

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

03 March 2015

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 KCC CONSULTATION – SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LIBRARY, REGISTRATION AND ARCHIVE SERVICES IN KENT

To set out the proposed changes to these services and to agree a formal response to the consultation.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will recall that a County-wide review of local library provision was commenced in 2013 in partnership with district councils. In Tonbridge and Malling a joint member panel was established to carry out the review which included a number of visits to our local libraries. The main focus of that review was to investigate the scope for using library buildings for additional activities which might raise additional revenue funding to support the service. That review process was put on hold by the County Council in early 2014. A more formal consultation on the future of library, registration and archive services has now been launched by the County Council and this report sets out the proposed options for change and seeks Members' views on these.
- 1.1.2 The public consultation takes place for 12 weeks from 12 January 2015 until 8 April 2015. The consultation focuses on the options for service transformation and KCC's preferred option of establishing an independent charitable trust to run Kent's Library, Registration and Archive service.
- 1.1.3 The consultation document (Appendix1) considers the following options:
- Keep the service in house – KCC continue to run the service
 - Transfer the service to a charitable trust – a not for profit organisation, the charitable trust would be commissioned by KCC to run the service
 - Run the service in partnership with a provider – KCC would form a partnership with another suitable organisation or business to run the service

- Outsource the service to a 3rd party – a suitable organisation or business would take over the running of the service.

1.1.4 Although the above options have been presented it is clear throughout that the preferred option is to create an independent charitable trust. All of the options could potentially deliver the required savings, but the view of KCC is that a charitable trust is the best option to safeguard services and achieve future improvements.

1.2 Impacts to Services

1.2.1 The consultation document highlights the benefits of service delivery via a charitable trust as: “sustainable, greater freedom to adapt and improve services, the opportunity to access more funding and explore greater income generating opportunities and to contribute savings for the council”.

1.2.2 They have pointed out that a charitable trust would still need to secure approval of KCC and consult with residents before any final decisions regarding significant changes are made.

1.2.3 The document does not however, provide any assurances that the current library stock will be maintained or that the current level of service will remain available. Currently our residents can access free services at a number of libraries across the borough; these include baby rhyme time sessions, sessions for jobseekers to receive help with CV’s, access to computers and a variety of other free services. Library closures would have a detrimental impact on many residents. Equally services that are currently enjoyed for free could become cost prohibitive for many residents if charges were to arise for certain activities. In responding to the consultation, regardless of the option chosen, it would be useful to have greater clarification of any likely impact on service provision, e.g. costs of any potential charges for services and any future obligation to maintain the current level of existing library stock.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 N/A

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 N/A

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 N/A

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.7 Recommendations

1.7.1 That a response to the consultation be drawn up that reflects the following:

- (a) Greater clarification is provided of any future costs or charges associated with using the library, registration and archive services;
- (b) Reassurances are provided that if the service is transferred to a charitable trust or another provider, there will be an obligation to maintain the existing level of library stock.

The Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Gill Fox

Nil

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive