“This library is a vital part of the community … and has helped me so much to become integrated into it.”

“They don’t get books for my community without asking what would we like to have…they don’t talk at us, they talk with us.”

June 2011
Innovation and Evaluation Plan

Sandwell Library and Information Service
Innovation and Evaluation Plan

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Introduction

We want Sandwell to be a “thriving, sustainable, optimistic, and forward looking community”. We need to be serious about tackling the cycle of poverty, income, aspiration and power that has affected people living in Sandwell. To achieve this vision we need citizens to be well informed, to be proud of their skills and talents and have opportunities at all levels for local people to be in control of their own lives. Delivering high quality library services to local communities is an integral part of achieving this vision.

In October 2010 the library service published a Strategy for Service Delivery to begin consultation with library stakeholders around how to deliver high quality and efficient library services that continue to meet the needs of local communities during a period of budget reductions. The strategy was published before the Government announced details of the Comprehensive Spending Review, but we knew that cuts were coming and we knew they would be severe.

This innovation and evaluation plan is the next step in the process – a set of practical proposals for library reconfiguration that will allow budgets to be reduced whilst still delivering quality library services and to empower communities to become involved in developing services for their area. The plan will allow ideas to be piloted and evaluated, ensure that national best practise is adopted in Sandwell, and that needs and priorities of customers are understood and inform the decision making process.

We intend to use this plan as the basis for wider consultation about the future shape of library services in Sandwell, taking the opportunity to focus on priorities and improve efficiencies, as we continue to deliver a library service that the residents of Sandwell need and deserve.

Councillor Linda Horton,
Cabinet Member for Leisure Services
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Library location and distribution

We have a number of models in place that can be used to reduce costs, such as co-location with other service providers, moving libraries into partner’s spaces, sharing library spaces with other organisations, staffing libraries and supporting partners to provide library services in their spaces through a hub and spoke model. We can explore these options on a library by library basis, through the consultation process. We also need to explore other options for moving libraries into new partner’s spaces, such as linking with retail or the youth service. Services delivered from different libraries in Sandwell vary, as they are designed around meeting local needs. There won’t be a one size fits all solution to the question of library location – it will depend on local opportunities and needs.

- **Co-location** – two libraries, Glebefields and Great Bridge, are co-located with children’s centres. These facilities have benefited the library service by challenging the traditional image of libraries, increasing performance, and delivering savings through shared costs.

**Great Bridge library and children’s centre**

Great Bridge library reopened in June 2010 with a striking extension which houses a new children’s centre. It has undergone a transformation and now boasts new shelving, comfortable seating areas and a vending machine for customers to enjoy a drink. There are new improved lighting and heating systems in place and a public toilet available in the library for the first time, to make visits as comfortable as possible. By sharing staffing costs the library is now open more hours. The spaces and facilities are shared with building costs divided equally. With new opening hours, visits are up 50%.
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- **Using partner’s spaces** – Hamstead library is located in the Tanhouse Community Centre and Hill Top library in the Hill Top Community Centre (contributing to the income of the Hill Top Community Association). Oldbury library is part of Jack Judge House, and the new Blackheath Library is in a building shared with the Black Country Housing Association.

- **Sharing our spaces** – Tipton Community Heritage Museum is based in Tipton Library, where we are also negotiating with Adult Services to move in day care services. Wednesbury Library hosts an Adult and Family Learning centre, and Connexions are delivering services from there.

- **Hub and Spoke model** – we use larger libraries to support local community based library services. Hill Top library has been operating over the last year with no supervisor and staffed from Wednesbury. Four express libraries, based in children's centres and staffed by them, are supported with access to the library management system and regular contact by library staff. (We have a core library offer in place at all other children’s centres, but can’t publicise them as express libraries open to the general public because of the layout – they have to ensure the safety of children as their first priority).

**Priory Express Library**

This small library located in Priory Children’s Centre gives local people access to a library in the heart of the community. The library is in the reception area which has a café and lots of comfortable seating. The partnership work has enabled us to become involved in more of the centre’s activities and increased outreach from Wednesbury Library into the Friar Park area. It also means that we can do this cost effectively as staffing for the library is provided by the children’s centre and volunteers. The library received 6,600 visits last year and we are looking forward to increasing community involvement and visits to the centre over the coming years.
Community management

There is already a high degree of community involvement in shaping and delivering library services, with local community groups and individuals involved in running library activities, through library friends groups, and the use of volunteers.

