

# CONNECTING LIBRARIES

The report of the independent advisory board on libraries to Westminster City Council



# en's Library

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 / Foreword from the Board Chair

Westminster City Council established a Libraries Advisory Board in 2017 with the aim of engaging expertise at a time of profound change in local government, to assist it to determine the medium and longer-term future direction for its public libraries and archives.

Westminster's libraries have a strong base of a valued and well-used service to build the future on, including its regionally and nationally important archive, music and special collections. The operation of the service was remodelled in 2017<sup>1</sup> to ensure value for money and to help make it fit for the future in the light of local government austerity, but the Council wanted to look at what needs to happen next.

To begin with, we want to dismiss the notion that libraries are only about buildings as expensive receptacles of books and cosy places serving primarily the more affluent resident.

It is clear to the Board, through our visits and research, that libraries and the people who work in them are in an enviable position of trust, and that the benefits of a good quality library service are appreciated by its users and more widely in the community. The library service needs to find ways of encouraging a greater number of non-users to engage with libraries. Although councils have a statutory duty to provide a free public library service, it needs to generate a high level of take-up to justify expenditure and continued investment.

Nationally and internationally, public libraries are going through a renaissance, both in terms of the social infrastructure they provide, and the broadening of services and experiences they offer. At our sessions, we heard about libraries in Denmark (Aarhus), Finland (the new Helsinki library), and in other major British cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, and these examples formed the Board's strong view that libraries are already community facilities and assets, and given the right nurturing they could become a key focus of community activity and strengthen community pride and sense of place.

They are increasingly playing a key role in the provision of collaborative and diverse workspaces for the community as well as evolving into hubs for education, health, entertainment, and work. Libraries are encouraging people back into the physical space, by providing facilities and services people want, such as coffee shops, access to free Wi-Fi, child care programmes, health and lifestyle classes, senior citizen contact opportunities, and much more; while the 'walls' of libraries continue to expand beyond the physical space, with online resources, social media and mobile apps changing how collections and services are delivered.

Apart from our own deliberations and site visits, we have had working sessions covering effective use of digital services, the integration of better ways to serve the community jointly with other public services in Westminster, alternative delivery models, the value of cultural and heritage collections and services, and libraries' role in supporting communities to come together.

<sup>1</sup> Future delivery of the library service: Report to the Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure and Community by Director of Libraries and Culture, 28.11.16

## Board visits to libraries

We visited libraries at different times of the day, which made us realise the true range of activities that take place and the varied reasons why people use them. The popular misconception is that public libraries are entirely about lending books, to a shrinking number of users. **Our visits convinced us that a well-run library service:**

- offers a wide range of reading materials in digital as well as print formats with collections tailored to local need;
- supports community development as a hub for activity and access;
- provide learning opportunities for all ages and backgrounds;
- supports economic development by providing a reason for people to visit the neighbourhood, as well as helping people with skills; and
- introduces people to technology, helping bridge the digital divide.

## 1.2 / How to move forward

Despite these consuming sessions, I am all too conscious that there are many strategic strands to develop and we have only been dipping our toes into what a library service of the future might look like. It is not about painting a detailed picture, but some clear and strong themes came to the surface from all presentations and discussions. Above all, presentations demonstrated the need for passionate commitment by all stakeholders, and the will to come up with and implement a robust bold vision. Passion and committed engagement are essential to drive forward innovation, community engagement and develop a beacon service for the wide and diverse communities that make use of libraries. This is true whether it is providing strategic leadership, front line services or as a partner.

Severe financial cuts, as we heard about in Lewisham, could have led to library services imploding. But through the passionate hard work and creative thinking of many individuals, with a range of stakeholder interests being engaged, change has been effected for the good, and use of library services there has increased. This underlines what can positively be achieved by combining genuine commitment to the service on the part of the local authority with effective use of available resources and harnessing of community support, enabling a continuing and thriving library service.

This report advocates for a continuing and strong role for public library services in the City of Westminster, and **aims to enlighten the reader about the value of libraries and how they have an important place in the development of the city**, as it is articulated in the draft City Plan going forward to 2040.

I hope the Cabinet, Councillors, officers, the library and archive service, residents, stakeholders, potential partners and external advisors, all of whom this report is aimed at, will investigate, debate and take forward the thoughts and ideas in it, in order to develop the service in the future. I trust this work will assist in strengthening the future of the service, clarifying its future direction of travel together with the investment the Council makes in its public library services.

## 1.3 / Acknowledgments and thanks

I would like to thank the many people who have assisted the Library Advisory Board, for the time and commitment that has been given. I think we have covered a large spectrum of issues over the past year. The contributions from participants, the Board, officers including libraries director Mike Clarke and his team, Councillors David Harvey and Guthrie McKie, who observed the Board in action, library staff, and members of library friends groups. They are listed in Appendix 1, together with brief biographies of presenters and Board members.

Importantly, I would also like to thank all those who presented at Board sessions, sharing their expertise and perspectives as guest speakers. Presentations to the Board have been excellent and wide-ranging, inspiring and thought-provoking. Each session is written up in Appendix 2 and that overview is well worth reading.

We had presentations and question and answer sessions from the director of libraries at Arts Council England, the chair of the Society of Chief Librarians, members of the Kent Arts and Libraries team, the head of Lewisham library services, the managing director of social enterprise Wimbletech on start-up business working in collaboration with libraries; passionate delivery from Ciara Eastell OBE, of Devon's Libraries Unlimited, and by the deputy chief executive of leisure provider GLL. There was also a perspective from the then director of library services at King's College London and a compelling presentation from the chief executive of the National Libraries Taskforce. Board member Ayub Khan also gave us some interesting observations from his own experiences – as a local government chief officer and president of the librarians' professional body Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – visiting other library services in the UK and abroad.

All of these inputs greatly influenced Board thinking – and this report – in one way or another and we are immensely grateful to everyone who took time and trouble to come and talk to us. Despite this, the recommendations and conclusions in this report are solely the Board's and we take full ownership of them.

**Chris Cotton DL**  
Chair, Westminster Libraries Advisory Board  
London: February 2019



# CONTEXT, BACKGROUND AND FIRST THOUGHTS

**2.1 /** Before we get to the recommendations of the report, we have tried to put them in some context, viewing the recommendations in the light of national ambitions for libraries expressed in the National Libraries Taskforce publication “Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England (2016)”. We have also considered the strategic goals of the City of Westminster expressed in the “City for All” vision. We believe Westminster’s library service can be an exemplar of the Libraries Deliver approach, as well as supporting a range of highly desirable outcomes that the Council wishes to see more broadly.

**2.2 /** Westminster is a unique place. A city within a city, with a global outlook - Westminster has a higher proportion of working-age residents, and a lower proportion of younger and older residents than the London average.<sup>2</sup> Its cultural diversity and range of ethnic backgrounds is immense, and there are wide variations in personal financial resources. Residents interact with an important daily workforce that enjoys many services provided by Westminster City Council, most of whom live, and commute from, elsewhere.

There is a student influx too, with many major seats of learning. There is also a huge tourist pull into the City throughout the year providing significant employment opportunities. Visitors enjoy the shops, the richness of the performing arts, museums, the parks and historic buildings that abound, whilst others are here for the Mother of Parliaments, royal connections or religious history. Public libraries engage with residents, businesses, visitors and students, and the city’s healthy economy, rich mix of cultural activity, and academic credentials should provide opportunities for partnering in the future across a range of fields and activities.

