

REPORT TO: Employment Learning Skills and Communities
Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 5th June 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Neighbourhood, Leisure and Sport

SUBJECT: Library Strategy

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Purpose of this report is to present Halton's Library Strategy as a draft for comment.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

(1) The Board note and comment on the content of the draft Library Strategy.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The library service has a statutory responsibility to provide "a comprehensive and efficient library service" as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. There has never been a clear definition of what constitutes "a comprehensive and efficient service" although the national library standards did provide a framework for a time these have now been abolished and local authorities are able to determine the level and priorities of their own library services.

3.2 Several authorities have determined the level and priorities of their library services and a number have found themselves subject to legal challenge with their proposals for change being overturned in the courts.

3.3 The draft Library Strategy defines the priorities for the service in Halton over the next 3 years to ensure we fulfil our statutory responsibilities whilst contributing to the strategic priorities of the Council and delivering the service within available resources. It provides a strong set of priorities so that our financial resources are targeted where they are most needed and will be most effective.

3.4 Since 2009 there have been numerous reports and studies commissioned by government departments and other organisations about what libraries should offer to their communities. This strategy

takes into account all previous published reports but focuses on the two current documents which will influence the development of the service in the future. These are:

Universal Offers - The Society of Chief Librarians has recently announced four universal offers which constitute the service areas that modern users regard as integral to public libraries. These are Health, Reading, Information and Digital

Envisioning the Library of the Future – The final report of the Arts Council's research and consultation programme will be published shortly and will provide a strategic framework outlining the vision and role for public libraries.

3.5 The strategy has been developed by taking these documents into account along with other national and local drivers for change, and the needs and priorities of the local community including information from a number of public and staff consultations.

3.6 The Libraries Vision is supported by five overarching strategic objectives each with specific commitments and goals. The priorities under each of the objectives will be identified in our annual action plan.

3.6.1 **Libraries Vision**

We aim to achieve the best outcomes for the people of Halton and to ensure that the libraries are focal points for the community providing access to free information and resources tailored to local needs, within available resources. We will promote reading, learning and support people to develop their skills and fulfil their potential and encourage participation in the cultural and community life of the borough.

3.6.2 **Strategic objectives**

- **Inspiring a community of readers and learners**

We will engage people with books, reading and learning by providing them with inspiring collections and high quality information resources. We will create opportunities to share the enjoyment of reading and learn together, in libraries, in a relaxed and informal environment.

- **Employment, enterprise and developing online skills**

We will ensure all residents of Halton can learn to access the Internet for free in libraries with appropriate support.

- **Extending access through innovation and new technology**

We will grasp the opportunities offered by new technology to widen access to the library service and attract new audiences. We will put more information resources online and create digital content so that more people are able to discover, access, share, download and re-use our collections and services

- **Providing a relevant and responsive library service**

We will deliver a library service that is highly valued and highly rated by customers for its effectiveness and efficiency

- **Workforce development**

We will develop and maintain an enthusiastic and dedicated workforce with customer service excellence at the heart of our delivery. The library workforce will be welcoming and highly skilled so that using libraries is an enjoyable and enriching experience for everyone.

3.7 **Next Steps**

Barring the need for any major changes to the document as a result of consultation, it is intended that the final draft strategy is presented to Executive Board for consideration and adoption at the end of June 2013

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Library Strategy will set the priorities for the service for the next 3 years to ensure that we fulfil our statutory responsibilities.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Library Strategy will set the priorities for the service so that financial resources are targeted where they are most needed and will be most effective. It provides the context for reviewing the service and an opportunity to consider service delivery within resources available.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The Library Strategy supports the development of reading as a key skill and through subsequent action plans will ensure close working relationships with partners to support the Council's priorities

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The Library Strategy identifies the key areas of work to support literacy, learning, access to information and digital inclusion and will ensure a close working relationship with partners to support the Council's priorities

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The Library Strategy will raise the profile of the service to ensure that the library offer complements and supports the work of partners and becomes an integral part of the work to improve the health and wellbeing of the community

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The Library Strategy supports the development of facilities for public use and will ensure that services are accessible both physically and virtually are open to all and become focal points of the community within available resources.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The Library Services Strategy does not present any obvious risk however there may be risks associated with the resultant action plans. These will be assessed as appropriate.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 This is in line with all equality and diversity issues in Halton.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.