

## **Westminster libraries advisory board – background briefing and terms of reference**

Date: May 2017  
To: Chris Cotton  
Chair, City of Westminster Libraries Advisory Board  
Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor David Harvey  
Responsible officer: Mike Clarke, Director of Libraries & Culture

### **PAPER 1: Introduction to the Westminster Libraries Advisory Board**

1. In December 2016, the government published Libraries Deliver: Ambitions for Public Libraries, which set out the challenges and opportunities across the sector very clearly. The Council Cabinet has considered ways to review the City's library services in the light of this Government Report and the ever changing nature of Society and its use and demands on library services. The Council has decided to establish a Libraries Advisory Board, engaging wide and deep expertise, to assist it in determining and describing the medium and longer term future direction for its public libraries and archives, following the remodelling of the service in 2017. The Board will help shape how the City of Westminster responds to this, in a locally-specific way, as part of its determinations.
2. The Council has already taken steps to modernise the service using digital and self-service, and seeking value for money in pioneering TriBorough arrangements. But it is clear that further modernisation will be needed to reposition and renew the service in a time of great change. The Council wants to ensure the library service is thriving rather than just surviving, even if there is no more money available than at present, and there may indeed be less.
3. The Board will provide fresh thinking, friendly but critical challenge, engage and consult as appropriate with residents, stakeholders and external advisors. This will help shape a robust, evidence-based approach for the future. The Board's work will assist in strengthening the service and clarifying its future direction of travel and the investment the Council makes in provision.
4. Westminster City Council is proud of its library service. The Council sees libraries as vital community assets, and key contributors to its ambitions expressed in City For All (attached), across a range of outcomes which include promoting employment and economic development, learning, wellbeing and heritage. The service is among the best resourced and best performing in the country and is accessible to all through 12 library locations across the City, and through an extensive online presence. It serves a diverse population with widely differing needs, including residents of all ages, visitors, and people who study and work in the City. (See attachments: Westminster Key Facts 2017 and library use) Westminster has a history of innovation in its library service, having been among the first to develop public library provision in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through to innovation in modern times such as extended opening hours, self-service and social media presence. The Council wants it to continue to be a leading library service.

## APPENDIX 1

5. Nevertheless, change is inevitable, and there are both general, global, and locally-specific challenges. These include pressures resulting from increased consumer expectation, diversification of formats and delivery, and the wider digital upheaval; whilst at the same time the traditional library functions of lending books and providing information are facing competition and challenge on a number of fronts. There are also pressures resulting from pressures on the public purse and shrinking revenue from traditional sources.
6. Westminster's libraries have a strong basis in their communities and are widely viewed by residents and stakeholders as being at the heart of neighbourhoods. For example, public health officers have commented on the way libraries reach individuals and families other services find difficult to contact. By engaging with communities and stakeholders, modernisation and change can be undertaken in a way that is resilient, tested and has the support of a broad cross-section of actual and potential library users.
7. Nationally, public libraries are changing due to public sector financial disciplines, changing demand for services and challenges presented by an increasingly digital and virtual economy and society. No change is not an option as a decline in demand for some of the core traditional library 'offers' may render aspects of the service unnecessary within the next decade if not sooner, unless it changes. At the same time, there is strong growth in some activities such as community events and digital library services, with consequent resource demands and the need to rethink what libraries offer and how they are provisioned and resourced.

