

**13 October 2011**

**Warwickshire Library Service transformation approved by Cabinet**

Warwickshire County Council's cabinet today approved recommendations to transform the county's library and information service with changes set to come into place by the start of April 2012.

The transformation sees the library service manage a cut of over £2m from its budget, approximately 30% of its current funding, as it makes its contribution towards the county council's savings target of £70million by 2014.

The transformation will see the service evolve into a more dynamic system best able to meet the needs of the county's residents. A library hub will be based at three libraries in main centres of population – Leamington, Rugby and Nuneaton – and will offer the widest range of services and longest opening hours. Library Local will operate at 15 libraries, with the pattern of opening hours to be consulted upon.

Library Direct, will provide services directly to the customer, either in person or to their PC including a 24/7 online library, e-books and e-audio and further customer-facing support from mobile, outreach and the housebound reader services. The mobile library service, already working more efficiently through a partnership with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, will be reviewed to look at ways to make it more accessible to more customers and provide a wider range of services in the future.

A further 16 libraries have been identified by the council as unsustainable in their current form given the financial pressures the service faces. Following consultation with affected communities during March-June, a number of community groups have come forward with alternative arrangements to take over the management and running of these libraries by 2012.

This change will bring about savings on property, staffing and management costs, particularly as some of the community groups will move the library operation to community venues such as parish halls.

£100,000 of capital, alongside other county council funding streams - the Big Society Fund and community grants – has been made available for the groups to apply to in order to help them with procedures such as installing self-service machines and building modifications so that they can begin to operate by next April.

The community groups will be supported by library staff with a package including training, a helpline and quarterly visits. The community libraries will continue to receive refreshed book stock, discounted rent and equipment such as IT and photocopiers.

The proposals drawn up by community groups have greatly impressed Cllr Colin Hayfield, Warwickshire County Council's portfolio holder for Customers, Access and Physical Assets. He said:

“I know how much libraries mean to people and the outstanding response of communities has reflected that. Community groups have risen to the challenge and come forward with innovative and imaginative options for providing a library service in their locality. It would have been easy to accept that they would not have a library but these groups have rallied round and have presented their communities with some very exciting opportunities for how they can access their local library service. I very much hope that these community libraries prosper and that the effort and enthusiasm that has gone into drawing up these proposals is rewarded.”

The precise opening hours of the 18 libraries remaining in the county council's jurisdiction have yet to be finalised. The input of residents will play an important role when the options on the pattern of opening hours are finally implemented.

Other changes discussed saw cabinet approve plans to protect the stock fund with which books, CDs, DVDs, spoken word and electronic titles are purchased. In addition, agreed that removing charges on the People's Network, the council's access to the internet at libraries, could be examined by councillors when deciding future budgets.

Cllr Colin Hayfield, portfolio holder for Customers, Access and Physical Assets, said: "The transformation of the library service will create a modern and dynamic operation that is fit for purpose in the 21st century. People's needs and expectations from libraries are changing and we have to meet these within the constraints of finding the necessary savings.

"We know that libraries are deeply valued within communities, a focal point for residents whatever their age, ethnicity or economic means. We have worked immensely hard, and will continue to do so, to ensure that communities still have access to the services that make libraries so valued.

"We have had no choice but to make the savings but have acted decisively to limit their impact by working with partners at borough and district councils, with the police, with children's centres and with neighbouring authorities to share our resources and make them go further whilst providing a range of services for the public behind one front door.

"We must now look to the future and establish the new service so that it can complement the community libraries and ensure that everyone in Warwickshire continues to receive the benefits of a robust and efficient library resource."

Full details of the Cabinet report are available at <http://libraryconsult.wordpress.com/>

ENDS

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