### **2.3 / Libraries Deliver: the national strategy for libraries**

The National Libraries Taskforce was jointly commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Local Government Association. Libraries Deliver sets out the challenges and opportunities

for libraries at a national level, and makes a strong case for councils to tap into the full potential of libraries to impact on a vast array of potential beneficial outcomes. We have been encouraged by the Taskforce’s findings, which have resonated with what we received during our own investigations. A council that empowers and invests in its library services can unlock their potential to be, at different times, both a driving force and a conduit, acting in conjunction with other services, in delivering many of the strategic aims of the authority.

Libraries Deliver is a positive message with some depth that enriches the future of libraries debate and demonstrates the extraordinary reach that libraries can achieve assisting a wide range of outcomes for communities: delivering value for money, wide opportunities for partnering, and community engagement.

### **2.4 / Libraries help to deliver for Westminster a City for All**

It became clear when compiling the Board’s proposals that the recommendations of Libraries Deliver dovetail into all the themes in the “City for All” vision. This led us to conclude that thriving libraries are in a unique position and important resource to help deliver a “City for All”; from improving health and wellbeing, and building cohesive and ambitious communities, through supporting local enterprise and driving growth, to supporting civic engagement. Many of the “City for All” aspirations can be actively and directly driven through the Council’s libraries offer.

The foundations for this approach exist in Westminster already. We were particularly struck and encouraged by the commitment of senior officers whom we met from the adult social care, children’s, public health and housing departments to engage with library services. Many see libraries as part of key community services, which can assist in the delivery of aspects of their services in a trusted and friendly way.

<sup>2</sup> Westminster census and mid-year estimates, source: ONS, from WCC website

## 2.5 / Changing times, changing libraries

The scope of activity of all public libraries as we know them has evolved since their first inception in the 19th century but no more so than in the last 25 years as the digital society has emerged. The way people produce, consume and store information has been revolutionised. Alongside this societal change, libraries around the country have grown their offer and changed the ways they deliver services. Westminster's libraries and archives are no exception, developing in response to local need and national trends, and providing a mix of services that is specific to the city and the neighbourhoods within it.

2.6 / The Public Libraries Act of 1964 (over half a century ago) set out the duty of every authority "to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons", but the exact scope and quality of service is discretionary, for individual councils to decide. However, there is some consensus: drawing on this, we think a well-run service should provide:

- enjoyment in reading and other cultural and creative activities;
- raise aspirations and building skills so people can achieve their full potential, regardless of background;
- share information actively, encouraging people to engage with, co-create and learn from each other; and
- provide trust and practical support and advice to those who need it.

2.7 / The Act allows councils a lot of leeway in how much they provide and what they expect their library services to do. In recent times, this has meant that councils have decided to close some of their libraries, in many cases reducing the service to a minimum level of provision they think will be legally acceptable. Others have handed libraries over to volunteers to run entirely. This may initially seem attractive as it avoids library closures and maintains an impression of a full service, but in some cases it has resulted in the library service being hollowed out. Expensive buildings are maintained, but little goes on in them,

and over time as use declines, so the argument for closure seems to build up. It should be said, volunteer involvement in libraries is generally beneficial to the service, but where they are properly supported and not used as a substitute for adequate funding.

### The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

This Act makes public libraries a statutory service. It requires councils (including London boroughs) to ensure there is a "comprehensive and efficient" public library service. Local authorities must:

- provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all people that would like to use it;
- promote the service; and
- lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.

The Act gives requirements for the range of resources to be provided and the provision of support for people to access the service.

The Government or more specifically, the Secretary of State for Culture, oversees a local authority's role in complying with the Act.

(Source: CILIP briefing on Public Library Act 1964 [2015])

2.8 / The Westminster City Council, by contrast, has one of the best-funded and best-used public library services in the country, in relation to the size of its resident population. The Council's "City for All" vision declares that it wishes to "retain and support Westminster's libraries at the heart of our neighbourhoods."<sup>3</sup> The library service in Westminster provides a wide range of core activity in response to the statutory requirement, as well as a range of additional services that add value and deliver a greatly enhanced library offer (see infographic on page 9). However, a step change is required to allow libraries to fulfil their potential to fully serve, engage with, and contribute to local

communities. In Westminster, the retention of 12 public buildings across the city<sup>4</sup> (not counting the separate children's library at Paddington, and the music, schools and home library services) means that funding is stretched over numerous locations of varying age, suitability and quality, delivering variable services.

Tailoring of services is not always by community need, but sometimes by what the individual building can accommodate. The Board believes that the service is likely to be more effective, and more services better delivered, if a thorough review of needs and standards were to be undertaken in conjunction with a clear set of objectives, which should be developed by the Council following on from this report.

<sup>4</sup> The 12 sites are: City of Westminster archives centre, Charing Cross, Church St, Maida Vale, Marylebone, Mayfair, Paddington, Pimlico, Queens Park, St John's Wood and Victoria libraries and Westminster reference library

## What Westminster's libraries and archives do



<sup>3</sup> Working with you to build a city for all, WCC 2018

2.9 / We also urge Westminster City Council to be bold and not be afraid to try out new ways of working and service offers, building on a strong track record which includes initiatives such as Making Every Contact Count, ESOL<sup>5</sup> for Health, early years Rhymetime sessions and others. The service should take every opportunity and make a clear strategic plan for working with partners to innovate, to make sure libraries continue to retain the relevance and accessibility that clearly attracts so many in our community to use them. At the same time, judgement should be used to select the right service offers that are congruent with the read, learn, connect vision, and any temptation to chase every possible activity or fund to fill spaces and justify existence should be resisted.

2.10 / Councillor Richard Beddoe, Westminster City Council Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning, said: *“As we set out to create our city of the future, there is one question that should be at the forefront of our minds in every development we undertake: Will this be an asset to people’s lives? If we can answer this positively every time, the Westminster of 2040 is one we will all want to be a part of.”*

Although the timeline of this report is much shorter, we believe the Council’s determination to make Westminster a world-class city should include the ambition of offering world-class libraries. We think this will contribute to Westminster’s desire to create the city of the future. Singapore presents a possible example. As a small nation state, poor in natural resources, it has invested in the educational and creative potential of its citizens through high quality schools, universities and public libraries. The Singapore government defines a world-class library service as a dynamic library system characterised by convenience, accessibility and usefulness, which cultivates the culture of lifelong learning, creativity and entrepreneurship. (National Library Board’s annual review, 2017/18.<sup>6</sup>)

Chair Heng Kee says: *“our vision[is] to create readers for life, learning communities and a knowledgeable nation. The role of libraries*

*today goes beyond providing books. As Singapore gears up for the future economy, it is also important that we help people keep abreast of global trends and the developments in a fast-growing world.”*

2.11 / While the exact nature of the services libraries provide has changed over the years, their underlying purpose has remained constant. Public libraries have always existed to support all people in bettering their circumstances – regardless of their current situation. The original legislation in 1850 established the principle of free public libraries, and it was considered their core purpose to promote literacy, reading and learning that would enable self-improvement and reduce levels of crime. Although this assumption was borne from middle-class paternalism, the argument has been refined over the years and there is now a strong evidence-based link between levels of literacy and levels of crime, as well as with health, self-advancement, job opportunities, and happy retirement. For example, the Shannon Trust, which works with prisoners to improve their reading and literacy, says: *“Learning to read isn’t just a brilliant thing, it changes lives. It builds confidence, helps keep people connected and makes the world an easier place to live. It makes the impossible, possible. [Our] Reading Plan is helping people in prison.”<sup>7</sup>*

Libraries continue to help deliver a range of socially beneficial outcomes through their core purpose of encouraging lifelong reading and learning.

