

REPORT ON POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL'S VISION FOR COMMUNITY HUBS

A Community Perspective

'The library is far more than a building with books in it'

Walsall Library Consultation Report 2011

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FECH realises that the above list may not cover all those who may wish to receive a copy of this report. A copy of the report is also available on our website: www.fech.btck.co.uk

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SUMMARY

1. Introduction and Background

Wolverhampton Council have a vision for Community Hubs, which may involve co-locating libraries, community centres and youth provision. On hearing of this vision members of Finchfield community decided there was a need to express their concerns regarding the potential implications of the Council's vision for local communities, the importance of local libraries to communities, and the need for a comprehensive consultation. Finchfield Estate Community Hub (FECH) co-ordinated a 'Hands Off Finchfield Library' campaign which involved the following:

- a petition
- a file of letters and comments
- a focus group

Information from the above was then collated and included in this report.

The objective of this report is to demonstrate how important it is that some services should be based locally in their communities and not neighbourhood or area based. This report also aims to show how important Finchfield Library is to its local community.

2. The Council's Vision for Community Hubs

The Council state that their vision for three constituency based service hubs and twelve smaller hubs is consistent with the City Strategy 'Prosperity for All'. By transforming community services and facilities, and by delivery of universal advice and information services, the Council claims their vision will assist them in their objective 'Empowering People and Communities'. However, information contained in this report challenges the Council's claims.

3. Localism and the Big Society

The government's localism bill signalled a shift of power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils. Specifically with regard to library services, Ed Vaizey (Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries) states:

A strong library service, based around the needs of local people, can play a key role in our ambitions to build the Big Society by providing safe and inclusive spaces for people to read, learn and access a wide range of community services.

4. Statutory Requirements

There are various duties and responsibilities that local councils have to fulfil in respect of libraries and service provision. If a council is considered to be failing in its duties they can be made the subject of a judicial review; the Secretary of State also has the power to order an enquiry. The proposals of some councils in respect of library services have been subject to judicial review. In another case (Wirral MBC) the Secretary of State ordered an enquiry which found the council to be in breach of their statutory duties regarding library provision. The cases for judicial review have centred around lack of attention to equalities impact and lack of adequate consultation.

5. Finchfield Library

Finchfield library has served the local community for over fifty years. It is already seen as a community hub, the heart of the community and key to community cohesion. The library and the staff are considered to be part of Finchfield community. Although physically Finchfield has one of the smaller local libraries, the usage figures show that it is one of the most used libraries. The results of FECH's petition, comments and letters collected, and the results of the focus group demonstrate Finchfield Library's popularity; they also show the strength of feeling local residents have in respect of the library and its staff staying at their present location. All groups in the community use the library including the vulnerable and the elderly. The library is easily accessible to many on foot, by cycle and bus service. It satisfies many local needs including information and signposting. It already satisfies many of the Council's objectives in respect of 'empowering people and communities'. To take away or co-locate the library would actually be doing the opposite of the Council's objectives and be disempowering to people and communities.

6. Conclusions

Wolverhampton's City Strategy 2011 – 2026 takes as its theme 'Prosperity For All' and states:

- It is vital that everyone benefits from the prosperity we create, including the most vulnerable people in our community
- We want to close gaps in skills, health and well-being – not widen them.
- However, prosperity for all depends on opportunity for all.

If the Council are to achieve these aims, the following need to be taken into account when considering their vision for Community Hubs:

- A robust, quality consultation process is necessary in order to achieve a high level of understanding both of the services provided and to assess the needs of local communities.
- Unless the Council undertake a quality consultation, including an in-depth equality analysis, they may be in breach of their statutory duties regarding service provision.
- The definition of 'community' in the Council's vision for Community Hubs needs to be carefully considered . At present the term 'community' is being used in different ways by the Council and residents.
- Local community services, as against neighbourhood services, contribute considerably to people's sense of place, sense of living in a safe environment and to community cohesion; they have a positive impact on an individual's health and well-being.
- Within the local community (as identified by local people) there is a need for local services that are accessible to all, particularly the vulnerable and elderly.
- Ease of access is crucial to making the health and well-being benefits of libraries available to the most vulnerable groups in our communities. Co-locating services may create a barrier in terms of

both travel time and costs. It may also have a negative impact on people's perception of libraries as a welcoming, safe environment.

- Children who visit libraries achieve greater levels of literacy and numeracy than those who do not. Having a local, accessible library embedded in the heart of a community makes it more likely that children will become active library users.
- A local, accessible library service with experienced, professional staff narrows the attainment gap between children in poverty and those who are not.
- With the development of the BSF schools the ideal location for youth services would be on school premises where there are already facilities which are best suited.

7. Recommendations

This report includes recommendations under the following headings:

- A full Council debate
- Evidence based proposals
- Consultation
- Independent equality analysis
- Defining 'community'
- Community hubs best practice
- Transport and access
- Building Schools for the Future
- Funding
- Wolverhampton Library Service Strategic Vision

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In January 2012 FECH (Finchfield Estate Community Hub) became aware of the Council's vision for creating 'community hubs'. The Council is looking to develop community hubs across the city over the next five years. This vision may involve the co-location of library, youth and community services. FECH held a meeting of their committee and several concerned residents – the outcome of this meeting was twofold:

- It was felt that the Council's vision for Community Hubs presented a very real threat to the future of Finchfield Library
- It was felt that the Council could not be trusted to consult fairly on this issue

As a result of the meeting, FECH put into motion their 'Hands Off Finchfield Library Campaign'. FECH's first action was to conduct a petition so that local people could express their wish to retain Finchfield library and its staff at their present location. FECH also compiled a file of letters and comments and held a focus group of local residents.

The theme of the focus group was the Council's vision for community hubs and the possible co-location of libraries and other services. The focus group revealed that there were wider issues than simply the future of Finchfield Library, for example: accessibility of services; the impact of the Council's vision on vulnerable groups; potential impact on community cohesion and sense of identity; impact on local schools and schoolchildren; the importance of services being local to the communities they serve.

