

**Item 5**

## **Future Libraries Programme**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This paper updates Members on the first phase of the Future Libraries Programme and suggests key lessons and issues to be addressed in the second phase. At the meeting officers will update Members on latest discussions with the Arts Council about their vision for a second phase.

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to comment on the issues raised in the paper.

### **Action**

To be taken forward by officers as directed by Members.

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**Item 5**

## **Future Libraries Programme**

### **Background**

1. The Future Libraries Programme (FLP) launched in August 2010 and is a sector-led libraries improvement programme, jointly delivered by the LG Group and MLA. In phase one there were ten projects involving 36 councils (one quarter of library authorities). The aim was 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.
2. The MLA is being abolished by April 2012 and its responsibilities for libraries will transfer to the Arts Council from October 2011.
3. Although the FLP progressed well, Members will be very aware that there is a 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.
4. The LG Group has consistently argued that in the context of continued financial pressures on councils, the best way to protect frontline library services, and avoid getting into the territory of statutory inquiries, must be through expanding the sector-led improvement approach pioneered by FLP.
5. Dame Liz Forgan, Chair of the Arts Council, recently confirmed that the Arts Council is committed to a second phase of the FLP. An exchange of letters between Cllr Chris White and Dame Liz Forgan is **attached** at **Annex A**.

### **Summary of phase one FLP**

6. 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. 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;

**Item 5**

- 6.3 **Community management of library services** - Herefordshire with Shropshire and Suffolk are exploring new models of service delivery and governance including community management;
  - 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. We have worked with MLA, the library professional bodies and CLOA to widely share the learning from phase one. Key actions completed and underway include:
- 7.1 Two events for the phase one projects in March to share learning and test what and how they wanted to disseminate across the sector. This included a Member only session so that they could share their learning and experiences and identify potential new Member peers for the next stage;
  - 7.2 Three dissemination events were open to all councils:
    - 7.2.1 In London in early April the focus was on sharing the practical outputs from the projects;
    - 7.2.2 In Birmingham in mid April the focus was on the change management aspects of learning;
    - 7.2.3 A member only event is planned for early autumn.
  - 7.3 An active Community of Practice is enabling professionals to access and share learning;
  - 7.4 Articles in **first** magazine and regular updates in culture, tourism and sport e-bulletins;
  - 7.5 A publication aimed at council Leaders, Chief Executives, MPs and others setting out the high level messages from the FLP, is due to be published within the next few weeks;
  - 7.6 Peer challenge and support - the LG Group and MLA have brokered contact between the phase one projects and other councils who are interested in exploring similar initiatives.

**Moving towards phase two FLP**

- 8. There were some important lessons from the phase one pilots, which should inform how we approach phase two. In particular, the need for strong local political buy-in, the time it takes to build the complex partnerships that are needed to modernise libraries and challenges around evidencing projected savings.

**Item 5**

9. Discussions are underway about managing the transfer between MLA and the Arts Council and what this means for the Future Libraries Programme. The next phase will look very different from phase one. This reflects the fact that we now have a model for reform, which can be adapted to suit local circumstances, and the fact we are working with a different organisation who has a broader remit across the arts and culture.
10. We need to be clear precisely what the Arts Council's role in relation to libraries improvement will be, what budget will support this activity and the LG Group's role. There is a significant 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 whole local cultural offer.
11. There is also a debate to be had about how best to target improvement activity over the next six months to councils in the greatest need, whilst continuing to work with the phase one pilots to show what an efficient and effective library service could look like when modernisation is implemented, and preparing to offer support to a new wave of councils. Due to the fast moving pace of the libraries landscape, officers will update Members at the Board and seek a steer on the principles that should underpin FLP 2.

**Conclusion and next steps**

12. Given councils' budget-setting cycle, it is suggested that we need to launch FLP 2 by September. Subject to Members' steer, it is suggested that the next steps are as follows:
  - 12.1 To work with the Arts Council to scope FLP 2 by end of August; seeking clarity on the Arts Council's role, budget and relationship to its responsibilities for museums and the arts;
  - 12.2 Put appropriate governance arrangements in place – this is likely to comprise senior representatives from Arts Council, LG Group and the professional bodies;
  - 12.3 Launch FLP 2 by September.

**Financial Implications**

13. The LG Group's contribution to the Future Libraries Programme can be taken forward within existing resources.