

# **SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**Meeting date: 13 June 2022**

**From: Assistant Director Customer and Community Services**

## **Transformation of the Library Service**

### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report provides SMB with an update on the transformation of the library service since late 2019. This includes a full restructure of the workforce, improvements to a number of buildings, the introduction of new digital technology, and a refreshed focus on council priorities. The report also touches on libraries and the pandemic.

### **2.0 Issues for Scrutiny**

2.1 SMB is asked to note the changes made and the impact. Members are invited to share their views on the further development of the service and issues for consideration as we move towards Local Government Re-organisation.

### **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 In late 2019 work started to review the library service and discussions took place with all local committees to ascertain local members views of the future focus of the service. The feedback provided a strong steer on the need to ensure the service focused on supporting thriving communities, putting customers at the heart of delivery, being focused on council priorities and working with partners to develop the offer from the buildings.
- 3.2 Phase 1 of the restructure which focused on management and countywide roles commenced in late 2019 and concluded in the early part of 2020. At this point Covid 19 impacted severely on the service; resulting in the closure of all libraries. The service responded quickly by scaling up its digital offer and introducing a select and collect service.
- 3.3 As soon as provision in the legislation was made to allow libraries to open as an essential service, the Council chose to re- open as many locations as possible to offer people access to PCs and to pick up books.
- 3.4 Re-opening following the pandemic took a number of months due to the changes required to buildings and processes to ensure customer and staff

health and safety. Ability to offer usual opening hours and activity was also further impacted on by the large number of vacancies in the service as staff had left through personal choice and also through the second phase of the restructure.

- 3.5 The position at June 2022 is that all vacancies have been recruited to and a significant amount of work has been undertaken to induct new staff, engage proactively with Trade Unions and introduce a workforce plan to support the development of service.
- 3.6 In addition to the completion of a full service restructure, significant progress has been made with the improvement of a number of buildings with Barrow being the most notable. Work has started on Kendal library; and discussions have commenced with the architect appointed to develop designs for Carlisle library. A closer working relationship with the property and capital teams has also been established by the service to ensure that property repairs are addressed in a timely manner.
- 3.7 There have been a range of digital improvements made as well including website improvements, new technology being used by library and customer assistants to engage with customers on the frontline; and the introduction of intelligent automation to provide greater back office efficiency. The online offer (e books and magazines) saw a large increase in take up during covid and subsequent decisions about investment in stock has reflected this change in customer demand.
- 3.8 Developing our understanding of the difference the service makes to customers and communities has also been a key strand to our improvement journey. Engagement with different customer groups has given us new insights into how to shape our offer.
- 3.9 Relationships with other teams within the council have also thrived – with adult learning and the HAWCs now having a much stronger presence and offer in libraries. This is moving beyond co-location and into the development of a blended, joint offer which supports vulnerable learners and HAWCs customers to make the most of the library offer and vice versa.
- 3.10 The focus for the final year of the council is to continue with service improvements, continue to embed the new structure and ways of working and prepare for LGR. In addition to developing options for the model of delivery, the service will invest time and energy in supporting the workforce through the LGR process, given they have experience significant change over the past 2 years with the restructure and covid.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

- 4.1 Libraries have always played an important part in local communities. They offer a place of learning, creativity, support, access to information and advice and a place to connect with other people. Digital technology can help take the service to the next level in terms of meeting customer expectations and efficient management of the service; and alongside this the skills of the workforce and their passion to welcome people into our buildings and support them will mean that libraries can provide a meaningful and relevant offer to a wide range of customers.

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**16<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

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***Appendices***

Appendix 1

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