## **Paper 2: Background information on the public libraries service in England and Westminster**

### **1. Legal position of public libraries**

- 1.1 The 1964 Public Libraries Act requires upper tier councils to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” public library service for everyone who lives, works or studies within their jurisdiction (in practice, most library services are open to all, regardless of geography). The Act goes on to specify provision of books for loan and reference, printed and recorded music, journals and other materials. Of course, digital is not mentioned. Library authorities are also expected to help users find resources (by implication, catalogues and loan systems) and to promote the service as appropriate.
- 1.2 The “comprehensive and efficient” definition has been a source of contention for many years since nowhere in the Act defines it. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (SoS) is responsible for “superintending” the service and can call in the plans of a local authority s/he considers to be failing in this duty, or be asked to do so by others. The SoS has used these powers sparingly, and up until 2009 only one authority – Derbyshire – had been reviewed, in the early 1980s. Wirral was the subject of an inquiry in 2009 and required to revise its proposals to close around half its libraries. Since then a number of councils have been subject to review – currently Lancashire (30 proposed closures out of 70 libraries) and Swindon (proposing to close most of its branch libraries) are being considered by the SoS. Judicial review is also used, mainly by campaigners – Gloucestershire and Lincolnshire have been forced to amend or drop plans for library closures following High Court judgements, whilst Brent successfully defended its changes in 2011.
- 1.3 The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provides no direct funding for library revenue costs and DCLG funding through revenue support is declining. Policy development and support for libraries is delegated to Arts Council England (ACE) which took over this responsibility from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council when it was abolished in 2012. ACE provides advice to the SoS, research and development and funding in the form of portfolio funding and Grants for the arts, neither of which can be used to fund revenue costs in the core service.

Further reading: [DCMS guidance on statutory service](#) (2015)

Politics.co.uk – [Public libraries brief](#) (2012?)

### **2. Public Lending Right (PLR)**

- 2.1 PLR was set up in 1980 to provide recompense to authors and illustrators whose books are loaned by public libraries. It is now administered by the British Library based on loan data collected by sample. Authors have to register – originally this was limited to British residents but PLR is now in EU law and European authors qualify. PLR payments are capped at £7000 per individual but payments at the maximum level are few – only just over 200 of the 23,000 registered with the scheme received this level of payment - the vast majority of authors receive £50 or less pa. PLR currently only applies to print, but the Digital Economy Act 2017 (which received royal assent just before Parliament rose) acted on recommendations of the Sieghart review (2013) to extend PLR to e-book loans from public library websites.

See: [www.uk.plr.com](http://www.uk.plr.com)

Further reading: DCMS [annual report on PLR 2012/13](#) (the last year for which this is available)

### **3. Evolving nature of library provision nationally**

3.1 What libraries do has been an ongoing change and evolution since the first public libraries in the 1850s. Often change has been contested as new services are introduced, less well used facilities are phased out, and changes are made to property, administration and operation. A strong sense of ownership (whether a community of geography or shared interest) can lead to conflict between the requirements of existing users and the need to change to meet future challenges and needs. A common thread of library provision has been education/self-improvement/lifelong learning, and this continues today with access to information, digital literacy and building skills as key elements of what all public libraries offer. These and other aspects have an important social value.

3.2 A contested issue is the role of the book in society and public libraries. Only around 1 in 5 of Westminster's library users borrow a book on their visit. Libraries are used for a range of activities – attending a meeting or event, learning a new skill, using computers or WI-FI, meeting friends, quiet study being the most popular – and many customers never need to borrow an item and take it home. They can access the literature, information and knowledge they need on their tablet, smartphone or by booking a PC. As a result, consideration should be given to the balance between print materials (which are expensive to acquire, catalogue, and store) and digital or online resources. This also raises questions about the uses of space in the library. Although print books have seen a revival in sales in the last two years (mirrored by a similar phenomenon in vinyl records) this does not appear to be translating directly into library usage. It may be that the desire to own physical objects drives this rather than the content, in which case it would be of limited relevance to public library planning; e-book loans have grown exponentially since the first platforms were rolled out in public libraries c.2010, admittedly from a low baseline.