**2.12 / Broad yet purposeful focus**

We are not advocating that libraries should be all things to all people. Libraries should become engaged where they can make a difference – carefully prioritising where to engage, in consultation with colleagues and users. It is the fundamental purpose of libraries – to promote reading and learning – that has an under-recognised impact on a range of outcomes. The Council should recognise this potential and exploit it by targeted investment and much-improved partnership in some key areas.

The infographic (below) illustrates some of the key groups targeted by libraries’ universal service according to the Libraries Deliver report 2016. This approach links to number of Westminster’s existing strategies such as the Active Westminster Strategy and the council’s emerging Cultural Vision.



5 English for speakers of other languages, a variety of courses by a number of different providers are available in Westminster’s libraries  
 6 www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/s-347of2018.pdf  
 7 www.shannontrust.org.uk/impact

**2.13 /** The Board saw for itself that Westminster's Church Street library is a focal point of its community as a cultural hub, information centre and meeting point. It is also a bringer of investment both directly (with National lottery and Arts Council funding) and through people being attracted to visit and spend money in Church Street's shops and businesses. A good library can help a community feel more confident – such as the examples we heard about including the Avonmore library in Hammersmith and Fulham, which runs in partnership between the council and Citizens' Advice, and in Lewisham, where volunteers play a big part in service delivery and development.

One of the Board members had recently visited Aarhus, Denmark, where a new library forms the focal point of the city's approach to citizenship and new arrivals. Birth registrations take place in the library, and a bell is rung each time a new birth is registered there. In Suffolk, the library service is now a community business, run by a mix of employees who own a notional share and community representatives on a trust: use and funding from other sources beyond the council has grown significantly since this started.

**2.14 /** Integrating libraries to the delivery of a wider range of goals with other public services is likely require restructuring budgets and possibly redirecting some spend (either way). It is also likely to require exploration of other funding options that will meet strategic priorities. We recommend that this is explored and reviewed, as part of budget-planning processes over the next year, and findings implemented in 2020/21 and 2021/22. See also the section on page 33 regarding financial reality.

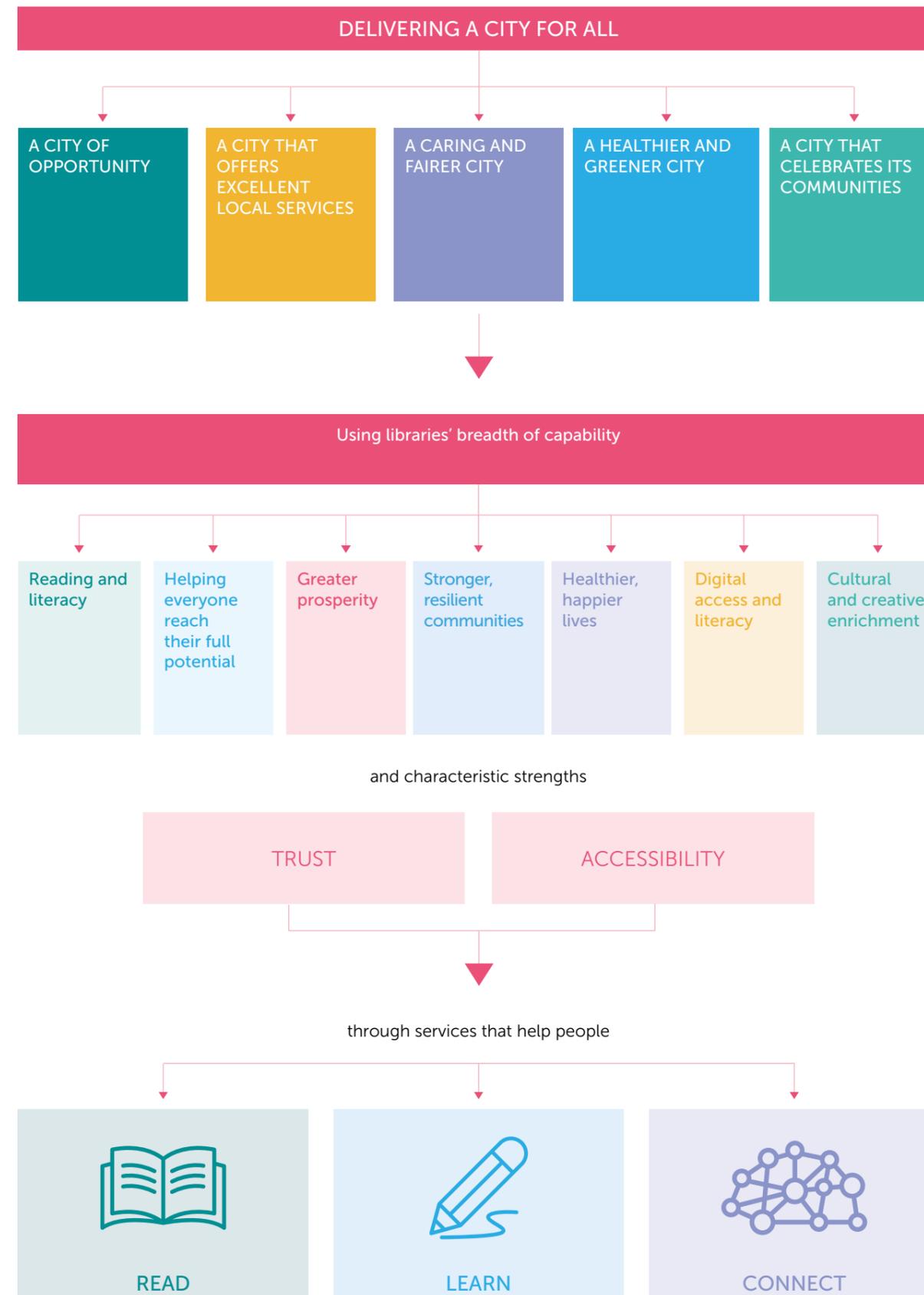
**2.15 /** A key area for renewed focus is in the link between libraries and learning: we want the link between the two to be renewed and strengthened. This enhances the original purpose of libraries but also supports a revitalised 'offer' for adults in the City. Such an offer would include access to both informal and formal learning (including academic courses), career coaching, support for entrepreneurs (who may not necessarily

appreciate that they are entrepreneurs, and personal skills building. This will create opportunities in an accessible, safe and familiar environment – a good starting point for many people. We say a bit more about this in our first recommendation.

**2.16 /** All Council services make their contribution to the society we live in and how we care for and interact with that society. Libraries have a special opportunity to contribute. In the words of Malorie Blackman, author and past Children's Laureate, quoted in *Libraries Deliver*: *"What do libraries do for us? Well, they introduce many into the world of literacy and learning and help to make it a lifelong habit; they equalize; they teach empathy and help us to learn about each other; they preserve our cultural heritage; they protect our right to know and to learn; they build communities; they strengthen and advance us as a nation; they empower us as individuals."*

**2.17 / Creating a joined-up purpose**

Our recommendations have been developed with a view to utilising libraries' existing strengths to deliver or enhance the five distinct areas identified by Westminster in City for All. This does not mean the long-standing purpose of public libraries – reading and learning – is set aside. In fact, it is essential, because it is by using the library service's mission of Read, Learn, Connect as a starting point that Westminster's libraries draw people in and make these opportunities happen. The following recommendations, the Board believes, could help the Council gain even more value and benefit for people from the remarkable potential offered by libraries' position of trust and accessibility.