1.2 Objectives of this report

The objective of this report is to demonstrate how important it is that some services should be based locally in their communities and not area based. This report will also point out how important Finchfield Library is to its local community. In order to achieve these objectives this report cites relevant case studies, statutory requirements and Council policy.

FECH recognise that this is not a fully comprehensive report and we have only touched upon some of the issues. We hope that those reading this report will appreciate how extremely difficult it is for individual residents to gain access to relevant, current policies and information.

2.0 SETTING THE SCENE

2.1 THE COUNCIL'S VISION FOR COMMUNITY HUBS

Based on the report to Cabinet 'Community hubs a 5 year vision'¹

- 2.1.1 The Council's vision for Community Hubs aims to 'enable the Council to deliver high quality customer-facing services for the citizens of Wolverhampton and for the local communities they serve'. The Council proposes the establishment of 3 large Community Service Hubs and 12 smaller Community Hubs. It is envisaged that delivery of these hubs will take place over a 5 year period.
- 2.1.2 The Council plans that the smaller Community Hubs will be based on existing community buildings and will focus on re-designating community centres, libraries and youth centres as Community Hubs.
- 2.1.3 The Council proposes that Community Service Hubs should be constituency based. It is intended that they will be 'multi-agency, multi-service hubs, providing for library, community centre and youth provision'. They will also provide spaces for 're-configured social care and family support services.' Council proposals state that Community Service Hubs will be 'fit for purpose buildings which will realise efficiency savings through asset rationalisation and service re-design'.
- 2.1.4 The Council claims that information and signposting will be a key feature of the Hubs which will also commit to better use of technology. It is envisaged that 'an improved on-line presence and use of digital media will help to provide a modern and accessible approach to local services making them available 24 hours a day 7 days a week'. In the case of libraries automated book issuing and digital media will be used.
- 2.1.5 The Council envisages the following benefits to itself and the citizens of Wolverhampton:
- Sustainable local services
 - Personalisation
 - Efficiency savings
 - Integration/partnership working
 - Customer satisfaction
 - Value for money
- 2.1.6 The Council proposes to transform the library service to make it more modern and accessible. It is envisaged that a transformed library service will help promote independence, health, leisure opportunities, quality of life and social inclusion. Voluntary, community and service groups will be provided with space to promote their services and activities.
- 2.1.7 The Council's vision is consistent with the City Strategy ('Prosperity for All – creating opportunities that encourage enterprise, empower people and re-invigorate our city') 'By transforming community services and facilities, and by delivery of universal advice and information services, this vision will assist the Council in its objectives of 'empowering people and communities' in respect of:

¹ <http://btckstorage.blob.core.windows.net/site3841/Wolverhampton Council Community Hubs and Satellites.pdf>

- providing suitable sites and facilities for 'undertaking early intervention and prevention;
- supporting financial inclusion by promoting a refreshed information and signposting strategy;
- encouraging healthier lifestyles and independence at all stages of life by providing the facilities that communities require to enable them to do so;
- supporting more people to be active in their communities;
- encouraging the voluntary and community sectors.

The Council's vision will also assist in achieving the objective of 'working together to re-invigorate the city' in respect of:

- increasing local ownership of place;
- creating neighbourhoods that are desirable, well integrated, safe and well managed in order to help in developing diverse and welcoming neighbourhoods with good quality housing.

2.1.8 The Council's vision for Community Hubs is also consistent with their 2009-2012 Corporate Plan in respect of:

- making communities safer and stronger;
- improving the health and well being of our communities;
- developing sustainable communities.

2.2 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND COUNCIL POLICY

Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

2.2.1 The 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act requires local authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service. This Act safeguards the provision of a free and accessible library service. Section 7 of the act states:

General duty of library authorities

1. It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library Service for all persons desiring to make use thereof...

Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

2. In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and

(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and

(c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.

2.2.2 The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for national library policy. On 1st October 2011 Arts Council England (ACE) took over responsibility for supporting and developing libraries. ACE are currently working with the Local Government Group on the second phase of the 'Future Libraries Programme'.

2.2.3 If a Local Authority is not fulfilling its duties under the 1964 Libraries Act the Secretary of State may intervene and establish an inquiry to investigate the matter. The following matters may be relevant to any consideration of this issue by the Secretary of State²:

- the analysis of existing and projected local need for the public library service; this may include matters such as deprivation indices, rural/urban context, and consideration of vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, elderly, disabled, children and young people, young families;

² http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/3416.aspx

- any consultation process undertaken in the lead up to proposed library changes and the Authority's response to that consultation;
- the strategic plan for the library service – including innovative and creative ways of delivering the service;
- any Equality Impact Assessment and how any adverse impacts may be mitigated.

Equality Act 2010

2.2.4 The Equality Act 2010 addresses several strands of equality including provision of services. The Act includes a Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force in April 2011 and requires public bodies such as the Council to consider all individuals when shaping policy and delivering services. It requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. The Equality and Human Rights Commission provides the following guidance³:

The Equality Duty supports good decision making – it encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities, so that their policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people's opportunities, public bodies can be more efficient and effective. The Equality Duty therefore helps public bodies to deliver the Government's overall objectives for public services.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations came into force on 10th September 2011. The specific duties help public bodies perform the Equality Duty better. They do this by requiring public bodies to be transparent about how they are responding to the Equality Duty – requiring them to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and to set equality objectives. The Government believes that public bodies should be accountable to their service users. Publishing information about decision-making and the equality data which underpins those decisions will open public bodies up to informed public scrutiny. It will give the public the information they need to challenge public bodies and hold them to account for their performance on equality. Moreover, knowing that such information will be published will help to focus the minds of decision-makers on giving proper consideration to equality issues.

2.2.5 Wolverhampton Council's Draft Equalities Objectives Action Plan (EOAP) 2012 – 2016⁴ fulfils the Council's duty under the Equality Act and Public Sector Duty to publish equality objectives and the structures they have put in place to take them forward.

