

**COUNCIL SEMINAR  
1st March, 2016**

Present:- Councillor Yasseen (in the Chair); Councillors Ahmed, Atkin, Beaumont, Buckley, Elliot, Ellis, Godfrey, Hughes, Jones, McNeely, Pitchley, Roche, Rose, Sims, Smith, Steele, Taylor, Whelbourn and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor M. Clark), Currie, Cutts, Fleming, Jepson, Reeder and Watson.

**LIBRARY STRATEGY AND FORTHCOMING CONSULTATION.**

Councillor Yasseen, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Working and Cultural Services, welcomed those in attendance at the seminar. She spoke about the importance of libraries in the community – they were one of the few services that people felt they owned. She had loved her local library whilst growing up and knew that others often found them to be a sanctuary, and they were one of the few places that were free to use.

She introduced the officers in attendance: -

Elenore Fisher, Customer and Cultural Services Manager;  
Rachel O'Neil, Customer Access Manager;  
Zoe Oxley, Library and Customer Services Manager;  
Paul Woodcock, Assistant Director, Planning, Regeneration and Culture.

Elenore explained how the provision of library services was a statutory requirement and local authorities were required to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient service'.

Rotherham's Library Service had previously undergone a major review in 2012. Further changes since had included the merger between libraries and customer services, the opening of the Library@Riverside, customer service centre improvements/upgrades, the provision of e-books and the provision of free WiFi in all libraries.

Rachel O'Neil explained that Rotherham's Library Strategy 2011-2015 had ended and a new Library Strategy 2016-2019 would shortly be consulted upon. The draft strategy included five areas to continue taking the Library Service forward: -

1. Rotherham's libraries would be well-used, cost effective and responsive to changing customer needs, available technologies and resources;
2. Services offered reflect, and will continue to reflect, the needs and make-up of Rotherham's communities;
3. Libraries will inspire Rotherham's children, young people and their families to enjoy reading and develop their knowledge and skills, so that they are able to improve their quality of life and have an opportunity to realise their full potential;

4. Libraries would be located in the heart of Rotherham's communities, library buildings would be recognised community hubs, offer welcoming spaces and provide access to modern digital technology;
5. Staff will help to bridge the digital divide by supporting Rotherham's communities to get online and explore all the benefits that being online brings.

Elenore explained that the draft 2016-2019 Strategy has informed current potential budget savings proposals. She confirmed that no decisions regarding these proposals could be made, or savings released, until after an appropriate consultation period had ended. Savings would be achieved over three-years.

1. Creation of a centralised team (no impact on customers);
2. Consultation on withdrawal of mobile library;
3. Consultation on changes to the Booklink service;
4. Relocation of Maltby Library to Maltby Joint Service Centre;
5. Alternative ways of delivering services within communities.

As a statutory Service, there were specific requirements for consultation, as confirmed by colleagues in Legal Services. There were currently no proposals for closures of static sites or reductions in their opening hours. However, changes to hours may be suggested through the consultation process; this had happened in previous public consultations.

The Service was already working with volunteers and there was further work to be done to develop work with schools, universities and parish and town councils.

Zoe Oxley explained that there were also savings proposals in relation to Customer Services. As a non-statutory service these did not have to undergo such detailed consultation, but it was felt that, as a merged service, it was appropriate for the consultation to follow a similar path.

2016-2019 savings proposals in relation to Customer Services included: -

1. Withdrawal of face-to-face cashiering at Riverside House;
2. Introduction of on-line benefit claims and risk based verification;
3. Support required to use digital services;
4. Introduction of appointment based service.

Subject to approval by Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> March, the Library Strategy and proposed changes in relation to Library Services and Customer Services would undergo consultation between 17<sup>th</sup> March – 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2016. As wide a range of methods as possible would be used: -

- Online via [www.rotherham.gov.uk](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk);
- A dedicated email address would be set-up to receive comments and questions;
- A paper-based questionnaire would be available at all libraries and customer service centres;
- Drop-in sessions would be held;
- 10% of the Borough's population were regular library users, work would be undertaken to target non-users in high footfall areas;
- The Youth Cabinet would be asked to respond to the consultation;
- Town and Parish Councils would be asked to respond to the consultation;
- Targeted consultation would be undertaken in the Maltby area.