# WHAT THE BOARD RECOMMENDS

## 3.1 / The overall approach

- Do not be afraid to be bold
- Adopt (and adapt) the vision for public library services articulated in Libraries Deliver, and use it to support City for All
- Develop and empower staff and volunteers, for a confident workforce which advocates for itself and the service
- Be consultative and collaborative: learn from others and look to co-design and co-produce services with the local community, business, and other council services
- Maintain a recognisable core service throughout the City, tailored and delivered expertly in local settings and with flexibility to meet local need

### We also think the following are very important:

- Developing a plan without a vision will not be effective. Our recommendations should be seen as helping develop a vision rather than a delivery plan, which comes next
- Explore how libraries can be resourced and invested in for the future, to ensure the best outcomes

Apart from general recommendations and observations throughout the report we highlight five specific service delivery recommendations that link to City for All.

## 3.2 / How we have structured our recommendations

- There are five main recommendations
- Brief introduction to each
- Why and how for each recommendation
- Desired outcomes

### The purposes of public libraries, agreed between central and local government, are:

- cultural and creative enrichment;
- increased reading and literacy;
- improved digital access and digital literacy;
- helping everyone achieve their full potential;
- healthier and happier lives;
- greater prosperity; and
- stronger, more resilient communities.

Source: Libraries Deliver, 2016



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## FIRST RECOMMENDATION: LIBRARIES HELP MAKE WESTMINSTER A CITY OF OPPORTUNITY

### Refocusing resources and combining with other services to ensure libraries are a vital platform for delivery

Westminster's libraries help everyone to *"have the opportunity to build and maintain their lives, careers and families"*, a priority of City for All. To do this, providing lifelong learning resources is essential. Accessible and trusted libraries provide resources, support and a "safe space" – particularly for those who need encouragement, help or support. This requires a clear tie-in with both adult education services and the Council's economic development work, to ensure seamless provision, best use of resources and, for the library service, a performance target to reflect the number of adults engaged and assisted and finding their lives enhanced. Some of these offerings may be "added value" or charged for at point of use, in addition to the core, free offer.

This recommendation has two strands – literacy and digital literacy; and greater prosperity.

### FIRST STRAND: LITERACY AND DIGITAL LITERACY

#### WHY?

Literacy improves life chances and is shown to have a positive impact on school achievement, employability, and health. The National Literacy Trust says: *"Lacking vital literacy skills holds a person back at every stage of their life."* Some parents find they can't support their own child's learning due to their own lack of literacy skills, lack of space and equipment particularly when children, as they grow up, have varying needs according to age. Low levels of literacy can also hamper social mobility.

In addition to this, the lack of basic skills has implications for isolation, social cohesion, and mental health. Libraries are an obvious place to start with the wealth of reading and digital materials and trusted staff to help people read, learn and find out more. Libraries are also places where people should be encouraged to come to learn new digital skills. The worldwide web and Google have made information so readily accessible and available to all that apparently there may be no need for libraries. However, there is still a substantial number of people who do not have ready access to digital services, for reasons of cost or accessibility. Others need help in researching, navigating and assessing the trustworthiness of information from often complex networks of resources. In the era of 'fake news', information literacy has never been so important and library staff help people develop this critical tool. Increasingly, public libraries are also partnering with technology companies and the academic sector to offer access for everyone to research reports and data, providing a valuable 'open source' for communities.

Digital literacy and digital inclusion should be strongly promoted as not only do they have huge benefits across learning, employment and leisure, they also align with the Council's own drive to connect with more people digitally.

#### HOW?

Expand the current reading and digital support programmes – independently and with partners particularly forging a new relationship with Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES). Engage more volunteers or secondees from business partnerships to work alongside library staff helping people become independent users of digital services.

Support a rolling programme of investment in IT to ensure that libraries update and provide a “world class” digital experience. The existing library offer we heard described by one of the staff as ‘2G’. Ideally, libraries should offer a superfast digital hub with modern infrastructure that can support the community in acquiring digital skills, giving people greater confidence and the ability to do homework, research and learning; to improve their health and wellbeing, job seeking, and their ability to engage with public services and e-commerce. It will also showcase the benefits of superfast, encouraging takeup, and this could potentially be a partnership with a major provider.

The service should, with the council’s IT provider, consider launching “*Westminster libraries in the cloud*” bringing together an improved digital offering, which would include digitising all its wonderful assets – not least more of the archive and reference library collections, so that more people can access them more easily.

## SECOND STRAND: GREATER PROSPERITY

### WHY?

Public libraries have always been a means to self-improvement and reskilling. They can support people into jobs and entrepreneurship through providing facilities for research, learning space, and resources, with a real focus on incubation and microbusinesses, and promotion of access to resources and knowledge in partnership with companies and individuals who can offer some of their time and skills each week.

### HOW?

#### We recommend the library service should:

- Develop a specific strategy to offer skills development, business and entrepreneurship support with a real focus on incubation and microbusinesses, and promotion of access to resources and knowledge such as the existing business information points. As we stated above (in Broad Yet Purposeful Focus), this should be done by renewing and revitalising the partnership with WAES, and working with the economic development team, and Westminster Employment Service
- Trigger business start-ups (particularly digital) by providing access to kit, connectivity and advice – a good example is the Makerspaces established by some libraries; we know this may be past being considered ‘innovative’ now but could be refreshed for the next generation
- Define a package of employment support to be delivered at each library as part of the core offer, including a range of basic support with job search, CV and application writing, and presentational skills. Specialist career advice should be made available within libraries to enhance this core offering
- Work with the economic development and commercial strategy teams in the council, build partnerships with large local employers which offer progressive career opportunities, to trial new forms of support. These would be delivered through library spaces, to assist low-income residents to progress in the workplace. For example, Google could be helped to identify and recruit a cohort of digital apprentices from low-income backgrounds, with support provided away from the workplace in libraries (coaching, tech skills, life skills, self-led learning, mentoring). This could parallel a scheme the City of London already has in place to improve in-work progression by young Black and minority ethnic (BAME) employees. Follow up with research to evaluate outcomes

#### We recommend the Council should:

- Develop a comprehensive learning and skills “offer to adults” in Westminster with recognition for libraries as entry points to a high-quality learning experience

#### Proposed outcomes:

- 50% of adults requiring literacy and digital skills improvement over the next five years are supported by libraries
- Learners gain recognised qualifications through participation in library programmes
- 10% of the City of Westminster’s target for people into jobs each year will have engaged with a programme in, or been supported by, libraries (75 people)

#### Case study

**Glass Box** is a community space in Taunton Library to support digital and business innovation where start-ups, innovators and digital makers can come together to share knowledge and increase digital skills development. The library works in partnership with businesses, who can offer to share their skills and expertise. Workshops have included a Google Digital Garage masterclass, where experts from Google offered advice and tips to local business owners on growing their businesses.

#### Library facts:

The British Library’s ‘**Enterprising Libraries**’ network has helped to create **1,692 new businesses** and **4,178 jobs** between 2013 and 2015 resulting in a payback of £4.50 for every £1 of public money spent. Of the people who started a new business, **47%** were women, **26%** were from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and **25%** were unemployed or had been made redundant.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Enterprising Libraries: Engines of innovation and economic growth (Key findings of an Economic Impact Analysis), British Library, March 2015

## SECOND RECOMMENDATION: LIBRARIES HELP SUPPORT A CITY THAT PROVIDES EXCELLENT LOCAL SERVICES

### Libraries provide a place and help make things happen

Libraries' intrinsic accessibility and trustworthiness can not only support improved services but also add value to the existing provision. We also think the commercial potential of libraries – some of it known, some of it still to be uncovered – should be maximised to help them be sustainable.

Westminster City Council has “*a national reputation for providing excellent local, value for money services*”. In deciding how to continue to drive efficiencies as well as improvement, the council should be mindful that libraries are able to offer locations across the City and trusted staff through which the community can access a wide range of services. This is a capability which can reduce pressure and levels of demand on other council services. Some examples of what we mean are noted below.