Specifically with regard to Community Hubs the EOAP states a corporate equality objective:

To advance equalities by taking practical steps to ensure services are accessible and efficient for all communities.

The activity that will progress this aim is:

³ http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/EqualityAct/PSED/essential_guide_update.pdf

⁴ <http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F4E3B227-6DBE-413F-A272-C8AEDE6B4F6F/0/EqualityOAPlan27mb.pdf>

To enable service redesigns with citizens as partners, not consumers of services and therefore ensuring that services are re-configured to deliver what users (including protected groups) themselves determine.

The Council's intended outcome for this equality objective is that:

Specifications for new services ensure accessibility for all relevant groups and community involvement/ownership in designing and delivering services in partnerships.

Best Value Guidance

2.2.6 Best Value Guidance came into force in September 2011. This calls for local councils to consider 'overall value including economic, environmental and social value when reviewing service provision'. The term 'social value' is defined as 'seeking to maximise the additional benefit that can be created by procuring or commissioning goods or services, above and beyond the benefit of merely the goods and services themselves'.⁵

The Best Value Guidance also emphasises the Duty to Consult as set out in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. Section 4 of the Best Value Guidance states:

Authorities should be responsive to the benefits and needs of voluntary and community sector organisations of all sizes (honouring the commitments set out in Local Compacts)⁶

Wolverhampton's City Strategy (WCS)

2.2.7 The WCS outlines a clear vision for reducing inequalities.

One of the key themes of the strategy is 'Prosperity for All'. The WCS states:

It is vital that the most vulnerable people in our community benefit from our goal. That is what a civilised society means. We want to close gaps in skills, health and well-being – not widen them. This means identifying and unlocking the key barriers at the right time so that people are not held back or discouraged. At a community and neighbourhood level, support still needs to be provided to communities and groups that do not yet have the skills and capacity to be self-sustaining. In addition, those who are not in a position to work also need to be safeguarded and protected, such as older people, the young and those living in poverty.

In a modern world, the physical environment needs to provide the infrastructure that supports the functioning of global companies, small business, neighbourhoods and people of all ages and backgrounds.

Wolverhampton Corporate Plan (WCP)

2.2.8 The WCP defines the Council's vision in a set of strategic priorities. In addition to the strategic priorities the Corporate Plan includes four cross cutting themes which are integral to the Council's vision:

- community cohesion

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1976926.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1976926.pdf>

- equalities
- sustainability
- value for money

The plan covers a three-year period and seeks to translate the council's ambition into a set of strategic priorities. These are based around a dynamic vision which both harnesses and focuses our resources to deliver those things that will make the most difference in reducing poverty and inequality and improving the quality of life for local people.⁷

The six key priorities for 2009-12 were:

- improve educational attainment
- safeguard children and young people
- improve community safety
- safeguard vulnerable adults
- develop skills and local businesses
- regenerate city sites

Under the priority of 'Improve educational attainment' the Council recognises:

Social disadvantage remains a key determinant of future attainment, with children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds tending to do less well than their peers at all stages. Parental aspiration and involvement in their children's education are key factors to success as is the quality of the provision.

Wolverhampton Library Manifesto/Library Strategy/Library Action Plan

2.2.9 The Council advised FECH that the Council's vision could be found in the Corporate Plan and the City Strategy. No specific library manifesto, strategy or action plan exists for library services in Wolverhampton.

N.B. There is currently no head of service for libraries in Wolverhampton.

Previous consultations and comment

2.2.10 The report to Cabinet 25/2/12 'Budget 2012/13 – outcome of consultation' states:

3.3.4 The suggestion, given the need to rationalise and retain services, was that youth services, early intervention, schools provision and making best use of the existing built infrastructure should be looked at "holistically" – i.e. consideration for services that could usefully be co-located both in terms of their compatibility and cost effectiveness.

3.3.5 There was some concern that Community Hubs might not be the most appropriate "venue"/"vehicle" for youth services (based upon historical precedents) and anticipated scepticism of older residents/their stakeholder organisations.

Wolverhampton Council's 'Youth Service Scrutiny Enquiry' 21st February 2012 notes the following:

⁷ http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/council/corporate/plans/corporate/cp_intro.htm

8.4.2 Implications for Youth Service – Community Hubs

(i) The Youth Service review will need to take into account the move to develop Community Hubs. At present the service operates from a range of quality points including 15 youth centres managed by the service, community centres, as well as schools and street based work.

(ii) The development of Community Hubs across the City would create the opportunity for youth provision to come together with other local services. This may create greater opportunity to make better use of youth club facilities which are frequently poorly used during the day, and it is important that youth provision is part of the planning for each Community Hub whether it is provided by the Council or a voluntary/community sector organisation. However, approaches also need to take into consideration the tensions that can arise when activities for younger people and the wider community both take place in the same building.

(iii) Transport links will also be taken into account, given the vulnerability that many young people feel when trying to access services.

Walsall Library Consultation 2011

2.2.11 In early 2011 Walsall's library service initiated a fundamental review to inform potentially wide ranging changes to the way in which the service is delivered. All of the data generated by Walsall's consultation is informative in view of Wolverhampton Council's vision for Community Hubs. Of particular relevance is the following:

Distance prepared to travel to library	
One to two miles	30%
Up to half a mile	28%
Half a mile to one mile	26%
More than two miles	15%
Not applicable – I don't use the library	1%

52% of respondents stated that they walked to the library.

92% of library users felt that the library was important to the local community.

86% of non-library users felt that libraries are important to the local community.

2.3 The importance of local services to specific groups

Many groups of people have specific needs which are currently met by the library service. The following are examples of some of these groups:

Children and young people

2.3.1 The 2009 National Literacy Trust's report found that access to books, computers, magazines and newspapers has declined for young people. Fewer young people were also reported having books of their own (73% compared with 89% in 2005), access to a newspaper (64% compared with 71% in 2005) and access to magazines (67% compared with 84% in 2005). The NLT report finds a direct relationship between library usage and literacy levels.