The next steps: -

- Report to the Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2016;
- Consultation to take place between 17<sup>th</sup> March – 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2016;
- Re-draft options, including the definition of 'core offer', based on consultation responses;
- An Equalities Impact Assessment would be undertaken;
- Proposals would be presented to Members in July as a Key Decision;
- An implementation plan would be confirmed.

Discussion and questions followed, and the following issues were raised: -

Councillor Whelbourn asked that the proposals be considered by Member Scrutiny. He also felt that Area Assemblies should be included in the consultation process.

Councillor Steele noted that two people had responded about libraries in the wider budget consultation process. He also asked what trade union consultation relating to paid staff and the use of volunteers had taken place? How did other South Yorkshire/Yorkshire councils use volunteers?

Elenore explained that other authorities had in the past proposed to close certain libraries unless community groups stepped in to run them. This had led to judicial review processes. It was not proposed that libraries would be run by volunteers, they would continue to be run by the Council, Rotherham wanted to use volunteers to help enhance the Service. Library staff were saying that they wanted to do more and make their libraries the hub of the community. To do this they needed time and any help to release them would be useful in achieving this.

Councillor Elliot asked about the consultation process and asked whether school children and Rotherham's toddler groups would be contacted. Councillor Elliot was aware that people not using libraries now could intend to use them later. The current 10% of the Borough using libraries may not always be the same 10%.

Councillor McNeely agreed that it was important for libraries to inspire children and families, and this also covered schools, governors and school staff. Libraries were not always accessible to parents, especially those with low levels of literacy. Sometimes libraries were not physically accessible. Libraries located in schools would be convenient as many adults and children were already there.

Councillor Ellis was concerned that the Library Service was being asked to do too many functions. She also felt that the role of volunteers was limited and they could not be expected to provide advice and guidance on Benefits, for example. The Library Vision needed to be clear.

Elenore confirmed that the core offer would be clear and available so that everyone involved in the Service could articulate it. Customer Services were provided in the Joint Service Centres only, and volunteers would not be working in these specialist functions. The core offer would inform people what they could expect if they walked into a library or a customer service centre; consistency was important.

Councillor Atkin explained that he was a regular library user, along with his family members. He wanted to place on record his thanks and appreciation to the staff at Wath Library for their work on the Wath Christmas Festival. They were responsive to the Wath community's needs, including working flexibly to accommodate the festival timetable and provide themed activities for the children. He asked whether community transport could collect people from their homes and drop them off at a library/libraries and then take them back home again? This would mitigate against the proposed loss of the mobile library. Would the LAC Council be asked as part of the consultation?

Elenore had had initial conversations with Community Transport and they were willing to consider this. She was working with Children and Young People's Services to consult with children on the proposals.

Councillor Rose used Swinton Library for her surgeries. The resource was very well used by people for advice and computers, right up until closing time. There was a lot of space in the building – was it all being used to maximum capacity?

Councillor Ahmed asked that Children's Centres also be included in the consultation to ensure that the core offer included early help for children, young people and their families. What was the take-up rate of e-books?

Elenore confirmed that the core offer would be very specific and Children's Centres would be included in the process. Secondary school library champions were keen to work with the Service

E-books were currently 1.7% of total loans and needed further marketing. E-magazines were popular. Additional e-books would be purchased so that the Service had the equivalent of a small library within the next few years.

Councillor Beaumont endorsed Maltby Library for their work within the community and how they reached out to the community. She asked whether there would be space and capacity to continue to deliver these services and maintain excellency if the library was based within the Joint Service Centre?

Councillor Godfrey had not seen the plans for the proposed relocation.

Elenore explained that a plan was being drawn up for stakeholders to visualise the proposed layout. There was a fairly large space in the Customer Service Centre that could be well utilised if the library was moved there.

Paul Woodcock recognised that there was an appetite for consultation and really welcomed this.

Councillor Yasseen agreed that the session was really pertinent for Rotherham's aspirations of reaching out to the 90% not currently using the Library Service. There would be a further session for Members as part of the consultation process. She thanked the Officers for their informative presentation and contribution to the discussion.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.