

Committee:	Dated:
Culture Heritage and Libraries Community and Children's Services	22/09/2021 24/09/2021
Subject: Barbican & Community Libraries – Library Strategy	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 4, 9 and 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	Revenue funding
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Carol Boswarthack, Head of Barbican & Community Libraries	

Summary

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant work had been put into a new strategy for the City's three lending libraries. This strategy is now complete, and clearly sets out the priorities for the section. The strategy adequately reflects the requirements of the Corporate Plan and the Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS) Business Plan.

Over the course of the pandemic, staff adopted the strategy's vision and principles, and this has greatly contributed to the section's subsequent innovative, successful and well-appreciated work for all its communities.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note this report

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London has three lending libraries: Barbican Library; Shoe Lane Library; and Artizan Street Library and Community Centre. Together these comprise Barbican & Community Libraries (B&CL).
2. Public libraries are a statutory service and the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 provides for the free lending of books. In recent years, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) Library Taskforce has

redefined libraries as community hubs with trusted staff, offering safe, neutral community spaces to all customers. As such, our lending libraries are perfectly positioned to carry out a range of services and activities that have a positive impact on many aspects of our customers' lives, including their health and wellbeing. In addition to the provision of comprehensive lending stock, modern library priorities include social inclusion and social mobility, alongside the more traditional activities of promoting reading for pleasure, supporting literacy and learning and providing access to culture. Public computers with internet access and a range of Microsoft products are standard in all UK public libraries.

3. The City's libraries lend digital and physical stock: eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and eComics are available to download, alongside other digital services such as language learning, streaming music and video and online reference tools. The majority of these services are also accessible remotely.
4. Our libraries are well used, with around 23,000 members who borrowed 421,962 physical items of stock in 2019/20, the last full year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of our members are City workers.
5. Since around 2009, there has been significant joined-up working between the lending libraries and colleagues within the DCCS, especially around working with children and families. In 2017, the Department of Culture, Heritage and Libraries was disbanded and B&CL moved to the Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS). Since that time, library staff have worked to further embed the priorities of the Department and have reinvented the service as community hubs.
6. A library strategy is key to ensuring that our revised vision and priorities are embedded in all we do, and work on this strategy began in 2019. All B&CL staff were encouraged to help shape the strategy and, throughout 2019, the Head of B&CL ran several staff workshops in all three libraries to examine the current situation, future ambitions, challenges and solutions to achieving these ambitions.

Current Position

7. This strategy is informed by information from the regular B&CL Public Library Users' Survey, comments and suggestions received from service users, and the output of the staff workshops. It addresses the requirements of the Corporate Plan and the Departmental Business Plan.
8. At the heart of the strategy are a set of principles which staff will use to shape our services. The principles are:

We aim to provide:

- a library service that inspires and delights all our customers
- a service that delivers the aims of the City of London Corporation and the business objectives of the DCCS
- a service that celebrates diversity and promotes equality

- a service that actively works with partners to provide enhanced services for all our customers
 - a sustainable, efficient, responsive and relevant public library service that provides value for money, enhances lives and actively engages with all our customers, regardless of age, race, gender, or physical and mental ability
 - services that are co-produced with customers wherever possible
 - library buildings that are safe, neutral and welcoming to all
 - a full enquiries service carried out by expert, fully trained staff
 - the very best stock, customer services, activities and events
 - technology that enhances the effective delivery of our services.
9. The strategy also addresses a number of challenges currently facing the library service, along with potential solutions to these challenges.
10. The strategy was written by the B&CL Senior Management Team comprising the Head of B&CL and the two Principal Librarians (Barbican Library, and Shoe Lane and Artizan Street Libraries). Full consultation with colleagues in the Corporate Strategy and Performance Team took place.
11. Although work on the strategy started prior to work on the Target Operating Model (TOM), the strategy addresses many of the TOM principles, including but not exclusive to, greater efficiency, tackling silos and working more corporately.
12. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Section benefitted greatly from the work that had already taken place on this strategy. One example is that plans around better digital engagement were already well-developed and, consequently, the challenge to staff to create “a Library Without Walls” was enthusiastically accepted: our first digital events and services were available online within a week of the libraries closing in March 2020. Throughout the pandemic, the range of diverse online activities for customers of all ages continued to develop. Additionally, a full enquiries service was maintained throughout, and customers were able to request and receive essential remote, digital skills training.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

13. Strategic implications – The Library Strategy is relevant to the following City key priorities (Corporate Plan 2018–23):
- To provide modern, efficient and high-quality local services, including policing, within the Square Mile for workers, residents and visitors
 - To provide valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure, to London and the nation.

It is also relevant to the following DCCS strategic aims:

- Priority Potential: People of all ages can achieve their ambitions through education, training and lifelong learning
 - Priority Independence, Involvement and Choice: People of all ages can live independently, play a role in their communities and exercise choice over their services
 - Priority Community: People of all ages feel part of, engaged with and able to shape their community.
14. The vision of B&CL is to help individuals and communities live their best lives by supporting:
- reading and literacy
 - health and wellbeing
 - social mobility
 - social interaction
 - culture and creativity.
15. Financial implications – N/A
16. Resource implications – N/A
17. Legal implications – N/A
18. Risk implications – N/A
19. Equalities implications – N/A
20. Climate implications – N/A
21. Security implications – N/A

Conclusion

22. This new strategy for B&CL clearly sets out the priorities for the libraries and is closely aligned to the Corporate Plan. It will assist the staff to continue to shape a modern and efficient service which is relevant to all its communities.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Barbican & Community Libraries Library Strategy 2021–2023

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