### WHY?

Libraries are in communities where often there are few other visible public and community spaces. They provide a readymade shop window and place for service providers and residents to interact. People feel more comfortable using a library in a way they don't with a council office, advice service or even, in some cases, health services. These levels of trust, combined with accessibility, are specific to libraries and can help the council achieve its strategic objectives and boost community resilience and independence.

There are efficiency gains in using libraries, in addition to or in place of other facilities and resources, in both using resources well, and outcomes. Currently, thousands of people attend library health and well-being events each year, supporting public health priorities including smoking cessation, healthier eating, and better mental health. Often these are low-level interventions, such as books on prescription, which helps people take ownership of a mental health issue, used before the need for more intensive therapies arise. This can save money downstream as lower cost interventions reducing or delaying the need for more expensive one-to-one therapies provides a saving for the NHS and may also be better for the patient.

### HOW?

#### We recommend the library service should:

- Make the business case for efficiency gains for other services, engaging corporate policy, public health and others to support developing the evidence base
- Develop its commercial strategy, more pro-actively seeking funding opportunities. We recommend this be done in a clear and strategic way aligned with financial planning and corporate commercial opportunities
- Prioritise fundraising and commercial activity as a given. Westminster's libraries have taken some first steps in this but should review this area, supported by the council's commercial team, and secure support for doing more. Learning from the experience of some of their teams (archives, music, for example) in leveraging funding successfully, and scaling this up

#### We recommend the Council should:

- Carry out a full review across all council service portfolios, looking at where libraries could help deliver and communicate initiatives and help see them actioned. Build findings and resulting proposed actions directly into service development and financial planning
- Help the service become more adept at fundraising and commercial partnerships. It has already taken some steps to grow in these areas but they require skill and specialist knowledge, at a time when more public and voluntary services are chasing the same funding pots and opportunities. Set realistic targets but also engage the service with wider corporate fundraising and commercial activity

#### Proposed outcomes:

- Libraries have a secure resource base enabling longer-term planning (five years or more)
- Commercial strategy introduces greater resilience for the service, protecting and complementing the core offer and enabling the introduction of financially viable service improvements and enhancements to spaces

#### Case study:

Chelmsley Wood library, Solihull

- The library includes co-location with a community advice hub and health hub in an urban neighbourhood
- Council-run
- Library service review (2017) future strategic direction emphasises more hubs and partnership working

#### Library facts:

Library users place a theoretical monetary value of £24 - £27 per visit on their library service, which is 5.5 - 7.5 times greater than the cost of provision.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The Economic Impact of Libraries Report, Alliance of Libraries and Archives UK, 2014

## THIRD RECOMMENDATION: LIBRARIES BECOME A VISIBLE ADVOCATE OF A CARING AND FAIRER CITY

### Accessible spaces fostering community spirit

“City for All” says that *“caring for our most vulnerable...is and will always remain our most important priority.”* Libraries, as trusted and safe spaces, are somewhere the most vulnerable can have a place and a voice and participate in activities rather than feeling isolated.

### WHY?

Westminster should be a place where people look out for each other, fostering a sense of community, and where everyone has a chance. Libraries can help promote social inclusion and make people feel part of the city and welcomed. They are already places people go for help, for advice and to make contact. We want to see the council build on this by using libraries to make even more connections in our sometimes-fragmented urban life. Going back to first principles, and the legal basis for libraries, they should genuinely be “for all” – ages, backgrounds and communities – which helps build cohesion.

### HOW?

By using libraries to foster community spirit, connectedness and shared experiences, helping tackle loneliness among not just elderly people but also the isolation felt by new arrivals with a lack of English skills, carers, people with mental health problems, or parents at home with a very young child. There should be a fair deal for young people – many of whom use libraries for study, but are sometimes overlooked for other needs. The service can learn lessons from its colleagues in youth services and sport and leisure in its engagement.

Libraries should, as a given, be accessible – not just for mobility impaired people, but to all: people with dementia and their carers, homeless and vulnerably housed people, and those with mental health issues, as well as easy to use for parents and carers with buggies and prams. This may need investment, as some facilities currently do not meet these needs resulting in those people not being able to access services. Certainly, the Council should look for opportunities to reprovide or upgrade outmoded facilities, wherever this is possible, either through planned maintenance and development, or opportunities that arise to replace existing provision with new. This should form part of the library location strategy we suggest later in this report (see section 6.4). We are aware the Council has opportunities for two new libraries in Westminster to replace current, inadequate provision: these should be used as prototypes for an “inclusive from go” approach.

### We recommend the library service should:

- Support action to tackle the “loneliness epidemic” through a targeted, measurable programme in partnership with adult social care
- Ensure all libraries become dementia-friendly spaces as they are refurbished or provided, and more staff are encouraged to become Dementia Friends as part of the national ADS scheme
- Provide a consistent standard of service to homeless or vulnerably housed library users complementing the work of the council’s homelessness team to understand needs whilst managing any behavioural issues
- Develop an engagement strategy with young people – including non-users of libraries within a 16-30 age group – making them feel it’s “their library”

### We recommend the Council should:

- As a priority, address the accessibility and quality of the service provision – particularly its buildings, to ensure barriers to using libraries are reduced and removed. This includes both physical access, supportive technologies, staff training and awareness, and co-design of services with users
- Use the potential of the community infrastructure levy and section 106 resources in a strategic way to support these changes, with the engagement of local communities

### Proposed outcomes:

- All libraries to be fully and equitably accessible, with standards assessed and agreed with disability and community organisations, and percentage of registered users with a declared disability is aligned to City of Westminster resident proportion by 2025
- Westminster’s libraries are seen as a national benchmark for accessible service provision by peers and national organisations, by 2025

### Case study:

**Sandal Library** in Wakefield received a major internal and external refurbishment in 2015. The interior was redesigned so that people living with dementia would feel comfortable, supported and more independent. Planned in partnership with the Alzheimer’s Society, Sandal Library became the district’s first dementia friendly public building and is likely to be the first fully dementia friendly library building in the country.

Practical things include: a colour scheme which is deep red making it warm, friendly and calming; furniture which is suited to the people who will use it; a reduction of reflective surfaces; contrasting door frames making it easier for people to recognize them against the walls; and signage that is easy to understand. They have published details about these changes in a guide. Since reopening, it has become a beacon of good practice for other library services and health professionals. Its local community has also enthusiastically supported their new local library and it has become a vibrant hub of community life.

### Library facts:

**68%** of people feel isolated following a diagnosis of dementia, and **85%** want to stay at home as long as possible after a diagnosis. However, one study found that people with dementia regularly go out alone and this improves their health, wellbeing, and independence. Familiar places help people to find their way around, and data from the national Taking Part Survey 2016 (DCMS) indicates that over one-third of people aged 75+ already use their public library.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sources: “Over half of people fear dementia diagnosis, 62 percent think it means ‘life is over’ ” study; Dementia Awareness Week 15th-21st May 2016 from the Alzheimer’s Society, YouGov poll (June 2014) commissioned by Alzheimer’s Society, Mitchell, L. and E. Burton (2010) Designing dementia-friendly neighborhoods: helping people with dementia to get out and about.

## FOURTH RECOMMENDATION: LIBRARIES HELP MAKE A HEALTHIER AND GREENER CITY

### Libraries are a key resource for social prescribing and referrals

Social prescribing is a means of enabling GPs, health and social care professionals, the voluntary sector and other partners such as job centres and pharmacies, to refer people to a social prescribing advisor, who supports and refers patients to local services such as walking clubs, gardening or arts activities.