- **Community engagement** - Community engagement activity in Smethwick and Bleakhouse libraries have given us a model of how local friends groups, community groups and individuals can become involved in shaping and delivering services (informal feedback from RENASI, the consultants employed by Big Lottery to evaluate the investment in library projects stated: “It feels clear, both in terms of the library authority itself and in comparison to other Big Lottery libraries, that there has been a very impressive performance in bringing the community engagement work into the core offer of the library service”). We need to embed this approach in all libraries.

**Smethwick Library**

Smethwick library has established itself as vibrant community hub - a place where local people come to learn, socialise and have fun! With Big Lottery funding we have three community rooms, a café and public toilets. The community rooms are used by staff, partners and other agencies to run a wide variety of activities for local people, but most significantly the rooms are used by volunteers from the community who decide and run their own activities. Last year Smethwick Library attracted over 200,000 visits and we are seeing the real benefits of working closely with our community, offering them the services that they want. The best practice developed at Smethwick will now be rolled out to all libraries.

*Laughter workshop at Smethwick Library*
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- **Community spaces** – There are now separate community spaces at many libraries and we have been successful in turning libraries with separate community spaces into lively community hubs. We have to find ways of increasing delivery of community activities in libraries that don’t have dedicated spaces too.

- **Friends groups** – We have these at most libraries and the Federation of Friends meets quarterly for consultation on strategic issues. We can step up this activity, ensuring they exist at all libraries and developing their role into that of an advisory or management committee – this approach could be piloted with a library which already has a very strong and active friends groups.

Rounds Green friends group
The friends group at Rounds Green organise the spring open day, summer fayre and other events, which raise funds for the library. This helps to pay for craft materials, refreshments and entertainers etc. for children’s activities during school holidays.

- **Use of volunteers** - Compared to neighbouring local library authorities, Sandwell has a high number of volunteers working in libraries – with 4008.5 volunteer hours delivered in 2010/11 (up by 127%). These are currently used to provide added value services, such as the café at Smethwick Library. In future they could be used to provide core services and maintain opening hours, reducing staffing costs. Our belief is that we cannot hand over the running of libraries wholesale to volunteers; they have to be trained, managed and supported if this approach is to be successful. This approach will take time to develop as negotiation with Unions and staff will be required.
4 Going digital

Use of Information Technology is well embedded in Sandwell libraries, for example in the availability of computers in all libraries for customers to use (which attract nearly 40% of library visits), and the library management system which manages the library catalogue, back office tasks such as ordering new books, the database of library members, and all the library activities such as issue and return of books. We are increasingly using I.T. to make the library service available on-line 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, and automate processes to reduce costs.

- The 24 hour library – a 24/7 library service is available through the website. We provide a range of on-line services and resources including access to the library catalogue, reservation and renewal services, user account management, information resources, online joining, and comments and complaints. The website includes information about services, locations, opening hours, what’s on etc. By summer 2011 we will have introduced a telephone renewals hotline to allow customers to renew their books at any time day or night. We plan to extend catalogue searching so that it can include the archives catalogue and the catalogues of other Black Country libraries. We are exploring how to make e-books available to library customers.

- Automation – the automation of library back office processes in Sandwell is among the best in the country (with supplier
selection of new books, on-line ordering and receipt, and direct delivery of stock) which has allowed us to reduce back office staffing. We are in the process of rolling out self-service to the 12 largest libraries in the Borough, which will continue to reduce staffing costs. Staffing costs can be brought down even further by adopting best practice for staffing at all libraries, reducing opening hours, and the increased use of volunteers. Further capital investment could allow self-service to be delivered through all libraries.