#### **3.3 Social value of libraries**

One of the key areas of enquiry for public library theorists and government-sponsored commissions has been to establish the social value of libraries. It continues to be a debated subject with a lack of clear consensus. In comparison, other local authority services can point to clearly measurable outcomes which deliver a statutory requirement or corporate priority, eg number of children safeguarded or number of adult social care episodes provided, with evidence available on what these deliver as impacts, such as reduction in acute care costs. By contrast, services with discretionary elements often struggle to demonstrate impact: use of a public library may assist a child's achievement in school but the outcome happens elsewhere and may not be able to be attributed to the library's involvement. There is research evidence in certain areas such as child development, but it is not specific to individual services and public libraries have tended to fall back on metrics such as as footfall and number of items borrowed to prove their worth.

Sheffield University undertook research in 2011 to determine the best ways of measuring social value. Among the criteria for measuring social value, researchers considered:

## APPENDIX 1

- Social benefit: the benefit the user derives from the services on whatever level
- Economic benefit: the dividend received by individuals finding work or being supported and equipped with skills through services
- Educational benefit: support provided by libraries to children and adults through access to books and learning

Whilst sensible, these criteria may need revisiting for updating purposes, particularly in view of the digital transformation of society and the culture of entrepreneurship, both of which public libraries can and do encourage.

The Sheffield report calls for new ways of measuring social value and better communication of it in relation to libraries, as well as better use of existing research. It also refers to the importance of stakeholder views in understanding this – including those who do not use a public library. Social value is not currently built in to the performance indicators used by Westminster’s library service, and this may be an area for the Board to recommend change.

Further reading: [Measuring the value of public libraries](#), University of Sheffield, 2011

### 3.4 Government policy and the role of national bodies

Government and a number of public bodies have an interest in public library policy and development, including Arts Council England (ACE), the British Library, the BBC, and professional bodies including the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (Cilip) and the Local Government Association. Within government, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has oversight, but Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is also involved due mainly to its funding relationship with local authorities.

The government’s role, discharged through DCMS, is to ensure the Public Libraries Act is observed, intervene where the ‘comprehensive and efficient’ standard is not upheld and set overall standards for public libraries. Linked to this it also has a role to provide advice and policy development, as well as funding for development, which it has delegated to ACE.

Government has commissioned numerous reports on the future of the public library service (see for instance Reading The Future commissioned by Virginia Bottomley as heritage secretary in 1997). The immediate past culture minister Ed Vaizey asked William Sieghart to chair a commission on the state of public libraries and their likely future, which reported in December 2014. The Sieghart report recommended:

- Establishing a taskforce with central and local government backing to drive change (underway)
- Ensure central government recognises the role libraries play, cross-departmentally
- Support creation of a national digital library network and improve the availability of resources by, among other things, extending PLR to digital
- Develop the library workforce
- Diversify the sector with more models of delivery

## APPENDIX 1

The National Libraries Taskforce was set up in 2015 in response to the Sieghart Report. It published Libraries Deliver as a policy document in 2016, recommending among other developments that local government adopts a policy of Libraries First, making use of public library spaces, resources and staff to deliver on a wide range of government, health and other priorities, and recognising the need for them to be properly funded and supported to do so.

Further reading: [Independent library report for England](#) (Sieghart report, DCMS, 2015)  
[Libraries Deliver: ambition for public libraries in England 2016 – 2021](#) (DCMS, 2016)

### 4. Culture and heritage

4.1 Public libraries and archives play a key role in promoting culture and heritage and engaging audiences. Although library use measured by visits is in decline, it is still a more popular pastime than going to concerts, exhibitions or football matches (around 230 million visits last year). Libraries have developed as venues for cultural activity – both as passive spaces to host activity by others, and promoting cultural activity themselves. Libraries have for many years hosted art and craft exhibitions of varying scale, prestige and merit – from local amateur and young, developing artists using the local library to gain exposure and sales, to libraries co-located with recognised art galleries and spaces. Similarly libraries have been used for performance space, in many cases because they are local, accessible and affordable but in some where there is a professional quality auditorium or theatre.

