

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....1st November 2012

1. Title of Item/Report

Asset Review Update

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that provided an update on the Asset Review and built on earlier reports to Members in 2011 and in June 2012. The report had previously been considered at a meeting of the Executive Scrutiny Committee on 23rd October and that Committee had supported the recommendations as set out in the report.

In September 2011, Stockton Borough Council Cabinet approved a differentiated Library Service model in which some sites would have a larger range of products and services and be open longer hours, whilst others would be reduced.

Applying the principles of the differentiated service model, Cabinet in December 2011 agreed to explore rationalisation and co-location of Fairfield, Roseworth, Thornaby Westbury Street, Eaglescliffe, and Billingham Bedale, and to give full consideration to the likely impact of any changes in each case. The December Cabinet paper acknowledged the key sites as Stockton Central, Thornaby Central, Billingham, Yarm, Ingleby Barwick, and Norton. The same report highlighted capital investment already made in Stockton and Thornaby, and planned for Norton and Billingham. In Billingham the commitment was given to creating a new town centre library and customer service facility.

Throughout this Review the Council had considered its statutory responsibility to provide a comprehensive service. The Council had also considered the outcomes of judicial reviews relating to reviews of services in other parts of the country

With these cases and guidelines in mind, the process of reviewing options for the future in Stockton had focused on the users of the service, and its accessibility to those diverse communities.

The Council had undertaken a 6 week consultation on people's preferences for different aspects of the service, for what parts of the

service were most valued, rather than which branches or service points people use or would like to retain. Over 1200 responses were received from a broad cross section of the community. The key messages were that a wide ranging and up to date book stock (73.7% rated this most important) was still the most important feature of the service, with well trained and friendly staff to provide good access to this (72.6% rated this as most important).

Other factors which received general support were a wide range of information materials, the ability to borrow and return books to any branch library (50.8%), and activities for children and young people. 49% rated Sunday opening as least important, and 59% said it was least important for libraries to be open on Bank Holidays.

General comments on the service show an understanding by respondents to the survey that change is necessary and there is support for the co-location of libraries with other appropriate services.

There were 40,000 active borrowers whose use of the service we could track, but in addition there were many thousand users who do not borrow items and whose usage patterns we are seeking to understand through focus groups and survey comments. Levels of usage were an indication of demand and likely future usage, and distance to the nearest library was a significant factor.

Combining all the relevant data and intelligence, officers had explored a wide range of scenarios, including closures, integration, reduced opening hours, and partnerships with community organisations.

In terms of consultation on phase 2 proposals it was suggested that Stockton Borough Council continue to invest in the fabric and equipment of the main 'town centre' branches, retaining extended opening hours where they were currently offered, staffed by expert professionals, and providing an up to date and relevant book stock. The major investment in the creation of a new Library and Customer Service facility in Thornaby, and the refurbishment of Stockton Central, should be mirrored in Billingham, delivering the widest possible range of services, stock, and equipment in the most efficient manner possible.

The Council was investing £2.7m in the new Billingham Town Centre facilities and it was proposed that this would replace Roseberry and Bedale Libraries. The Bedale Library building would be offered for asset transfer to community ownership or for sale. Mobile library visits to the 'Old Billingham' area should be increased to support those users who might be unable to attend the new Town Centre facility.

It was proposed that Westbury Street, Roseworth, Eaglescliffe and Fairfield Libraries be integrated into appropriate community facilities in their vicinity. Library staffing hours would be reduced for each site. This would retain an accessible staffed library service presence. Integration would require investment in equipment, shelving, furniture and stock which would improve the quality and feel of the service. Linkages to other services in the facilities could provide additional value and efficiency.

The suggested facility for co-location of Westbury Street Library was the Riverbank Children's Centre. The suggested facility for Roseworth Library was the Redhill Childrens' Centre. Appropriate facilities were still being considered for co-location of Eaglescliffe and Fairfield Libraries. However, in respect of Eaglescliffe Library, consideration was being given to the projected growth in the number of households in that area and to the potential to find a location closer to the areas of growth and to communities furthest from the closest alternative branch.

Where a suggested co-location option was not identified, the reduction in staff hours and opening hours should happen at the same time as the changes in other areas, rather than waiting until a long term co-location option was found.

It was recommended that, in addition to staff changes and reductions required to operate the reconfigured Library sites, it was possible to remove 2 posts which currently supported all branches. The duties carried out by the posts in question could be integrated into the roles of other staff.

Each of the proposals would now be subject to Equality Impact Assessments.

The total anticipated revenue saving that could be achieved by the changes outlined above was around £360,000.