Numerous reports point to a direct link between access to resources, reading levels and attainment.

For example:

- National Literacy Trust 2009: Young people's reading and writing - an in-depth study focusing on enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment.'⁸
- National literacy Trust 2008 'Literacy Changes Lives'⁹
- All Party Parliamentary Group for Education 'Report into the enquiry of overcoming the barriers to literacy.' July 2011¹⁰

The National Literacy Trust's report 'Literacy Changes Lives 2008 cites the following research:

In 2006 KPMG released a paper entitled 'The long term costs of literacy difficulties'. This research estimated the annual cost of poor literacy as £1.73bn; made up of costs in terms of crime, health, special needs support, behavioural issues, and unemployment. KPMG states that this estimate is conservative, and there are a number of intangible benefits of literacy that are not included in the survey.

Child poverty in Wolverhampton

2.3.2 The link between access to resources and attainment is particularly relevant for Wolverhampton. Under the theme of 'Prosperity for All' Wolverhampton City Strategy aims to reduce child poverty and increase attainment. Under the heading 'Empowering People and Communities' the City Strategy states:

Too many children in Wolverhampton are born into poverty and do not have the support they need to succeed later in life. In 2007, nearly one in three children and young people were growing up in poverty – the second highest level in the West Midlands.

Under this key theme Wolverhampton Council is committed to early intervention and prevention. Their indicator for success is the Foundation Stage Profile 'percentage scoring 78% in PSE (personal, social and emotional development) and CLL (communication language and literacy).'

The National Library Service for Wales 'Child Poverty Solutions Online'¹¹ states:

⁸ http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/0177/Attitudes_towards_Reading_Writing_Final_2011.pdf

⁹ http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/0401/Literacy_changes_lives_2008.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.educationappg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/APPG-for-Education-Literacy-Inquiry-final-report.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.childpovertysolutions.org.uk/english/national-libraries-service>

Libraries can play an important social, as well as educational, role in the community, and can lead to personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment, local image and identity and wellbeing. New technology (i.e. internet) can attract new, previously socially excluded groups, to using and joining libraries.

Health and well-being

2.3.3 Wolverhampton Council's City Strategy states:

Coupled with poverty are problems of ill-health and life expectancy, for which the city is in the lowest 20% nationally. Obesity, alcohol misuse, smoking and poor lifestyles all make significant contributions to the poor health of the city's population, and one in three people are in receipt of incapacity benefits because of poor mental health – the highest rate in the Black Country.

The Reading Agency is an independent charity. Their mission is 'to inspire more people to read more'. They are the UK's leading development agency specialising in spreading reading through libraries. They are currently working in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians on a project called 'The Universal Reading Offer'.¹² As part of this project the Reading Agency have focused on the contribution libraries make towards health and well-being. Their research has found that reading has a wealth of health and well-being benefits from reducing stress to combating the onset of dementia.

Public libraries health assets include:

- a network of local community hubs;
- non-stigmatised, non-clinical community space;
- community outreach expertise, access to vulnerable people and local knowledge;
- expertise and support;
- supported on-line access;
- health related self-help reading programmes, services and resources, referral and signposting and social and recreational activity;
- volunteering and community engagement opportunities.

The Reading Agency acknowledges the role on libraries as a health tool expert in cost efficient, self-help, early intervention and prevention delivering:

- health information and learning;
- creative reading with therapeutic and mood boosting benefit;
- social opportunities e.g. reading groups acting as a social connector, breaking down isolation;
- contributing to the wider determinants of health and well being e.g. learning and literacy.

Mental Health

2.3.4 One in three people in Wolverhampton in receipt of incapacity benefits cite the reason for incapacity as mental health problems.¹³ The 'Commissioning Strategy for Mental Health Services in Wolverhampton'¹⁴ places emphasis on a stepped approach and highlights the following needs:

¹² http://readingagency.org.uk/about/Universal%20Reading%20Offer%20Presentation__March21.pdf

¹³ Wolverhampton City Strategy

- prevention and promotion of mental health and well-being;
- social inclusion;
- linking Health and well-being to a wider social context;
- the importance of community in contributing to good mental health.

Libraries play a key role in giving information, signposting and providing access to information. They play a key role in providing social contact. The importance of access to self-help books has been shown through schemes such as Books on Prescription. Several Primary Care Trusts across the country have set up Books on Prescription (BOP) schemes. The schemes were developed following the recommendations in a government report, “Self-help Interventions for Mental Health Problems”, with the aim of cutting waiting lists, reducing the amount of drugs prescribed, and offering an appropriate level of treatment for the majority of people who visit their GP with common mental health problems.

Books on Prescription schemes are a form of bibliotherapy which, when high-quality books are used, can bring many of the benefits of conventional medication without the potential side-effects associated with drugs, and often achieves good results more quickly. The schemes are usually operated by trusts in conjunction with local library services

Older people

2.3.5 The policy report ‘Age of Opportunity’¹⁵ carried out by the Older Age Working Group (June 2011) examines ways of transforming the lives of older people in poverty. They state

Social isolation in later life is a problem which has reached epic proportions in the UK. Over the course of this review we met numerous older people whose human contact is limited to just half an hour a week. From the host of charities and professionals consulted, we learnt that these people are not ‘outliers’, but representative of a vast group. It is estimated that over a million people aged 65 and over report feeling lonely often or always and a similar number who feel trapped in their homes.¹⁶

Age Concern’s ‘Safeguarding the Convoy’ is a report on the project ‘Campaign to End Loneliness’ which examines the needs of older people specifically with regard to elderly isolation. The report cites research¹⁷ which describes how older people can be excluded from resources. Under their section ‘Alleviating Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older People’ they state:

... the impact of the physical and social external environment has not been evaluated. It has been suggested that the provision of adequate public transport and accessible, ‘safe’ social venues (parks, libraries, internet cafes, garden centres and shopping malls) would reduce social isolation and loneliness

¹⁴ <http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/NR/ronlyres/51C68418-0FA9-4473-A932-742B12AAD4A5/0/draftmentalhealthstrategy.pdf>

¹⁵ http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/client/downloads/20110629_AgeofOpportunity.pdf

¹⁶ 1 Spotlight 2006 survey (unpublished), GfK NOP for Help the Aged, 2006

¹⁷ Fokkema and Knipscheer 2007

Wolverhampton has an increasing older population - this is significant because older people are by far the largest user group of public services¹⁸. The 'Projecting Older People Population Information'¹⁹ identifies around 41 000 older people (aged 65+) currently living in Wolverhampton and projects this figure to increase by 30% over the next 20 years.