4.2 ACE recognises the value of these activities and facilities and since it has taken on policy responsibility for libraries it has made funding available, principally through Grants for the arts though also capital programmes. Libraries can be seen as providing space, support and audiences for emerging artists and art forms, and ACE encourages these to be considered when designing new or refurbished libraries. In addition, libraries provide opportunities for people considering a career in cultural and creative industries through the resources they provide (see some of the “special” collections in Westminster libraries) as well as access to computers, technology and resources to develop skills, knowledge and experience.

4.3 City of Westminster has a cultural partnerships officer embedded in the library service to grow networks and links with the wide range of cultural organisations in the City, as well as to develop cultural activity in libraries (such as interactive performance and installations). For example, Made In Libraries was an ACE-funded programme to support people who wish to develop work for performance in our libraries supported by staff.

See: ACE [policy and priorities](#) for libraries  
[Made In Libraries](#) scheme details

4.4 Local authority archive services do more than just preserve records of municipal activity. They provide a written, visual and oral history of communities, support planning and development processes, provide an educational resource for students of all ages and help with important commemorations such as the WW1 centenary. Archive services are accredited by the National Archives for quality of preservation and access – and Westminster’s is only one of three in London to achieve this rigorous national standard. Westminster has taken a leading role in supporting developments at sub-regional and regional level as well, for example providing consultancy support to other local authority archives (including Hammersmith and Fulham) and

## APPENDIX 1

helping drive the establishment of the London Local Archives Partnership, a National Archives-supported programme to share best practice and resources.

### **5. Shared provision – shared service and links to other local authority and public services**

5.1 Libraries have a longstanding track record of working with other council services within their own authorities and other library services to share resources and provision. Interlibrary loans are the oldest example of this, and more recently consortia to procure stock and IT have become commonplace. Libraries have often delivered services for other parts of the council and public sector, usually on a recharged (transactional) basis such as schools library services, specialist information provision, public information and customer contact services (eg Westminster libraries are sites for Your One Stop Express council services).

5.2 More recently, library services have begun to be funded to deliver more tailored services in partnership with adults, children and public health services. Some examples:

- Children’s information services, a requirement of the Children Act 2002, have been provided in many local authorities by the library service
- Enhanced home library services, delivering books but also providing advice, information and ‘silver surfer’ support, and in some cases befriending (volunteer) services, have been supported/funded by adult social care
- In Hammersmith and Fulham, health information points are being rolled out in libraries to give branded access to reliable information and a focal point for events, funded by public health
- Public health substitution funding has been allocated in Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster, to ensure under 5 “rhymetime” sessions can continue to be provided, as part of school readiness
- Westminster is seeking to train library staff to the first level of Make Every Contact Count, an approach to ensuring residents’ needs are picked up and support offered whenever and wherever they come into contact with the council – not only through adults or children’s services

5.3 The TriBorough arrangements for sharing resources and services were introduced in 2012 by Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster. Although the boroughs remain sovereign, and accountable for the budget and service standards of their own libraries, they have pooled resources on a number of cross-cutting areas to save money, improve services and drive further efficiencies. These are:

- Shared service-wide management and administrative support
- Procurement of stock (print and digital)
- Staff learning and development
- Certain “specialised” services eg children’s library specialists, coordinators of learning and IT services
- Digital services and social media presence, and the shared catalogue/customer database

5.4 Sharing these services generated over £1m of savings from the outset and more streamlining has contributed a further £250k savings in the current financial year. Opening hours (and

## APPENDIX 1

therefore staff resourcing), the library premises and some “locally-commissioned” services such as Westminster’s music library and archives, remain the sovereign borough responsibility.