By providing non-medical support, it aims to improve patients' quality of life, health and wellbeing by recognising that health is affected by a range of social, economic and environmental factors, and by helping them take greater control over their own health. Evidence shows that this approach works: a UK study found that after three to four months, 80% of patients referred to a social prescribing scheme were paying fewer visits to A&E, outpatient appointments and inpatient admissions.<sup>11</sup>

Dr Neil Churchill, NHS England's director for experience, participation and equalities, said: *"Readers have always believed in the benefits of reading but initiatives like these show how important libraries can be to our health and wellbeing, especially for people feeling lonely or isolated and living with poor health. It's great to see the NHS partnering public libraries to make sure we can help more people find answers to their troubles and not just treat the symptoms."*<sup>12</sup>

To help Westminster be a healthier city, where people grow up, live and age well, libraries can contribute to people's understanding and engagement with their own health and well-being, as well as that of the community around them. More than anywhere else, in health, knowledge is power, and a more informed population is better able to make informed choices.

### WHY?

Fundamentally, libraries are about a broad-based and hugely effective form of social prescribing on a mass scale, substituting participation, learning and social contact for clinical treatments. It's for this reason that libraries are co-located with local health centres in Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Lambeth and many other areas. Kent Arts and Libraries demonstrated to the Board how their digital services communicate with the growing ageing population and help link up people with each other and services, remotely, to assist in providing reassurance and combating loneliness.

Public libraries already support better health and well-being for many people, helping them to become active, live better and maintain their mental health. Westminster's library and archive services are no exception. Health checks, smoking cessation groups, chair-based exercise for older people and reading for mental health activities take place every week, and libraries are a key place that people seek information and advice about health and well-being at a time and in an environment, which tends to make them comfortable and receptive to these messages.

### HOW?

As a free, local and accessible resource, delivered in a non-stigmatising environment, the service can play a role in overcoming some of the causes of health inequalities, including lack of information as well as deprivation, levels of formal education, and physical mobility. Libraries can also play a part in the emerging "tranquillity agenda", providing space for people to recharge and reflect in our vibrant, "always-on" culture. This could contribute further to the mental health benefits they can bring.

### We recommend the service should:

- Continue the partnership with public health, building on the success of the health information officer, training for staff in Making Every Contact Count, and the 1,000 health activities in libraries every year. Update and develop the health offer in libraries
- Build the offer with local health professionals, particularly GPs, to ensure they know about what libraries in their locality can do. Remove any barriers to awareness and build this in as a key local target for each individual library
- Ensure new and redesigned library spaces have different zones wherever possible, allowing a range of social activity and also a quiet space for study and reflection. And also that new and refurbished libraries offer spaces for health and well-being activities such as meeting and events spaces, consulting rooms and digital resources and equipment, wherever feasible
- Focus on social isolation and loneliness reduction, by reforming the home library service to specifically address these issues as its most important priority
- Develop the rationale for libraries and public health building a partnership with UCL Partners, the academic health science network based at University College London Hospital (UCHL), to trial fresh approaches for effective community-based treatments for adult and adolescent depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease. This would build on work such as Wakefield's dementia-friendly library, and the new approach to under-5 rhyme time sessions being developed by the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians, that focuses on better mental health outcomes.<sup>13</sup> It would also connect it to UCLH's world-leading research and higher standards of proof. This would see Westminster's libraries acting as city-labs and real-world settings for academics to conduct formal trials and studies, with potential benefits in practice for staff and volunteers, and better outcomes for service users
- Within the context of family hubs, look at how libraries could provide targeted 'pop-up' services to support the development and learning among families with young children. This could focus on school readiness through building literacy (rhyme and story times, engagement with reading) and parent information services – building on what libraries already do, but spreading it out wider in the community beyond the library walls

### We recommend the council should:

- Join the libraries and archives service up with the sport and leisure strategy, and ensure it is contributing to encouraging active, engaged and healthy lifestyles by providing encouragement, support, and awareness
- Consider how it can use libraries much more effectively as focal points to promote positive behaviours, including driving recycling, making more use of libraries' ability to reach into the community to affect behaviour change. Use libraries as an exemplar to shift towards reduce, reuse, share as well – making a highly visible commitment to having less 'disposable' culture in the City, taking all opportunities to use resources more sparingly
- Promote community gardening and planting wherever space permits

### Proposed outcomes:

- Outcomes and benefits of a social prescribing approach as applicable to libraries are measurable and demonstrable, with a suite of performance measures to be developed by 2020
- Increased library usage by people on referral from health providers
- Westminster's libraries partnering on innovative programmes with research organisations

<sup>11</sup> The Reading Agency: Social prescribing and Reading Well in Shropshire libraries, 2.10.18

<sup>12</sup> NHS England: Social prescribing at the library, blog 12.10.18

<sup>13</sup> Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians: Rhymetime and seven quality principles, November 2017

### Case study:

Oswestry Library and North Mobile Library in Shropshire have been working in partnership with other community organisations on a social prescribing pilot scheme in the local area. When GPs identify patients who they feel would benefit from a health-promoting community intervention, they can direct them to Shropshire Council's health service, **Help2Change**, where a friendly and experienced advisor is available to talk to the client about resources and services available in the library to help.

According to Mirka Duxberry, Library Development Manager at Shropshire Libraries, chief among these resources are the **expert-endorsed Reading Well collections**:

*"The programme offers more than signposting and includes one to one support from a social prescribing advisor, trained in behavior change. The majority of clients have anxiety, depression and/or pain management issues. We have introduced them to our specialist Reading Well collection of books on these topics, activities for reducing stress/reducing isolation such as Time to Listen (books aloud for adults), and Quick Reads book club for people with low confidence and concentration."*

The scheme also has the full support of Shropshire Council's public health department, who has seen how working with Shropshire Libraries has helped to broaden their reach into communities and really *"make a difference by working with partners to make health and wellbeing information available to the public"*.

### Library facts:

Regular library users have an increased the likelihood of reporting good general health. The NHS estimates this delivers a saving across the library-using English population of £27.5 million annually.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries (Full Report), 2015, Arts Council England

## FIFTH RECOMMENDATION: LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES SHOULD BE THE CITY'S FOCAL POINTS FOR CELEBRATING CITIZENSHIP, HERITAGE, AND COMMUNITY-BASED ART AND CULTURE

### The first place for people to experience and engage with arts, culture and heritage

Cultural and creative opportunities enrich lives. Previous Culture Secretary, Karen Bradley MP, said: *"Watercolour painting, playing a sport, visiting ancient and beautiful places, drawing, writing poetry, mastering a musical instrument – all of these lead to a life well lived. They raise the human condition and cheer our spirits. Simply put, they make us happy..... It is precisely the aggregate effect of these individual experiences that will bring about a healthier, smarter, more peaceable, more cohesive, and happier society."*<sup>15</sup>

The DCMS Taskforce says: *"Libraries are well-placed to increase participation in cultural activities because of their use by all social groups and their role as inclusive cultural hubs within communities. Libraries also point people to wider cultural activities, objects, knowledge and sites, and encourage individuals to explore different cultural experiences and to create things themselves."*

### WHY?

We believe the library service should foster and promote engagement with cultural and artistic activity for two reasons:

1. it is good for people – their well-being, and social integration; and
2. it improves educational achievement and encourages lifelong learning.

Libraries are a good place to start taking part, as an audience or participant: they are local, friendly and accessible.

