Library Support Programme led by the Local Government Association Group (LGA) and Museums Libraries and Archives Council

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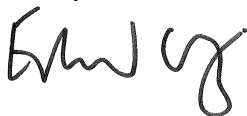
(MLA). In line with the new thinking of the coalition Government and the LGA this is about help and sharing best practice, not interference or control. The programme will help identify how local authorities can drive down costs in their library service provision whilst maintaining the quality of the frontline service. There was an exceptional level of interest in the programme and 51 projects submitted expressions of interest with participation of over 100 councils. This week we were pleased to announce the 10 successful support programme projects which will take part in the first wave of the Programme. The projects are:

- Northumberland with Durham
- Bolton, with Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan
- Bradford
- Lincolnshire, with Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincs
- Suffolk
- Oxfordshire with Kent
- Herefordshire with Shropshire
- Cornwall with Devon, Plymouth, Torbay
- Lewisham with Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth & Southwark
- Kensington & Chelsea with Hammersmith & Fulham

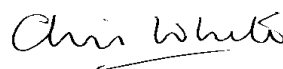
The programme will take the best learning from these 10 pioneering projects and make it available across the wider public library network so that everyone can benefit from the work.

If your authority is not involved in the 10 projects announced this week we hope that you will follow their progress and consider the learning from this programme and its relevance to your own authority. We expect the programme to set a fast pace and ambitious trajectory which we hope you can and will be part of in later phases of the programme. Further details on the announcement are available at http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/news_stories/7381.aspx.

The MLA will keep their website updated with progress on the support programme and the solutions they are exploring with the participating authorities. The site also includes improvement advice, best practice case studies and field team contacts (please see http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/strategies/The_future_libraries_programme). We would be very grateful if you could draw this letter to the attention of portfolio holders responsible for libraries in your authority.



ED VAIZEY
**Minister for Culture, Communications &
Creative Industries**



CIlr CHRIS WHITE
**Chair, LGA Culture, Tourism & Sport
Board**