Wolverhampton's 'Strategy for Older People' states as one of its underpinning values for its vision:

The views and expressed needs of older people will be central to the planning design and delivery of services

Adult Social Care

- 2.3.6 Wolverhampton Council's 'Putting People First Programme' is about transforming adult social care. One emphasis of the programme is 'early intervention and prevention'. The programme also puts emphasis on 'access to good quality, universal services that are available to all' and states that 'information regarding services should be available in a range of formats and be accessible to all'. In respect of choice and control, the programme states, 'effective information and support mechanisms will enable citizens and customers to make informed choices'. In the outcome of the consultation for the 'Putting People First' strategy, respondents stated that when it came to the best venue for finding information libraries were their second choice with doctors' surgeries coming first. The consultation also highlighted that 'many older people cannot afford IT internet or are frightened by it, particularly lack of security.' 'Transport to libraries etc... can be problematic for the elderly.'

¹⁸ Wolverhampton City Strategy 'Review of Older People's Strategy' October 2011

¹⁹ <http://www.poppi.org.uk/>

2.4 Setting the Scene Finchfield Library

2.4.1 Last year Finchfield Library celebrated its 50th anniversary. The library is currently open for 38 hours a week. Current services provided by Finchfield Library include:

- A stock of over 18 523 books plus CDs and DVDs
- Inter library loan/book ordering service
- 6 computers in constant use
- Faxing, photocopying and scanning facilities
- Basic computer skills help and advice
- Visits to and from local school classes
- Baby Club
- Working with the local playgroup
- Local community, citywide and regional information
- Social hub for the elderly
- Talks to groups
- Daily newspapers
- Storytimes

The importance of library staff

2.4.2 Library users speak very highly of the staff at Finchfield library; they speak of their warmth, friendliness, helpfulness and professional knowledge. That Finchfield Library is so successful and popular is partly due to the commitment of its staff.

Accessibility

2.4.3 The numbers 3 and 682 buses stop directly outside Finchfield Library.

The 682 provides an irregular service from Finchfield which calls at Tettenhall. There are no direct, regular bus links from Finchfield to either Warstones or Penn Libraries. There are no direct bus links at all from Castlecroft to neighbouring libraries. At present many users including children, older people and young mothers with pushchairs either walk or cycle to Finchfield library. From any point on Finchfield Estate it takes approximately 10 minutes to walk to Finchfield Library; it takes approximately 35 minutes to walk to Warstones Library and 50 minutes to walk to Tettenhall Library.

Usage figures. 2011/12²⁰

2.4.4 In April this year FECH requested information from Wolverhampton City Council under the Freedom of Information Act. So far Wolverhampton Council have not responded in full to FECH's request and have refused a further request. FECH disputes the Council's position and is currently pursuing a complaint against them.

After the closure of four local libraries in 2008/9 there are currently 15 local libraries in Wolverhampton. Compared to other local libraries, Finchfield is physically one of the smallest in size.

Footfall

2.4.5 In 2011/12 Finchfield's Library's footfall was 48 698. In 2011/12 Wednesfield Library had the highest footfall at just over 110 000. However it should be noted that £1.5 million lottery funding for a new

²⁰ A comprehensive set of figures regarding various aspects of library usage both nationally and across Wolverhampton can be found in appendix 1

building has contributed to the increased figures for Wednesfield library from 2009 onwards (2009/10: 72 618; 2010/11: 118 508) A report by Wolverhampton City Council states that, at times, a number of services have co-located at Wednesfield Library

2.2 As well as the library, the new building houses Wednesfield Community Centre and the Wednesfield & Fallings Park Local Neighbourhood Partnership and is spread over three floors, all accessible by lift.²¹

Lending rates

2.4.6 Tettenhall Library has the highest lending rates at 121 299. Finchfield Library is second highest of all local libraries at 103 615 (Wednesfield Library comes third with a lending rate is 89 064)

There is a disparity between Wednesfield's high footfall and their lending rates. This may be accounted for by the fact that figures for footfall at Wednesfield Library do not necessarily reflect the number of people accessing the library service on that site.

Book Stock

2.4.7 Tettenhall has the highest books stock at 20 369. Finchfield has the second highest book stock 18 523. Wednesfield has 17 443.

Active borrowers

2.4.6 Wednesfield has the highest number of active borrowers 5954. Tettenhall is second with 4156 followed by Warstones with 4072, Pendeford 3385, Bilston 3666 and Finchfield 3262.

It should be noted that although Wednesfield has the highest number of active borrowers their lending rate is third highest. Finchfield is sixth for active borrowers but is second for lending rates.

Age groups

2.4.8 A breakdown of age groups using the library service has been requested by FECH under the Freedom of Information Act. So far this information has not been made fully available to FECH.

Financial information

2.4.8 FECH have requested a breakdown of expenditure on libraries in Wolverhampton. So far this information has not been made fully available to FECH.

Comparing like for like

2.4.9 As can be seen, the figures for library usage in Wolverhampton do not compare like for like – this is demonstrated in the discrepancies highlighted above regarding footfall/active borrowers/lending rates. In order to compare like for like, figures would need to be adjusted to account for differences in size, services offered, hours opened, books issues etc.

