

CONNECTING LIBRARIES

A summary of the independent report on the future of Westminster's libraries

Background

In 2017 Westminster City Council established a Libraries Advisory Board to look at the future of libraries in Westminster given the way libraries are used is changing and in light of local government funding reductions.

The Board carried out visits, extensive research and workshops with a range of people with an interest in the future of Westminster's libraries. We also looked at international, national and local issues and have made a number of recommendations for the council to explore.

Libraries in context – what the Board looked at...

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR LIBRARIES, LIBRARIES DELIVER

The strategy looked at:

- How we tap into the full potential of libraries
- Potential to impact on vast array of beneficial outcomes
- Empowering and investing in library services
- Gaining recognition for the contribution libraries make
- Achieving and demonstrating value for money

THE UNIQUE WESTMINSTER CONTEXT

- A city within a city, with a global outlook
- Well-funded and well-used library services
- Step change needed to make sure libraries fulfil their potential and meet the needs of the communities they serve

HOW LIBRARIES ARE USED IS CHANGING

- Public libraries have evolved dramatically since inception
- Changes in how we produce and consume information
- Changes in society and changing needs within the community
- Growth and diversification of libraries' offer and the role of libraries staff
- Making best use of digital and new technologies
- Going beyond statutory obligations to meet local needs

INTEGRATING LIBRARIES

- Connecting with other service departments and wider partners
- A clear and joined up purpose which others can buy into
- Explore funding options to focus on strategic priorities
- Be bold and think innovatively about the role libraries can have
- Using libraries' unique strengths to reach into the community and encourage access to services



Summary of our recommendations to Westminster City Council

City for All objective

Recommendation Potential options for Westminster City Council to explore

1

LIBRARIES HELP MAKE WESTMINSTER A CITY OF OPPORTUNITY

First strand: literacy and digital literacy

- Expand reading and digital support programmes, forging new relationship with Westminster Adult Education Service
- Rolling programme of investment in I|T – libraries should offer a superfast digital hub
- Consider launching “Westminster libraries in the cloud” including more online archive and reference collections

Second strand: greater prosperity

- Specific strategy for skills development, business and entrepreneurship
- Help business start-ups by providing kit, connectivity and advice
- Define a package of employment support
- Build relationships with economic development partners and work together to trial new forms of support

2

LIBRARIES HELP SUPPORT A CITY THAT PROVIDES EXCELLENT LOCAL SERVICES

Libraries provide a place and help make things happen

- Make the business case for efficiency gains for other services
- Develop libraries’ commercial strategy, proactively seeking funding – the council should help the service become more adept at this
- Prioritise fundraising and commercial activity as a given
- Conduct full review across council services looking at where libraries can help deliver their outcomes

3

LIBRARIES BECOME A VISIBLE ADVOCATE OF A CARING AND FAIRER CITY

Accessible spaces fostering community spirit

- Support action to tackle the ‘loneliness epidemic’ in partnership with Adult Social Care
- All libraries becomes dementia friendly places
- Provide consistent standard of service to homeless or vulnerably housed library users
- Develop an engagement strategy with young people, including non library users
- Address accessibility issues especially in relation to library buildings
- Use the potential of funds like the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 to support these changes

4

LIBRARIES HELP MAKE A HEALTHIER AND GREENER CITY

Libraries are a key resource for social prescribing and referrals

- Continue to partner with Public Health on Making Every Contact Count, and other health initiatives
- Build the offer with local health professionals, including GPs
- Ensure new and redesigned libraries have ‘zones’ for different activities wherever possible
- Reform the home library services to reduce social isolation
- Develop the rationale for a partnership with UCL partners
- Explore options for targeted ‘pop-up’ services for children and families
- Join up with the council’s sport and leisure strategy
- Look at how libraries can be focal points to drive positive behaviour change
- Promote community gardening wherever space permits

5

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES SHOULD BE 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

- Continue to support and grow art, culture and heritage programming in libraries and archives
- Make use of digital channels with partners to improve engagement
- Develop strategic approach to fundraising and consider dedicated resource
- Set challenging targets for funding and attendance
- Recognise libraries’ role in promoting culture and creativity
- Consider and dedicated budget or programme led by libraries to develop new creative talent