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**Item 2**

## **Future Libraries Programme**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This paper updates members on the Future Libraries Programme, led by the LG Group, working with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and DCMS.

The libraries landscape is changing at a rapid pace. In view of this, officers will update Members at the Board meeting. This will include latest intelligence on how library services are responding to budget pressures.

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to comment on the update, and to give any further steer on the actions to disseminate learning from phase 1 of the Future Libraries Programme.

### **Action**

To be taken forward by officers as directed by Members.

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## **Future Libraries Programme**

### **Background**

1. The Future Libraries Programme (FLP), launched in August 2010, is a sector-led libraries improvement programme, jointly delivered by the LG Group and MLA. In phase 1 there are ten projects involving 36 councils (one quarter of library authorities). The aim is to support councils to develop locally appropriate solutions to delivering modern and efficient library services, and to capture and share the learning across the local government sector. **Annex 1** is a summary of the ten phase 1 projects.
2. On 29 December, Cllr White and Jeremy Hunt jointly wrote to council leaders, to emphasise the importance of councils leading their own improvement of local cultural services, and to highlight the learning that is emerging within and outside the FLP. A copy of the letter is at **Annex 2**.
3. At the January Programme Board meeting, Members agreed that sharing the learning from phase 1 and, subject to funding, supporting more councils to get involved with the FLP, was an improvement priority for 2011/12.
4. Members will also be aware that the Government is abolishing the MLA by April 2012. Its responsibilities for museums and libraries will transfer to the Arts Council.

### **Progress**

5. The LG Group and MLA have worked with the FLP projects to put in place tailored packages of support and advice. In some instances councils have commissioned this from private sector providers.
6. The leading savings options that are emerging include:
  - 6.1 **Use of new technology** – Northumberland and Durham are exploring how they can make the most of the opportunities presented by Raceonline 2012 and use digital innovation to improve services and make savings;
  - 6.2 **Exploring a single library authority** - Cornwall with Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are looking at a single library authority for the peninsula as opposed to four of varying sizes, capacities and strengths;
  - 6.3 **Community management of library services** - Herefordshire with Shropshire and Suffolk are exploring new models of service delivery and governance including community management;

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- 6.4 **Shared services** - Kensington and Chelsea with Hammersmith and Fulham are exploring the feasibility of shared services;
  - 6.5 **Locating libraries in other outlets** - Bradford is exploring locating libraries in shared outlets including retail premises.
7. In view of the challenging financial situation, there is a strong appetite from councils to access the learning from the FLP projects. There is already a very active Community of Practice and a newsletter from the LG Group and MLA to portfolio holders and heads of service.
8. Further actions include:
- 8.1 Two events for the phase 1 projects in March to share learning and test what and how they disseminate across the sector. This will include a Member only session so they can share their learning and experiences and identify potential new Member peers for the next stage;
  - 8.2 Three dissemination events open to all councils:
    - 8.2.1 In London in early April to focus on sharing the practical outputs from the projects;
    - 8.2.2 In Birmingham in mid April to focus on the change management aspects of learning;
    - 8.2.3 A member only event will be held in June. **Members are invited to give a steer on key messages for this event.**
  - 8.3 A publication aimed at council Leaders, Chief Executives, MPs and others setting out the high level messages from the FLP.
9. Although the FLP is progressing well, Members will be aware that there is vigorous debate about the future of libraries and campaigns in those areas where local councils have taken the difficult decision to close some of their libraries, and in the letters pages of the broadsheets. The best way to protect frontline library services and avoid getting into the territory of statutory inquiries is to give even more councils the opportunity to participate in the FLP, and this is something we are pressing with government.

**MLA / Arts Council transition**

10. Discussions are also underway about managing the transfer between MLA and the Arts Council, and what this means for the Future Libraries Programme. We need to be clear precisely what the Arts Council's role in relation to libraries improvement will be, and what budget will support this activity. There is also a potential opportunity for the Arts Council to have a single conversation spanning arts, museums and libraries, with councils about how they can work in partnership to modernise and strengthen the local offer.

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**Next steps**

11. Priority actions are:

- 11.1 To continue to disseminate the learning from phase 1
- 11.2 To secure agreement and funding for phase 2
- 11.3 To agree with the Arts Council some joint principles that will underpin the transfer
- 11.4 To draft the FLP publication

**Financial Implications**

12. Future LG Group support for the FLP is dependent upon the outcome of the 2011/12 business planning process.