Members then considered issues relating to the Education Development Centre at Norton. Previous reports to Cabinet had identified the need to consider the long term use and viability of the Centre. A summary of the findings of the review was provided and it was noted that

- Income achieved for training facilities would be less than budgeted, resulting in a budgetary pressure.
- Training and conference space was utilised for less than 40% of the available time between the hours of 9am and 5pm and for less than 15% between the hours of 5pm and 9pm.

- the Centre provided an office base for a significant number of staff, totalling around 80, the majority providing support to schools.
- The Centre was used by a number of external organisations. The outdoor space was used informally for football, although there were no changing facilities available.
- Catering was provided to users/occupants of the building, although this service operated at an annual loss.
- There were also significant maintenance issues. In excess of £500,000 was required in the medium term to address these.

If a closure option was to be considered, then identification of suitable alternative provision would be essential. In this respect an assessment had been made of the potential viability of utilising the former City Learning Centre at Billingham (Campus Site). Indications were that the building could be used as an alternative training venue adequate to meet the required need for CESC related training, providing three conference rooms, and also a base for 30 staff. The facility would also offer some spare training room capacity for use by other services. In order for this building to become a suitable alternative location, some internal re-configuration would be required and additional car parking spaces would be needed.

Analysis had also been undertaken of the meeting room capacity within the council's main administrative buildings. This analysis indicated a significant amount of overall surplus capacity.

There would remain a need for access to larger conference/training facilities on an occasional basis. Possible options included greater use of the Jim Cooke Conference Suite and the refurbished facilities at Preston Hall. However, some use of external facilities would be required for larger scale events and for this reason it was recommended that a budget for such external room hire be created (c£25,000pa) and co-ordinated centrally.

Closure of the EDC would require re-provision of accommodation for around 80 staff and it was considered that vacant office space remained that could be utilised to provide space for those displaced.

Given the level of usage and the ability to relocate the significant majority of services it was recommended that this facility be closed and the site considered for disposal. Annual revenue savings of between £200,000 and annum would be achieved. This figure would allow for funding of the operating costs of the Billingham CLC and creation of a fund to allow rent

of external facilities where necessary.

Ward members present referred to the significance of the building within the community. They indicated that they would wish to investigate the feasibility of a possible Community Asset Transfer and it was noted that this could be picked up as part of the suggested options appraisal.

Cabinet then considered Hardwick Pool and Gym. Members were reminded that the Council had made significant investments in modern and accessible pool provision across the Borough. Previously the Council funded the running costs of Abbey Hill Pool as it was used by the Youth Service and by the Primary School Swimming Programme. Both of these uses had now ceased and the majority of use is by the School itself.

The previous report to Executive Scrutiny and Cabinet identified that the School was to assess options for taking on responsibility for the pool building. Given that the running costs were approximately £65,000 per year with outstanding maintenance of around £130,000, and given the relative priority in comparison to the Gym, the School would not be in a position to take on the management of the facility and this would now close.

Members noted the Equality Impact Assessment associated with the Pool facility

Members were provided with an update in respect of Asset Transfer and the Community Asset Transfer Scheme being developed by Catalyst. Cabinet noted that expressions of interest in the properties at 98 Dovecot Street and Primrose Hill Community Centre had been received.

A further report, updating progress and presenting the results of the consultation on the Libraries Service, together with updates on Youth and Community facilities will be presented to Executive Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in the new year.

RESOLVED that:-

1. a second phase of consultation be undertaken on the proposals in respect of the Libraries Service.
2. the relocation of services from the Education Development Centre and the subsequent closure be approved, which will be followed by an option appraisal to determine the future of the site.
3. given the Council's investment in modern, accessible pool provision at SPLASH and Billingham Forum and confirmation that the School could

not fund the running costs of the Abbey Hill Pool, the facility would now close.

4. the progress with respect to Asset Transfer and the CAT Scheme being developed by Catalyst be noted.

5. following receipt of expressions of interest in the properties at 98 Dovecot Street and Primrose Hill Community Centre, these properties now be advertised for disposal or asset transfer in line with the agreed strategy.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To identify savings in line with the EIT review process.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Consideration had been given to the closure of Fairfield, Roseworth, Eaglescliffe, and Thornaby Westbury Street, to be replaced with mobile library visits. However, although this would realise a saving of c. £450,000, it would prevent over 300,000 visits per annum currently going to those branches. The mobile visits would carry a fraction of the collection that could be housed by the static branches, and would not allow for the range of community activities in those sites. Mobile services would not provide free internet access, and the role of libraries in reducing the inequality of access to online goods and services was felt to be of significant social value.

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 9 November 2012

Proper Officer  
05 June 2012