Library buildings provide an important venue for a wide range of cultural events and activities. They often offer smaller scale artistic events and activities in a familiar and informal environment, which can give them a heightened ability, compared to other venues, to attract new audiences who may not habitually engage with the arts. This is increasingly being recognized by Arts Council England (ACE) and other creative policy-makers and partners. A good example is City of Stories, a writers' programme in public libraries (including Westminster's) aimed at identifying new and emerging talent. Libraries can be an accessible introduction to cultural experiences with minimal risk. For artists and the creative economy, they can give a platform for little financial outlay, and space to grow and develop. They are incubators of talent, and this aligns with the council's own emerging cultural strategy. For the Council, it would fit well with the City Lions programme and the wider challenge to engage local people with the benefits of living in Westminster, cheek by jowl with some of the world's best arts organisations.

### HOW?

The service, supported by the wider Council, should consider a strategic approach to building relationships, including with external funders, and also consider crowdfunding, sponsorship and higher profile marketing. The service already has a good entree to the cultural ecosystem of Westminster through the Westminster Culture Network, which it supports and facilitates. This is a grouping of arts professionals, teachers, council officers and others which networks

<sup>15</sup> Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, maiden speech as secretary of state for digital, culture, media and sport; Liverpool – published 9.8.16

and collaborates regularly. The service should seek more opportunities to work with the major cultural, research, local, national and international business organizations that have their home in Westminster, and do so in a more targeted and strategic way. This may require a full time committed fundraising resource. Developing relationships may well have a beneficial effect in providing support for other library activities either financially or in kind.

**We recommend the library service should:**

- Continue to support and grow arts, cultural and heritage programming in libraries and archives, building on the excellence that already exists and ensuring that it is targeted widely and accessible
- Start to make use of digital channels with partners to improve engagement and take-up such as webcasting events and talks to broaden the audience
- Develop its strategic approach to fundraising and consider dedicated resource
- Set challenging targets for funding and attendance – leveraging money, increasing attendances, evaluating feedback

**We recommend the Council should:**

- Ensure libraries' role in promoting culture and creativity is fully recognised and reflected in its wider cultural strategies and programmes
- As well as the City cultural strategy, connect to other programmes and strategies e.g. sport and leisure, City Lions to maximise the benefits
- Consider a commissioning budget or programme led by libraries to develop new talent and offer opportunities targeted where the need is greatest
- Support and challenge the service to build more external relationships and bring in more resource through partnerships

**Outcomes:**

- Greater engagement with arts and culture within communities, via libraries; especially non-traditional and hard-to-reach audiences, to be measured via longitudinal study. Events in libraries are reported by participants to improve their connection to their community and sense of wellbeing
- Strengthened partnerships with major organisations fulfilling their social responsibilities to Westminster in part through libraries
- A more sustainable arts, culture and heritage offer



# SOME ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 5.1 / A note on special collections and services

The City of Westminster's libraries and archives include a number of special collections and services that are unique or unusual, and not replicated in other public library services. These include the City of Westminster archives, the Westminster music library and a number of collections based at Westminster reference library. The collections mostly relate to arts, culture and heritage (see also Recommendation 5). With the exception of the City of London – which is a unique authority, and in any case, has a London-wide remit for some of its services – no other borough maintains such a large number of special collections in addition to the core service within its public library service. In part, this explains the high per capita cost of the library service in Westminster. Some of the collections are of regional or even national interest, and are used by non-residents from far and wide, whilst being maintained as part of the Westminster-funded service.

Archive services do more than just preserve records of municipal activity. They provide a written, visual and oral history of Westminster and its ever-developing communities. We should not forget every day is history in the making. Westminster has an archive of distinction, one of only two in London to be accredited by the National Archives,<sup>16</sup> which runs a sustainable programme of education, outreach and events, funded by mainly external resources and partnerships.

The music library, housed in Victoria library, is one of the largest of its kind in the country. Founded in 1946 thanks to the bequest of a major collection, and still supported financially by the charitable Central Music Library Committee which provides funds for new acquisitions, it includes a song index of more than 75,000 items, as well as orchestral and vocal sets for hire, and books about music. This is a significant collection, with no real equivalent in London, as most boroughs have discontinued their music libraries in recent years. As well as research resources, there are music practise facilities and keyboards for hire,

and a regular programme of talks, workshops and concerts aimed at opening up access to the collections and engaging with schools, and groups who may think it is not for them.

Westminster reference library is, in reality, a special collections library with resources focused on visual and performing arts (particularly West End theatre), business and science. It recently launched a telescope loan services funded by a research council grant, supported by a programme of events. Alongside the collections regular activities, talks and networking events attract hundreds of people each year, many of whom are not otherwise library users.

The Board is not going to comment in any detail on these services as their specialist nature would require more in-depth evaluation. We have not reviewed these services in their rightful national context. They appear to provide much-valued services (evidenced by use and recognition), but where they are positioned in the future requires a detailed study and meeting of minds nationally.

It may be that, given their wider regional and national remit, and the potential for greater external funding, a different vehicle should be considered in the form of a trust or other non-profit model, for these specialist services. Partnership with other institutions (particularly academic) might also be a way forward for some of the collections in particular – providing access was maintained and enhanced. The main aims would be to ensure continued vibrancy and sustainability for these services and collections, and the Board thinks this – and other options that may be identified – should be considered by the Council.

### 5.2 / Volunteering

Libraries should continue to nurture their connections with the local voluntary and community sector (VCS). Westminster libraries already work directly with many VCS organisations to deliver vital services to people in their neighbourhoods, sometimes by providing physical accommodation. Libraries should build upon this existing good work, using their reach into the community to raise the profile of local VCS activities and playing an active part in the promotion of volunteering and recruitment of volunteers.

Volunteers are already an important part of delivering library services in many parts of the country, not least in Westminster. They support and assist paid staff but their contribution goes beyond that. Volunteers help deliver services that are enhanced beyond what the council could offer alone. They are also a direct connection to the community, helping the service be 'owned' by it and providing an important feedback loop. The benefits are also mutual – opportunities to volunteer in libraries can support people's health and wellbeing, provide chances for personal and career development, and can tackle social isolation.

We think the Council should increase and diversify the number and deployment of volunteers in running its libraries, with more demanding targets for the number of hours and an overall number of people engaged in this way, and give more of a voice to volunteers, in terms of consultation and engagement. Targets should include a requirement for the volunteer body to reflect the socio-economic and cultural makeup of Westminster, and that volunteers should be part of the solution for developing new and sustainable services in libraries.

<sup>16</sup> The National Archives accredits local authority archive services which meet its standards for care, access and education. Westminster was first accredited in 2016



## DELIVERING THE RECOMMENDATIONS: THE FINANCIAL REALITY

**6.1 /** Austerity in the public sector hasn't gone away. The Board fully appreciates that 'gold-plated' levels of funding are not likely in the future for discretionary services, as reduction in government grants and increasing demand for core social services continue. Libraries need to clearly and continuously demonstrate the value they add, and the approach of Libraries Deliver partially illustrates their value and beneficial outcomes.

**6.2 /** It is, however, worth noting that while local government as a whole spent less than 1% of its total budget on public libraries in 2014/15, here in City of Westminster the council spends rather more, about 3.5% of its revenue, on running the library service, a total of £6 million a year, as of 2018/19. It is clearly proud of its libraries and willing to invest in them (when others have cut theirs). Even so, financial pressures dictate that libraries will need to be more commercial and successful at attracting new funders and users if, in future, provision is to be maintained or even extended to meet a new and emerging need. They will also need to consider whether other models of delivery, in whole or part, might support sustainability.