**Self-service in libraries**

12 libraries will offer self-service kiosks by October 2011, allowing customers to scan their own library ticket and books, then being given a receipt to show which items they have borrowed and when they are due back. The kiosks allow you to borrow items, return items, pay fines and check your account. They have a separate display for children and instructions can be in different languages. Self-service allows a reduction of between half and one full time member of staff per library.
5 National best practice

In September 2010 the minister for libraries, Ed Vaizey, established 10 pilot projects across the country to test innovative approaches and alternative models of provision for libraries, in order to deal with reducing budgets – “The Future Libraries Programme”. The projects reported early in April 2011, following a 6 month feasibility study which was supported by expertise from the DCMS and MLA and received £100,000 funding. As yet none of the projects are actually underway and none of the projects is able to quantify details of likely savings to be delivered. They say it can be done, but it takes a lot of work, a lot of time, and a lot of relationship building. Sandwell libraries are looking at all the issues raised by the FLP report, and will continue to track progress to learn lessons, but we are already actively pursuing all of the ideas tested

- Four main themes emerged from the pilot projects:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sandwell approach</th>
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<td>Shared services across council</td>
<td>We have well established partnership working with other Black Country library authorities, e.g. joint procurement of stock, activities and promotion, training, service development</td>
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<tr>
<td>boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reviewing the location and</td>
<td>Through our asset management plan we review the location of service points, and have moved Oldbury and Blackheath recently. This will form a major part of the consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>distribution of service points</td>
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<tr>
<td>New models of delivery</td>
<td>We have been innovative, with hub and spoke staffing models, express libraries, automation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community management</td>
<td>Local groups and individuals are involved in shaping and delivering services, particularly where we have community spaces, and our well established friends groups can be developed further</td>
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The report came up with eight recommended strategies:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sandwell approach</th>
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<tr>
<td>Share back office services</td>
<td>We share our library management system with Sandwell College and the Education Library Service. We have a joint stock procurement contract with the other Black Country library authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with other local authorities</td>
<td>We are engaged with other Black Country library authorities to look at the potential for shared services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide services digitally</td>
<td>We provide excellent on-line library resources 24/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-locate with other local services</td>
<td>We share spaces with a variety of organisations to provide library services</td>
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| Use library service to deliver other service outcomes and priorities | The library service supports many of the Council's priorities, and improves lives by:  
  • Improving the well being of children, young people and families e.g. activities for children, young people and families to do  
  • Supporting the local economy e.g. Job clubs in libraries  
  • Improving health and well being e.g. Books on prescription  
  • Improving the well being of older people e.g. Silver surfer sessions  
  • Removing inequality and creating cohesive communities e.g. LGBT reading group |
| Better understand costs                            | We map costs against individual service points, and benchmark costs with other library authorities   |
| Better understand community need/ aspiration       | Our community engagement and consultation approach is best practice (as shown by our gaining the Customer Service Excellence standard). We will undertake a needs analysis as part of the consultation |
| Look at alternative ways to deliver the service    | We have developed a number of models such as co-location, hub and spoke staffing, express libraries, automation |
Proposals for evaluation (and potential pilot projects)

- Undertake research and consultation with library users and Sandwell residents to determine:
  - what are the needs and aspirations of local people
  - what are their priorities for service delivery
  - what they think of the innovative plans for delivering a library service
  - what are the most suitable opening hours
  - where they would go to use library services if delivered from an alternative venue
  - how far they would travel

- Identify libraries with high costs for delivery, and undertake an options appraisal for a reduced cost model:
  - Co-location
  - Using partners spaces
  - Sharing our spaces
  - Hub and spoke model
  - Express library
  to determine the practicalities, opportunities and costs of adopting each approach

- Evaluate and consult on the use of the mobile library service and work with other partners (youth service/children’s centres/early years) to look at a more cost effective use of resources

- Consult on the concept of a “town” library as a central focus in each of the Sandwell 6 towns, whilst recognising the needs of local neighbourhoods in accessing a library service

- Further roll out of automation, which will be evaluated both in terms of customer response and implications for staff roles

- Work with corporate property/planning to identify other potential partners for co-located library provision, e.g. youth service, retail
• Identify a library with a well developed friends group, to develop an advisory or management committee approach

• The café at Smethwick Library is operated by volunteers through Option for Life, in a social enterprise model. Identify and establish another social enterprise service to be delivered from library spaces

This process of innovation and evaluation will lay the basis for a reconfigured service over the next 3/5 years.
Appendix 1 – Current pattern of libraries

Key:
- Central Library
- Area Libraries
- Community Libraries
- Neighbourhood Libraries
Appendix 2 – Current pattern of innovative library delivery
Appendix 3 – Current pattern of hub and spoke library delivery
Appendix 4 – Use of libraries

- Libraries are a highly regarded, very popular local service with high levels of customer satisfaction

- Usage of libraries is increasing, with over 1.5 million visits in 2010/11 – the highest figure recorded, up by 5% from the previous year

