



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Libraries NI: Closure of Libraries in Belfast
Date:	24 September 2010
Reporting Officer:	Mr Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects (ext. 6217)
Contact Officer:	Ms Cathy Reynolds, Estates Manager, Property & Projects (ext. 3493)

Purpose

To update Members on discussions held with Libraries NI in relation to the potential collaboration with the Council following the closure of certain libraries in the Belfast area.

Relevant Background Information

The Strategic Policy & Resources Committee at their meeting on 18/06/2010 considered the decisions made by the Libraries NI Board in terms of library closures, and agreed that the Council continue discussions with Libraries NI in relation to potential collaborations. The Director of Property Projects and the Estates Manager subsequently met with the Chief Executive and other officers from Libraries NI to discuss any potential for collaboration.

Members will be aware that the libraries within the Belfast City Council area affected by closure are the Ballymacarrett, Andersonstown, Oldpark, Ligoneil, Sandy Row, and Whitewell libraries. At the meeting Libraries NI outlined their future development programme for libraries within Belfast both in terms of buildings and services.

They did stress that their new library services weren't wholly about buildings but about taking the service out to communities where demand exists. They are focusing on providing more mobile stops in certain areas; providing more individual housebound visits and developing outreach work in community settings. They are, for example, currently looking at a pilot scheme in Tullymore Community Centre as well as working with the East Belfast Community Development Agency for potential future provision of a library service at the old Templemore Avenue School as part of a larger community facility.

There is a significant focus on Belfast Central Library and opportunities for collaboration may exist in terms of hosting the 'Belfast Story'. Subsequent meetings have taken place with the relevant BCC officers on this. In addition, there still remains the possibility of the Belfast Visitor and Convention Centre relocating here but as the NI Library Authority are to have their Outline Business Case finalised by December, the Council will need to confirm with them as a matter of urgency as to whether they wish to consider relocating here in order that this can be incorporated in their outline business case. The Director of Development is to take forward discussions with the Libraries NI on this and a further report brought back to committee as appropriate.

Girdwood also remains as a possibility for a joint collaborative project and the NI Library Authority had previously expressed a willingness to co-locate here as part of the proposed Community Hub. However, the Girdwood proposal obviously depends on wider agreement in relation to the development of the overall area.

Major refurbishment and capital investment is to take place at the Falls, Shankill and Whiterock libraries, with commencement of works proposed for end December/early January. The Ormeau, Lisburn Road, Chichester and Ardoyne libraries are also included in their 3 year development plan either at their existing sites or on new sites. At the planning stage of new libraries consideration will be given to co-location with other services and Libraries NI is keen that new library developments will be integrated with community planning requirements for the areas concerned.

Libraries NI are keen to continue dialogue with the Council in terms of future developments and collaboration, and more discussions will be taking place, particularly in relation to Belfast Central Library and the integration of community planning requirements in their new refurbishment schemes. They did however point out that any such collaboration is in the financial context within which they have to work.

Key Issues

- Council officers have met with Libraries NI to discuss potential for collaboration.
- Immediate opportunities exist for collaboration at Belfast Central Library and discussions are underway regarding this.
- Girdwood remains a possibility for a collaborative project but is subject to wider agreement on overall future development proposals.
- Major refurbishment and investment is to take place at the Falls, Shankill and Whiterock libraries in the forthcoming months. The Ormeau, Chichester, Ardoyne and Lisburn Road libraries are also included in their 3 year development plan. NI Library Authority will continue dialogue with the Council in terms of integrating these developments with community planning requirements.
- Libraries NI are currently looking at community outreach service provision in certain community facilities and have increased mobile provision and individual housebound visits in areas where demand exists.

Resource Implications

Financial: None at this time

Human Resources: None at this time

Asset & Other Implications: None at this time although any future collaborative developments will have asset implications.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to note that the Council will continue the dialogue, as appropriate, with Libraries NI regarding their future development proposals and areas for joint working and collaboration. Future reports to be brought back to Committee as appropriate.