



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>CONSULTATION – A MODERN AND PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE FOR THE GREATER BELFAST AREA – UPDATE ON CONSULTATION</b>
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> June 2010
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### Purpose of the Report

To inform the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on the decisions made by the Board of Libraries NI on the consultation document "Meeting the demands for a Modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland, Stage 1: Greater Belfast".

### Relevant Background Information

#### Summary of the Proposals Consulted upon

Libraries NI was created in 2009 to take responsibility for the public libraries service across Northern Ireland. One of the first tasks that the new authority carried out was a strategic review of its library provision across the Province. The first phase included a review of the Greater Belfast area.

The review encompassed 32 libraries within the Greater Belfast area. Each of these libraries was examined under 4 criteria which were:

- fit for purpose;
- capable of delivering on the vision of Libraries NI;
- in the right location; and
- sustainability

Using these criteria it was contended that the following libraries were considered to be no longer viable: Andersonstown; Ballyhackamore; Ballymacarrett, Belvoir Park, Braniel, Cloughfern, Dunmurray, Gilnahirk, Ligoniel, Oldpark, Sandyrow, Tullycarnet, Whitewell, Woodstock.

Libraries that met the key criteria for future use and may have been recently refurbished and are well placed geographically to remain were Carryduff, Dundonald, Finaghy, Glengormley, Grove, Holywood Arches, Rathcoole and Whiterock.

The review indicated that libraries that require new builds or major refurbishment were Ardoyne, Chichester, Cregagh, Falls Road, Lisburn Road, Newtownbreda, Ormeau and Shankill

Libraries that required to be clustered to consolidate provision into a single viable entity were Suffolk and Colin Glen.

Members received a briefing from representatives from Libraries NI on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2010 on the details of the proposals contained within the consultation document and the comments discussed at this meeting were included within the Council response.

#### Belfast City Council Response

The Council's response to the consultation was approved by the Committee at its meeting on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and was subsequently submitted to Libraries NI.

The response highlighted that the Council would be keen to explore the co-location of library services within Belfast City Council owned buildings. Particularly where Belfast City Council buildings are located in the proximity of libraries facing potential closure. The response also stressed the need for an assessment of the population needs of the areas where service withdrawal was proposed.

In summary, the factors which the council highlighted needed further consideration when making decisions on proposed closures included:

- Any plans for the closure of libraries should take into consideration access to public transport. The older population and those with physical disabilities would for example find distance to an alternative library a limiting issue.
- Libraries are regularly used as community spaces and local people use them as such. In particular, older people, younger people and migrant workers use libraries frequently.
- In some of the areas where closures are proposed the library may be the only community space available to residents.
- Some of the proposed closures are situated in areas of high deprivation, where a significant proportion of residents have no or low levels of qualifications.
- There is merit in considering what other community facilities exist within the area in order to look at relocation options if feasible.
- Proposed mobile services to replace existing service may not be suitable for older people or people with disabilities and this needs to be addressed.
- Libraries are an important meeting place for social and community activities many associated with life-long learning outcomes but also just places to drop in, attend thematic events, meet socially and are used by the local community in such a way.
- The Council is of the opinion that libraries, like council leisure facilities, should have opening hours which reflect customer demands, possibly including longer opening hours in the evenings and weekends. The Council would, for example, be supportive that the opening hours of the library at the Grove Well Being Centre Library could be extended in line with the opening hours of the leisure facilities at the centre.

### **Future of Belfast's Libraries**

At its meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the Libraries NI Board scrutinised the findings of the review and the public consultation process. The review encompassed 32 libraries in total, 19 of which are located in the Belfast City Council area. The board determined that of the 19 libraries in Belfast City:

- Finaghy, Grove, Holywood Arches and Whiterock meet the key criteria for future use and are well placed to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century library services.
- Plans should be taken forward, subject to the availability of funding, for capital investment in Ardoyne, Chichester, Falls Road, Lisburn Road, Ormeau and Shankill Libraries.
- Ballyhackamore and Woodstock Libraries originally proposed for closure should remain open, in relation to Woodstock Library the situation should be reviewed in 2 years.
- Suffolk Library, originally proposed for amalgamation with Colin Glen Library, should remain open,

pending investigation of further developments in the area

- The remaining libraries should close and alternative provision be made, particularly for those users who are unable to access an alternative static library. The libraries which will close are Andersonstown, Ballymacarrett, Ligoniel, Oldpark, Sandy Row and Whitewell.

The Board also decided that the following libraries within the Greater Belfast Area should also close:

- Belvoir Park, Braniel, Dunmurry, Gilnahirk

### **Key Issues**

The Council in its response to the consultation document recommended the need for a more collaborative approach in the creation of estates strategies and the co-location of services in the future. The response commented that Libraries NI work closely with other statutory organisations, particularly the Council, to ensure that a collaborative partnership is adopted

Following the decisions made on the closures outlined above Libraries NI have advised that they are keen to continue to explore the feasibility of partnerships with other organisations, including Belfast City Council. Council officers will continue discussions with Libraries NI in relation to potential collaboration particularly where Belfast City Council buildings are located in the proximity of the library closures announced.

### **Recommendations**

1. To note the decisions made by the Libraries NI Board
2. Council officers to continue discussions with Libraries NI in relation to potential collaboration

### **Key to Abbreviations**

### **Documents Attached**