- 5.5 Westminster, supported by Kensington and Chelsea, has decided to withdraw from shared arrangements for adults and children. However this does not apply to libraries, the expectation being that the shared arrangements will continue for the foreseeable future.
- 5.6 On a more informal basis there is widespread cooperation and sharing of expertise and best practice among libraries officers inter-authority. National and regional bodies such as the Society of Chief Librarians and groupings for children’s librarians, archivists etc, facilitate this work which takes the form of, for example, shared projects (including a recent example, where 20 London boroughs including Westminster worked with Spread the Word to create a live literature project which has attracted an £80,000 Grant for the arts), catalogues and training resources and staff work experience swaps. The vast majority of this is done pro bono, however the emergence of contractors into the public library scene is already seeing some changes to this with sharing knowledge being increasingly treated as a consultancy and charged for accordingly.
- 5.7 The Reading Agency is a national charity and ACE portfolio organisation which promotes reading and helps libraries to market themselves (strapline: “more people, reading more”). It focuses on children, non-proficient adult readers and people with mental health issues or dementia, by providing promotions, reading lists, marketing materials and publicity. The best-known example is the Summer Reading Challenge – run annually it aims to bridge the gap in children’s reading over the long summer break and avoid the “dip” in standards that can occur on the return to school. Each year around 750,000 children take part in a themed scheme with incentives and rewards for reading at least six books. All 151 English public library authorities usually take part.

Further reading: <https://readingagency.org.uk/>

## 6. Children, young people and schools

- 6.1 The purpose of providing libraries for children is to help them get the best start in life, encourage reading for pleasure and as an essential skill and to equip them with the tools for success in education and beyond. There is good evidence that the younger and more frequently children are exposed to books, words and language (even before they can be expected to read) the more likely they are to be successful in education. Reading for pleasure is important to encourage this. Children’s libraries are a success story, nationally and locally, with rising usage (including increased book borrowing cf adult library services), over-subscribed activities and events, and successful reading programmes. A more recent phenomenon is code clubs which are drawing a significant response – both in demand from children and parents, and interest from volunteers to help run them.
- 6.2 Key programmes and activity:
- Bookstart: early exposure to books through gifting books to babies and toddlers, run in partnership with early years services and registrars



## APPENDIX 1

- Under 5s sessions: very popular, over-subscribed; at least one per week at every community library in Westminster (more in larger sites). Generally referred to as Rhymetime but also include storytelling and crafts
- Homework and study support: often volunteer-led, dedicated time for children to use computers, books and other resources and get help with homework
- Other clubs and activities, such as arts and crafts, games/Lego Clubs and coding clubs - benefit children's development and learning which include: helping with motor, IT and social skills, spacial awareness, imaginative play
- A e-sports club is being trialled at one Westminster library in partnership with an industry body with the support of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Aimed at 10-14 year olds (the "post-code club" age group) it builds on skills to help children develop potential as programmers and app developers

6.3 The schools library service supports curriculum and reading for pleasure in education settings with loans of resources, advice and support to raise standards of school library provision.

6.4 Young people make extensive use of libraries, including study support and space to revise with friends or individually. High occupancy homes make libraries in inner London an important resource as well as their use for leisure. As part of work being done for the Leader of Westminster City Council to open up opportunities and improve facilities for young people, the library service is looking at making spaces more teen-friendly, particularly in terms of more informal and leisure use to sit Jalongside study and tech uses.

Further reading: [Reading Is Fundamental](#)

[Why libraries are important to children and young people](#): International Federation of Library Associations

## 7. Library staff

7.1 Library staff are a crucial resource and vital to the success of the service. Typically local authority library services spend 65-70% of budget expenditure on employee costs (the other major element is premises, around 20-25%, with stock usually less than 10% of spend). At the most basic level, staff are required to open the premises to the public so the staff spend directly affects opening hours, one of the key indicators of a library service's performance.

7.2 Even this is changing however and there is more to it than a simple numbers game. Historically a lot of staff time was spent on repetitive manual tasks such as issuing items to customers, shelving returned books, tidying the library and directing people to the right book or journal. Technology has enabled library services to release staff from many of these routines, such as self-issue (similar to supermarket self checkout), online catalogues, requests and joining forms, and automated print release and copying. It can be anticipated in future that with the development of drone technology and shift to digital media the need for staff to handle any physical stock will be redundant. What then will be their role?