### **6.3 / Alternative models of delivery**

The Board had presentations from organisations who are providing public library services in a variety of ways. These included Devon's Libraries Unlimited, a mutual provider which is owned by employees and the community; GLL, which is a form of social enterprise; and as previously mentioned, the partnership libraries in Lewisham, and in Hammersmith and Fulham. The different models, and the in-house delivery of service which Westminster (along with many other councils) continues to have, all have strengths and weaknesses. The implications and relative merits of individual models of delivery can be financial as well as operational. The Board noted how, whatever the model pursued by a local authority, the challenge of balancing budgetary imperatives and the pursuit of efficiencies with the core purpose and value of the services, remains. The Board has decided not to recommend one model over another, as it would require considerably more time and investigation than we have had available to make a sound recommendation.

What did become abundantly clear, though, in engaging with the different models presented is that the passion and commitment of the people delivering the service are vital. This is especially true for those responsible for leading it, from both a political and managerial standpoint. We recommend that Westminster City Council keep reviewing its means of delivery in a timely way to ensure that not only is it offering the best value and achieving objectives, but also that it is engendering passion and commitment to the service at all levels. An unflinching commitment to this, not the details of the precise model chosen, seemed to the Board to be the key common marker of success.

**6.4 /** An important part of a financial review should cover the use and appropriateness and location of library property and premises. The library buildings in the context of the council's wider property ownership should be reviewed by the Council's property services and library services together to ensure buildings are used to best effect, and what the need should be in the medium term future. This review should include co-location opportunities, sharing of resources, disposal to market of duplicate or under-utilised facilities, and reinvestment in library provision. It should also have a mind to community engagement. A good example is the plan to use space at Seymour Leisure Centre to provide a new library for the community in Marylebone. There could be further opportunities if other services such as adult learning work more closely with libraries in the future.

**6.5 /** The Board has not looked in-depth at where to locate libraries or how they should be planned. As we have noted, that would require a thorough business and needs appraisal, as well as identification of potential opportunities. There is the wider community of Westminster as well as local communities, and communities can be defined by geographical and other definitions. These need to be determined so that the council can respond appropriately. We do urge the council to include consideration of library provision in major redevelopments, of which the Church Street Masterplan is a good example.<sup>17</sup> This does not necessarily mean standalone library buildings.

<sup>17</sup> WCC: Church Street regeneration

Each evaluation should include the question “**what is the need**” with a clear bold response including “**what services should be on offer**” so the offer responds to the community. By way of illustration, it may be a review would demonstrate that fewer hubs, resourced effectively with excellent facilities planned to serve the community, and combined with other council services, would represent better service and value than the existing network built up piecemeal over the years. There are a number of examples of the close proximity of some libraries within Westminster, whilst other parts of the city are more remote from provision. Rightsizing this should be a long term ambition to ensure fairness and consistency.

In answering “**what is the need**” an appraisal study should include questions that respond in several ways. Is the current library of value as a centre of learning, as a cultural hub or facility, as a key resource for young people and their development, or for older members of the community; as a community builder, and as a community centre. They need not necessarily satisfy all these objectives but as has been said in section 2.9 of this report currently tailoring of services is not always by community need, but sometimes by what the legacy building can accommodate. This is clearly an ineffective way to continue in the future.

At the same time, locating services needs careful planning so people (especially existing users) are not deterred from using the service because of transport issues or fear of the unknown. On the other hand if the libraries estate contained the right number of well-sited, well-specified facilities, there is evidence to suggest that they might attract much greater use.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, any ill-effects of change – such as reluctance to travel, mobility concerns and other potential drawbacks could be offset by putting library resources in more community settings, including pop-up libraries as currently operated by London Borough of Merton, and more outreach and flexible provision with partners.

**6.6 / Westminster is at the heart of London, with strong local, national and international business presences, which offer support and partnering opportunities few other**

local authorities have available to them. Westminster libraries’ positioning at the heart of communities could make them very attractive for sponsorship or corporate social responsibility investment. Invest to save, community infrastructure levy and planning gain are just three alternative funding sources that libraries should build their case for investment from. Philanthropic support and Arts Council England funding is also available given the appropriate pitch for funds. The archive service, which is part of libraries in Westminster, has proved adept at securing funding from small grants and other parts of the public purse, and most of their project work is externally funded. Applying for funding requires, above all, knowledge and training, resource, stamina, skill, and passion for the cause.

### 6.7 / Commitment means more than money

We have seen that passion and will to serve the community is crucial - more essential than throwing money at the subject, or indeed the reverse, presuming that major savings can or should be made. We were struck by how resourceful some service providers elsewhere have been when faced with potentially devastating financial cuts driving the need to think creatively and look for funding opportunities.

Equally though, the Board has seen how strong investment in library services, not necessarily funded in whole by councils, can deliver dividends for service scope and social outcomes well beyond those traditionally viewed as libraries’ and archives’ remit. The aim must be to courageously address the question of how to make Westminster libraries “**fit for the future**” and then support the service to find ways of resourcing the solution. This could include probably a mix of:

- Commercial sponsorship of some aspects of the service (other services have done this with their culture programmes, specific collections, children’s facilities – LEGO has supported these in some libraries, for instance); alternatively monetising some

non-core activity (an example would be charging admission for special events)

- Seeking long term funding from a key sponsor – public or private – for the specialist services that Westminster’s libraries offer but other councils do not. These include Westminster reference library (and its individual collections), the music library, the Chinese language service at Charing Cross Road library. One route would be to seek ‘**national portfolio England**’ status from the Arts Council, but this shouldn’t be the only opportunity that is explored since it is unlikely to be the answer to everything
- Commissioning by other council departments to deliver services making use of existing library strengths and skills. The service is already commissioned by public health to deliver health information and lifestyle guidance; by economic development to co-produce business information points, and by the West London Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver English For Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for Health classes. We recommend more commissioning opportunities are sought
- Greater commercial activity in libraries, delivered by the service but also through partnerships, franchising or sub-contracting

Health, social care and children’s services are the Council’s highest priorities and we hope we have made a case in this report for libraries to be part of the solution to many of the challenges faced by the Council: supporting health, learning and social care programmes, and building on the accessibility and trustworthiness we have talked about. Reducing the service’s funding without consideration of the alternatives – and the value it adds - would be counterproductive to the welfare of the community they are there to serve. Conversely, by giving all opportunities full consideration, we think that the realistic scope for world-class service, with long term financial sustainability, remains.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the well-documented case of Tower Hamlets’ Idea Stores, where a declining library service reinvented itself with fewer, better-located and purpose-designed buildings combining library and adult learning provision in one place



# CONCLUSION

We have presented our views and recommendation but how are we best able to judge the benefit of implementing the recommendations over time? We are all aware of the ever-rising expectations of customers and at the same time, the pressure on public funding requires greater diligence on measuring performance. Understanding the impact of what libraries do (the services, support, and space) both to individuals and to the community, is essential for us to understand and demonstrate its value.

Assessment of value for money of library services is often expressed only in economic terms. There are thorough business plans and targets for income and expenditure, there is a measurement of inputs including the cost of staff, stock, IT and premises. There are bold headlines of cost per visit, number of active members, or visits to the website, number of activities, books loaned. But importantly rarely is there any assessment of outcomes.

For example, what improved opportunities have been generated by increased literacy, or for reskilled midlife users? Has the use of a library led to higher academic grades or a better job? We certainly witnessed after school homework being diligently undertaken on one visit to Pimlico library, but library services must go beyond anecdotal indications, to ensure that where these connections feel instinctively true we can also prove that they are.

Continuous assessment of outcomes is crucial but is not the responsibility of the library service alone. It is for the council to acknowledge and find ways to measure the difference being made, and for the wider community to recognise the value of libraries and the services offered within them.

For the recommendations in this report to have the beneficial effect, we urge the Council to embrace the real opportunities available to widen library services for the good of the community and together collaborating with other services the values embraced in "City for All" will continue to achieve their goal.