- The Library Offer: The library offer sets out what we believe should be delivered to the people of Sandwell, based on an understanding of their needs and expectations:
  - Library services with reading at the centre to improve literacy
  - Information services and expertise made available to all
  - Library Services that engage and involve people
  - Library Services open and accessible to all
  - Opportunities to learn and discover
  - Library Services that are value for money

- Libraries are used for a variety of purposes:
  - For young people aged 16 plus and adults – 59% came to borrow books, 37% to use computers and 36% to find something out (PLUS survey, November 2009)
  - For children aged under 16 – 71% came to borrow books, 36% to use computers, 33% to read and 21% to do homework (Children’s PLUS survey, March 2011)
  - More people are visiting libraries for the increasingly varied activities provided – in 2010/11 attendance at activities run in Sandwell libraries was 49,926 children (up 23%) and 33,379 young people and adults (up 43%)
Appendix 5 – Resources

• In recent years the library service has made efficiency savings through:
  - Reducing management costs by implementing a leaner structure
  - Reducing back office costs by automating processes for the order and receipt of stock
  - Reducing building costs by locating libraries in partner’s buildings and sharing staffing and building costs with partners who move in with us
  - Improving discounts on buying new books, through a joint contract in partnership with the other Black Country libraries
  - Rationalising the van fleet, reducing by two vehicles, and introducing a smaller low floor mobile library
  - Implementing self-service, to be rolled out to 12 largest libraries by October 2012
  - Introducing low cost express libraries and satellite model for staffing
  - Savings to supplies and services

• The library service can continue to reduce costs through:
  - Completion of the self-service programme to reduce staffing costs
  - Alternative staffing models and the use of volunteers to reduce staffing costs
  - Reduction in opening hours, which if managed carefully will mitigate the impact on library usage
  - Further restructure to save management and back office costs
  - An option proposed in the 2010 3 year budget reduction strategy was to look at the number of vehicles for the mobile library offer. We recognise that this service is highly valued by local communities. We will produce a feasibility study to see how that service could be maintained with one vehicle and access to the youth service bus during the daytime, and be more cost effective
  - We are exploring the potential for budget saving through shared services with other Black Country authorities

• Any proposals for reconfiguration of facilities are likely to take time to implement and deliver savings, so this cost reduction programme needs to continue
Appendix 6 – Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to the following who have contributed to the development of the plan:

- Roger Bagley – Tipton Local History Group
- Fred Barnfield – Chair, Federation of Library Friends Groups
- Lynn Beckett – Early Years and Childcare Partnership Unit
- Wendy Beddall – Parental Support and Family Learning
- Laura Brodrick – Joint Commissioning Unit
- Andy Brown – Parental Support and Family Learning
- Jane Burns – Head Teacher, Albert Pritchard/ Wood Green
- Frank Caldwell – Museums, Arts and Tourism
- Shaireen Chaudhry – Ideal for All
- Jean Clark – Central Library Friends Group
- Cathy Corbett – Brandhall Library Friends Group
- Paul Evans – Asset and Facilities Group
- Joan Ferguson – Thimblemill Library Friends Group
- Sasha Gelpi – PCT Mental Health
- Manjit Gill – Personnel Services
- Raj Gill – Saathi
- Alan Harward – Wednesbury Library Friends Group
- Paul Hayward – Capital Projects Team
- Cllr Linda Horton – Cabinet Member for Leisure Services
- Betty Johnson – Tipton Local History Group
- Andy Kilmurray – Community Services
- Matt Lee – Priory Family Centre
- Sue Moore – Capital Projects Team
- Sharon Nanan-Sen – Young People’s Services
- Gina Neale – Make Friends with a Book
- Keith Percival – Cradley Heath Library Friends Group
- Shirley Percival – Cradley Heath Library Friends Group
- Viki Powell – Hamstead Library Friends Group
- Michael Robinson – Cradley Heath Library Friends Group
- Mandip Singh Sidhu – Asset and Facilities Group
- Mark Sturgeon – Options for Life
- John Sullivan – Langley Friends Group
- Jim Wells – Youth, Culture and Lifelong Learning Service
- Eileen Wilkinson – Great Barr Library Friends Group
- Cllr Jayne Wilkinson – Oakham Library Friends Group
- Sandwell Library staff