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3.0 NATIONAL, COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY PERSEPECTIVES

3.1 FECH's perspective – a local community group

Petition

- 3.1.1 The FECH 'Hands Off Finchfield Library Petition went live on 6th February and closed on 8th April; it was available in paper form and online. The petition text and background information was carefully chosen so as to be as impartial as possible and to reflect FECH's desire to enable local people to be informed and have their voice heard.

Petition Text

Finchfield Library is the only community building in Finchfield. The library acts as an essential community hub. We, the undersigned, would like Finchfield Library and its staff to remain at their present location and for the library to continue providing our community with the present services that it delivers so well.

Background information

FECH (Finchfield Estate Community Hub) are aware that Wolverhampton Council are currently consulting with the public regarding the establishment of 'Community Hubs'. This may involve the possibility of services such as libraries/community centres/youth clubs being co-located. We feel that we can best pass public opinion specifically about Finchfield Library and the wishes of the local community to the Council by conducting this petition.

- 3.1.2 At the close of the petition 58 signatures had been collected online and just under 1300 signatures had been collected on paper copies. The petition only ran for a short period due to the Council's initial dates for consultation. These dates were later cancelled. Had the petition run for longer a great many more signatures would have been collected. FECH believes the petition would easily have gained over 2500 signatures thus triggering a full Council debate.

Comments

(A full list of comments is included in appendix 2)

- 3.1.3 During the campaign FECH invited members of the public to give us their comments or write letters which we have presented to Rob Willoughby. The comments can broadly be said to fall into 8 main areas:

Finchfield library already acts as an important hub for the community

This is a Community Hub. Why would they want to change it?

What else have we got round here? Nothing really when you think about it.

Community cohesion and sense of place

I came in once and the storytime was going on. I thought it would be really annoying, but then I thought, well, that's what should be happening in a library. Lots of things going on – young people and children being involved. I felt good all day after that. It makes you feel part of something. A community I suppose, and we don't get that very often these days – community spirit.

Importance of the library to older people

I haven't spoken to anyone for three days. If it wasn't for the library I might not speak to anyone all week.

They [the librarians] said just to let them know if my husband needed any books when he was ill and they'd sort it out for us. They know what he likes and I could go and collect them.

Accessibility

Lots of people walk here especially off the estate. My nan comes – she probably wouldn't go anywhere else. It'd be a shame if they took the library away – she loves it.

It's good because you can wait just inside the library and see the bus coming. It's good for us older people.

Importance of the library to children and young people

Finchfield Playgroup has a visit from the librarian every week for storytime. This has been a regular event for over 15 years. We have an excellent relationship with Finchfield Library, the children look forward to 'the storylady' visiting and we think books are an important part of the children's development.

It's good because the children can come here after school. They can walk and come in to do their homework.

I come to storytime. It's really good and I get to choose my books as well. You know your kids are safe when they're in the library.

I'm a teacher – I tell all my children to use the library. It's how you learn – anyone knows that.

Intergenerational

I live in Telford but I come here because I pick my granddaughter up from school here and we come in.

I bring my grandchildren. I don't even live in the area but when I visit my daughter I bring my grandchildren to the library and then they can play in the playground next door.

Importance of experienced professional staff

I think the library wouldn't be what it is without them [the librarians]. We need them!

I want to speak to a person – you can't talk to a machine.

Computers and internet access

I didn't have a computer but they [the librarians] showed me the ropes and I've got a computer now at home.

I have to come here to check my e-mails and print things off. I haven't got a printer at home.

Health and well-being

The letters and comments received by FECH as part of the 'Hands Off Finchfield Library' campaign have included several references to the importance of local libraries regarding physical and mental health and well-being. For example:

In the past I have suffered many years of an anxiety disorder which at one time resulted in my becoming agoraphobic and unable to leave the house. The first place I managed to go to when able was my local library just a few minutes walk away. For many months the library was the only safe place I felt I could go to in the outside world. I went there as part of my recovery process and also because it was a safe place where I knew I could access information regarding self help. At the time I could not have managed a longer journey to a library further away.

Additional comments from Councillors

Councillor Andrew Wynne: 'Finchfield Library is a well used community facility. There is universal feeling that the library provision in the locality should not be altered in any way. It is in a convenient location and is popular with local residents. It is a necessary facility for Finchfield.'

Councillor Wendy Thompson: 'It would be very much missed; it's used by all ages and is a very busy meeting place for all the local community.'

Letters

3.1.4 FECH has passed ten letters and e-mails of support for Finchfield Library to the Council. We are also aware that others have sent letters directly to the Council. Three of the letters were from either governors or heads of local schools. The letters detailed, with great strength of feeling, many ways in which Finchfield Library is a valued and necessary asset to the local community. For reasons of

confidentiality only excerpts are included in this report and copies of the letters have not been included in the appendices.

It is already a hub for all sections of the community as a centre of information and advice offering facilities for young families as well as older members of the community who use it not just to exchange books but to enjoy contact with other, particularly the library staff. Many older residents feel isolated and use the library as a welcome break in what can be a lonely day, staying to read the daily papers and chat with others.

This is not a quiet, rarely used, dust collecting library. It is the vibrant heart of the Finchfield Community, its loss would reverberate around us and be sadly missed.

It is used and treasured by the majority of local residents [toddlers groups, school groups, elderly, infirm, unemployed, general public] for all the above groups it is essential that the library remains local and easily accessible thus avoiding travelling time and cost.

A Council that does not see the benefit of and future for libraries in all communities is a Council that is not only not in touch with its residents but a Council that does not understand its communities.

In January this year I read the document 'Community Hubs – A Five Year Vision for Wolverhampton'. I have since spoken to hundreds of people within my local community on this issue and share their alarm at the threat that the 'vision' for community hubs poses to our library service here in Finchfield.

I do not have my own car to travel to a different library. There is no direct bus route to the next nearest library so if you do close Finchfield Library you are denying my children access to all the books, all of that opportunity to learn.

