

Item 4

Update on Libraries

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report updates Members on the latest situation regarding public libraries. It also suggests LGA actions to ensure that public libraries have the best possible chance of thriving in tough financial conditions.

Recommendation

Members are invited to comment upon the advocacy and improvement activity presented in this report.

Action

To be taken forward by Officers as directed by Members.

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Update on Libraries

Background

1. Members will be aware of the vigorous debate that is being played out in communities and the media about the future of public libraries as councils take difficult funding decisions.
2. The LGA has consistently argued that the best way to protect and improve frontline library services and to avoid getting into the territory of statutory inquiries is innovation, led by the energy and expertise of councils themselves. We have also emphasised the importance of positioning libraries as central to the achievement of other political priorities, such as economic growth, better health and engaging young people.
3. In October 2011 Arts Council England (ACE) assumed national responsibility for libraries development as part of the functions they inherited from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The LGA's priority has been to ensure that ACE supports a sector-led approach to improvement for libraries that enables as much funding as possible to reach the frontline to keep services open. We have also championed the role of democratic engagement in the consultation processes that underpin library plans.
4. The LGA has consistently argued for the statutory duty to provide public libraries to be modernised. Under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act councils are required to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" public library service and to stock microfilm and gramophone records. The Secretary of State is required to "superintend" this on the advice of professional librarians. The LGA is calling for a twenty-first century Libraries Act that puts local accountability to the citizen and service first, that values the library service for its outcomes, recognises the digital age we now live in and awards national government its true role as strategic leader, not superintendent.
5. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee held an inquiry into library closures in March 2012. The LGA submitted written and oral evidence and we anticipate the publication of the final report in the next few weeks. Solutions put to the Committee ranged from the re-introduction of public library standards to a national vision for libraries, more central government intervention and exploiting fully the potential to share back office functions and turn libraries into community hubs. The Chair of the Board has written to the Chair of the Committee to set out why modernising the statutory duty is necessary to help libraries to thrive in tough financial times (copy attached at [Annex A](#)).
6. In a recent keynote speech on libraries, Ed Vaizey MP, the Culture Minister, announced an additional £6 million to support partnerships between libraries and the arts through ACE's Grants for the Arts scheme. He also announced that new CIPFA library data profiles would be freely available to all library authorities for one year and we are working with officials to align this with LG Inform.

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Overview of the Current Situation

7. Libraries are amongst the most highly used and valued of all council services and councils spend almost £1 billion every year providing them. According to the latest CIPFA statistics (2010/11):
 - 7.1 There are 151 public library authorities in England providing 3,469 service points where the public can borrow books – this represents a 0.9% reduction compared to 2009/10.
 - 7.2 There were 264 million physical visits to public libraries – this represents a 2.9% reduction.
 - 7.3 Over 20,000 volunteers give 645,000 hours to helping their local libraries – an increase of 22% on last year.
 - 7.4 There were 255 million book loans. This represents a fall of 3.1% although lending of children’s books increased.
8. Councils have responded to the funding challenges by embracing new ways of delivering library services, including sharing back office functions with other councils, co-locating libraries with other public services, exploiting new technology, developing partnerships with the private sector, setting up social enterprises and giving communities a bigger role in delivering libraries. A recent LGA publication *Local Solutions for Future Local Library Services* contains a wealth of good practice examples which other councils are learning from.
9. However, with councils facing a likely funding gap of £16.5 billion a year by 2019/20, it is clear that efficiency savings alone are no longer enough. In this environment the ability of libraries to position itself as vital to overall political priorities is going to be crucial to their sustainability. Libraries need to be at the heart of councils’ commissioning conversations on everything from health to economic growth, supporting vulnerable adults and engaging young people.
10. There is also an even greater urgency to the LGA’s calls for central government policy to reinforce libraries’ wider contribution to outcomes. ACE’s extended remit covering libraries, museums and the arts represents a significant opportunity for national policy to be more joined-up mirroring what councils are doing locally.
11. However, public libraries will continue to be at a disadvantage unless they are released from regulations which anchor them to the past. Where councillors do take difficult closure decisions they do so in a sensible and responsible way within the framework of the law. This has been confirmed by recent legal proceedings.