## APPENDIX 1

- 7.3 Services (in academic and business libraries, as well as public) have made substantial savings in staff costs from some of these changes. Some of the savings have been reinvested by empowering staff to do more “added value” work interacting with customers and increasing the number of activities taking place in libraries. Future library design should ensure a high level of customer self-serve, and the role of library staff to be mainly around relationship building and pro-active interventions with customers.
- 7.4 Library staff were traditionally divided into professional (graduate/postgraduate qualified) staff who undertook “professional” duties such as stock selection, reader advice and outreach; and non-professional (often called library assistants rather than librarians) who did the functional and transactional work – staffing issue counters, shelving and tidying. In the public library sector these demarcations have substantially eroded in the past 20 years, due to the need for savings in the staff budget and new technology, but also as local government as a whole has moved away from professional “closed shops” to more open, flatter structures with an emphasis on managerialism and outcome-led performance. This has caused some anguish among long-standing staff and the professional bodies, but there is no legal requirement for professional qualifications and current good practice, as adopted by Westminster, is that a qualification in librarianship may be one of a number of demonstrators of suitability for a role, but is not exclusive. Westminster is working with SCL and CILIP (the librarians’ professional body) on work around the future qualification needs of the profession.

### **Paper 3: City of Westminster Libraries Advisory Board terms of reference**

The Advisory Board will:

- Develop a strong, robust vision for libraries and archives over a defined timeframe that will support key decisions and investment, using as a starting point the government’s Libraries Deliver policy statement, but building on and adapting it to the specific circumstances of the City
- Support the Council’s ambition for a positive, engaged dialogue with residents, stakeholders, staff and others to effect change and instil confidence at a time of challenge and uncertainty
- Consider the challenges, pressures and opportunities in the public library sector, local government, publishing and IT industries as well as specific and local factors within the City of Westminster, and make recommendations for how the libraries and archives service can adapt and change so that it continues to be relevant, affordable and attractive
- Consider the libraries and archives service’s interrelationship with other council and public services and with TriBorough partners and commercial and third sector stakeholders
- With all these factors, shape a strategy that informs future direction and development of the service relating to library buildings, digital provision and services, recognising the different character and usage of our many and varied library buildings and services

Initial questions the Advisory Board may wish to consider:

1. The National Libraries Taskforce has set out a number of ‘achievements’ that it thinks all public library services should deliver. Are these all appropriate for Westminster and do they fit with our ambitions?

## APPENDIX 1

2. How can we ensure we deliver the best possible service in the right places, respecting communities and in the right ways?
3. Is Westminster's Read-Learn-Connect vision right for the longer term and how can libraries support our City For All ambitions?
4. Over what timeframe should decisions on investment, service change or infrastructure be made?
5. What changes are needed to ensure the workforce, infrastructure and technology are equipped to deliver what is required in future?
6. How do we identify and measure the social value of libraries, specifically for Westminster? How do we evidence what libraries contribute to helping people achieve and engage more (and 'prevention' of other problems later), and in relation to the unique situation of Westminster, close to the heart of government and in a city of sharp contrasts of income and disadvantage?
7. How do libraries balance roles relating to being cultural hubs and access points to a wider range of services including council information, health, volunteering and police? Is there anything a library *shouldn't* do?
8. What might the library of 2030 look like?
9. What does "good" look like?

### Reporting back and timetable

The Advisory Board will aim to present a report to the Leader of the Council for debate at Cabinet/Full Council during the first quarter of 2018. The Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Environment, Leisure and Community Services (which has the library service within its remit) will have the opportunity to input to the report and comment on the final draft. The anticipated timeline is as follows:

- Early July 2017: first meeting of the Board
- September 2017: Policy & Scrutiny input session
- December 2017/January 2018: drafting stages of report
- First half of 2018: Final report in draft to Policy & Scrutiny Committee  
Presentation to Leader and Cabinet/Full Council