I am chair of governors at Castlecroft Primary School. The librarians visit the school on a regular basis. The children visit the library in their classes on a regular basis. I frequently see the children from school with their mums on the holidays and at weekends. There is much to do about how children can't read when they leave school. How can you take away their right to a proper place to borrow books?

'I live in [...] and as a person with long term mental health needs, Finchfield Library is literally a lifeline to me. I am very isolated, so knowing that I can walk just [...] to the library can motivate me to get out and provides some social contact and quality of life.

Personally, I couldn't do without it. I have MS so a trip to the Central Library is not really possible for me.

Having a love of reading helps a child in so many ways. Not just the act of reading itself but it helps with spelling and comprehension. It fires the imagination. My four and seven year olds have also engaged in the fun reading challenges and have enjoyed doing so.

Focus Group

3.1.5 Members of the local community agreed to take part in a focus group so that FECH could explore issues in greater depth. The focus group consisted of seven individuals who reflected a range of ages between 20 and 70. The participants included a university student, health professional, chair of governors, retired teacher, classroom assistant, retired theatre nurse. Background information was sent to participants prior to the focus group. Three question themes were explored:

Q1. What do you think about the idea of three community hubs? Of having a number of services in one building?

Q2. Do you think it is important to keep local libraries?

Q3 What would be your ideal south west Community Hub?

The table below is an analysis of the focus group data. Italics show sample comments; bullet points draw together issues raised and discussed by the group as a whole.

Q1 What do you think about the idea of Community Hubs? About having a number of services in one building?

General Issues

'Well, I'd like to know where they're going to be.'

- Not enough information has been given on the possible locations of the three large Community Service Hubs.
- Concern was expressed regarding the experience and motivation of those making the decisions.

Overall issues about access to Community Hubs

'You'd need a day out. Two buses to go. Two buses to go back.'

'Think of the cost of bus fares.'

- Constituency area Community Service Hubs would not be easily accessible for many people (including vulnerable groups such as the elderly) as there are no direct bus routes.
- It may not be appropriate to house library, community and youth services in one building. Putting these services under one roof could create conflicting use of space and may lead to some people being segregated.
- There would be problems for service users relating to convenience, time and cost.
- At present many people walk to Finchfield Library including young mothers, children, the elderly and local schools. This would not be possible if the library was moved elsewhere.

Service provision issues

'Every area's different. They need to work with people in the community to find out what they want. For example, in this area they could put a youth centre but people might not even go.'

- Different areas require different services; therefore each area needs to be consulted adequately about their needs.
- The Council's suggested services for co-location (youth services, library services and community centres) need to be located in the heart of their communities.
- There are better ways of using existing resources such as locating youth services in schools.
- Some people may stop using the services.
- Provision of many important services would be lost on a community level.

Loss to local community

'The library is the biggest asset we've got in this area. We've lost the bus, we've lost the post office, and my bone of contention is they don't give us things. They say we're rich, but we're not – they don't think we need things.'

'Well, if they shut the library they may as well close the area because there's absolutely nothing else.'

- Finchfield Library is a Community Hub already and is of considerable importance to those living in the community.
- Finchfield Library has been our only community building for a number of years and contributes to the character of the area.

Social importance and sense of community

'It's vital! You see old people. You see young people. You see all people. It's so important.'

- As well as being a library and providing services to the local community, Finchfield Library is a friendly place where local people meet and socialise – this reduces the dangers of isolation for a number of people, including those who are vulnerable.
- All ages within the community are able to integrate there – Finchfield Library is a point of social cohesion for the community.

Financial considerations

'They'll cut costs but at the price of people's jobs.'

'Yes, and then do something stupid with the money!'

- There may be some financial savings to the Council but at what cost to the community?
- There is at present nowhere to put a large hub in the area so money would have to be spent on providing one.
- Finchfield Library could be used for some other purpose after library hours or on Friday when the library is not currently open.
- Questions were posed around the financing of the three large community hubs.
- There may be a loss of jobs.

Q2 Why do you think it is important to keep local libraries within their local community?

*'Because elderly people have no transport. They'd have to go to town. Why should they? They wouldn't....
and mothers with pushchairs.'*

'But the school – they can walk there.'

*'They [the librarians] become part of the community even though they don't live in the area. A person with
concerns, issues, problems – they can signpost.'*

*'It's the little things – the photocopier. And those are the things that these people who make decisions don't
appreciate – I use the photocopier.'*

'It keeps everyone in tune with the area.'

*'We find the south-west very hard to engage with. In the south-west there are a lot of people who are quite
isolated.'*

- Having a local library makes easier access for certain groups such as: elderly (who don't have transport); mothers (with pushchairs); young children calling in on their way from school, and classes on visits from local schools. At present these groups can often walk to their local library.
- A local library is a safe place for vulnerable and isolated people.
- Local libraries are fundamental to community integration and cohesion – all sections of the community use the library.
- Local libraries provide a personal, friendly service – the librarians are seen as part of the local community and they know the library users by name.
- A local library enables its community to have local, citywide and regional information about services and activities.
- Local libraries allow service providers to engage at a local level in a trusted environment where people feel safe and welcome.
- The library provides many services at a local level such as: computers, newspapers, photocopying, faxing, internet access. There is nowhere else locally these services could be accessed conveniently.

Q3 If there was to be a Community Hub in the south-west constituency where would it be? If this was to go ahead... where would you put a Community Hub?

'Three guesses where it would be!'

'Whitmore Reans – they'll put it in Whitmore Reans.'

Overall Issues

- The area concerned is large, which means services would not be local, accessible or convenient to many, including those who are vulnerable or isolated.
- The decision may have already been made – certain areas are more likely to be prioritised.
- The services proposed for large hubs would not necessarily serve all the differing needs of the numerous communities.
- Accessibility problems would raise additional issues of time, cost and convenience for members of

the community.

- It seems to go against the need to find ways to attract people into the town centre.

Consultation issues

'When it's to do with community it's in tiny writing and pinned up in a corner [assent in the room] ... well it is, we all know it.'

'There needs to be adequate notice – not just a day before or something like they do.'