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The LGA's Work Programme

12. Given the context outlined above, Members are invited to comment on the proposed LGA work programme for libraries:

12.1 Advocacy

Advocacy Activity	How	Outcome
Continue to call for the modernisation of the statutory duty to provide libraries	LGA response to Culture, Media and Sport Committee report into library closures – Autumn CTS Chair's regular meetings with Culture Minister – quarterly	Updated Libraries Act that puts local accountability to the citizen and service first, that values the library service for its outcomes, recognises the digital age we now live in and awards national government its true role as strategic leader
Urge central government to ensure national funding to support libraries improvement gets to the front line and encourage government policy to reinforce libraries' contribution to wider community outcomes	Agree with ACE what a single cultural conversation looks like and how it will work - CTS Lead Member meeting with ACE on 18 October CTS Chair's regular meetings with Culture Minister – quarterly Libraries roundtable on young people with The Reading Agency – 1 November	Central government improvement funding for libraries is devolved locally for councils to determine how best to spend it to meet their needs National partnership between LGA and ACE underpinned by a shared understanding of the single cultural conversation Councils benefit from a more joined-up relationship with ACE locally that allows efficiencies to be released and strengthens the hand of cultural services in commissioning conversations
Shift the debate away from a narrow focus on library closures and onto modernisation and transformation	A series of press releases that continue to showcase councils' innovation in the face of unprecedented budget pressures – quarterly	More balanced press coverage that recognises the financial pressures councils are under and greater awareness of the different ways in which councils are transforming library services

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12.2 Improvement Offer to Councils

Improvement activity	Outcome
With ACE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliver free political leadership seminars on 5 November, 12 December and TBC February • deliver bespoke peer support in five places – by March • continue to support more than 20 councils involved in the 13 Libraries Development Initiative projects which are testing new delivery models – March • develop and launch a new resource on community managed libraries 	By March 2013 supported 100% of library portfolio holders to lead transformational change of libraries and to improve the positioning of libraries within local commissioning conversations
Continue to update and share good practice case studies on Knowledge Hub – on going	Councils continue to have access to leading edge thinking on library delivery models
Work with DCMS to ensure that new CIPFA library data profiles are available to councils on LG Inform	LG Inform enables councils to access libraries data that is most useful to them in driving service improvement

Conclusion and next steps

13. This is a critical time for publicly funded libraries. As councils get ready for another extremely tough round of budget discussions, the sustainability of public libraries rests not only upon councils continuing to embrace new ways of working, but upon central government modernising the statutory framework and everybody realising the huge potential of libraries to make a difference on the issues that matter the most to communities.

14. Members are invited to comment upon the advocacy and improvement activity presented in this report.

Financial Implications

15. The activity in this report can be funded from existing resources and through our partnership with ACE.

10 September 2012

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ANNEX A

John Whittingdale MP
House of Commons
London
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28 August 2012

Dear John

Ahead of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's meeting to agree its report into library closures, we wanted to highlight why modernising the statutory duty to provide public libraries will help councils to ensure libraries continue to thrive in tough financial times.

The problem

The 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act is badly out of date. Under the Act public libraries are required to hold gramophone records; the most advanced technology referred to is microfilm, with no mention of computers or the internet; and the main function of libraries is described as book lending, when modern libraries provide a much wider range of services.

Moreover, the Secretary of State's "superintending" role confuses accountability for outcomes and leads to increased bureaucracy. The library service is fundamentally a local service. It is led by councillors and accountability should be outwards to the communities the service is working for, not upwards to Whitehall.

The solution

Twenty-first century libraries need a twenty-first century Libraries Act: one that puts local accountability to the citizen and service user first, recognises that the library service is valuable for its outcomes, not its inputs, and awards national government its true role as strategic leader, not superintendent.

At a time when councils are facing a likely funding gap of £16.5 billion a year by 2019/20, public libraries will be at a disadvantage unless they are released from regulations which anchor them to the past. We urge the Committee to recommend that the 1964 Act is updated and modernised.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Flick Rea
Chair LGA Culture, Tourism and Sport Board