'We don't want a tokenistic consultation. It should be prepared in advance and notices put out and proper meetings held... well that's a good reason for having the library.'

- There is a need for a well publicised, thorough and interactive consultation to identify the wants and needs of individual communities, which allows members of the community to participate in an informed way.

Automated book issuing

'It takes the personal contact away. In GP practices you don't even speak to anyone any more. The receptionists – it's like – don't you want us to speak to you? It's a barrier. I think you lose the confidence to speak to people.'

'How can you ask a machine about a book? You can't.'

- Introducing automated book issuing would have a negative impact on the personal, warm service currently offered by librarians.
- Machines create a barrier and take away the opportunity to engage verbally. Verbal communication is being reduced in society.
- Automated book issuing would mean there was a loss of opportunity to gain experience and confidence with communication skills – this is particularly important for the younger generations where communication skills are important for interviews and work situations.
- Concern was expressed regarding potential loss of jobs for qualified experienced librarians.

3.1.6 FECH gave feedback to participants subsequent to the focus group. The opportunity was given for participants to make any additional comments. One of the participants gave the following comment:

The positions of the current local libraries were chosen for a purpose. They are all central to their area and all near the area bus route. There are no suitable cross area bus routes so therefore no suitable situations for a cross area hub. What use is a centre that requires two journeys to get there and two to get home? Mothers with pushchairs don't want four bus journeys. Schools can't afford coaches to transport children across areas. If the elderly lose their bus passes they won't be able to afford it. An area hub is no use to people if it is difficult/or too expensive to get there.

A similar thing happened with the children's centres. When The Crescent was used it was good, but now that it is rarely manned and people have to go to Warstones it is of less use to the people of Castlecroft and Finchfield. I fear that money was wasted due to poor planning. Please don't repeat this experience with the social and educational life of the people in our area.

3.2 **Case studies – libraries under threat**

3.2.1 The economic downturn and ensuing cuts to public services has adversely affected libraries across the country. Nationally, numerous campaign groups are fighting to save their library services; several such groups have pursued legal action against council decisions.

Figures show that more than 100 libraries across the country have either closed, are now run by volunteers or have been turned into social enterprises since April 2011.²² Other estimates forecast that in May 2012 there were 600 libraries under threat across the country.²³

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (Wirral MBC) – Public Inquiry

3.2.2 In 2007/8 Wirral MBC decided to rationalize its library service by investing £20 million in 13 Neighbourhood Centres each containing a library and multiple council services..

In 2009, due to a large volume of correspondence and a specific complaint from the Museums, Archives and Libraries Council, the Secretary of State ordered an enquiry. The purpose of the inquiry was to gather information to help decide whether Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's plans for their library service were consistent with their statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service.

The enquiry found Wirral MBC to be in breach of its statutory duties. The primary reason for the breach was that Wirral MBC had 'failed to make a comprehensive assessment of local needs'. In particular the Council failed to give due consideration to the needs of older people, disabled people, unemployed people and those living in deprived areas. Further criticisms of the Council were that it failed to consider the requirements of children and that there was an absence of a strategic plan for or review of the library service. The inquiry found that Wirral MBC had made decisions without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services provided by libraries. The Council were found to have failed in carrying out an adequate assessment of needs before putting forward proposals to cut services.²⁴

Brent (Save Our Six) S.O.S. Libraries

3.2.3 Brent S.O.S. Libraries is a campaign group challenging Brent Council's decision to close six libraries as part of a cost-cutting programme. Brent Council announced its plans to shut the libraries in April 2011 saying the closures would help to fund improvements to its remaining library service and help it achieve £104m in savings.

Brent S.O.S. Libraries have pursued action through the courts on the basis that the Council's decision-making is flawed and unlawful. In February 2012 the case reached the Supreme Court who refused campaigners any further appeal finding that there was 'no arguable point of law' for an appeal. Samantha Warrington of Brent SOS Libraries said they will continue to push for the Secretary of State to hold "a public inquiry into Brent's failure to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service".

The campaign group 'Save Barham Library' (one of the 'Brent Six') have made the following information available to FECH:

²² Source 'Speak up for Libraries'

²³ Source 'Public Libraries News'

²⁴ http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/wirral_local_inquiry.pdf

1. Brent Council was able to provide information about registered and active users of our Library (and all Libraries in the borough). In our case this showed that just over 50% of the 'active' users were under 19 years of age. The young people were either small children brought to the Library by their parents usually after school or on Saturdays or older youngsters using the library for research or study space. Many people came to use the free PC and internet and some to read the newspapers and magazines. Because of the nature of our area there were many people who could not spend money on books on a regular basis.

2. While the Library was still open we did a simple survey asking people the reason for their visit, why they used our library, and whether they would use an alternative library and what issues this would create for them.

After the closure we posted a further survey to everyone who signed a petition or got in touch about the campaign asking about their experiences after our library was closed. We had around 40 responses and of these around 50% stopped using the library service. The other 50% used the Library service less frequently and were not very happy about the alternatives, spent extra time getting there and in some cases complained about the extra costs of public transport or parking.

3. After 6 Libraries (half of total) were closed in Brent we asked the Council to provide monthly data on visits and book issues. The Council argument was that people would migrate to the remaining libraries. Some people clearly have but large numbers - especially the young and the elderly have not.

The monthly figures show some increase in few of the remaining libraries but in overall terms both visits and issues are around 20% to 30% down - which represents roughly the shares of users and issues that the 6 closed smaller libraries were previously responsible for. The conclusion is that the great majority of the previous users of the 6 smaller libraries have been deprived of a local service and have given up on libraries.

Surrey Library Action Movement

3.2.4 Surrey County Council has been forced to revisit its decisions on community run libraries following a decision by the High Court judicial review. The Council's decision, now declared to be unlawful, was taken following a 'Public Value Review' of the authority's library service. On 27 September 2011, the Cabinet decided that "library provision in 10 areas be delivered via the community partnership model." The community partnership model involves the Council providing the library building and stock but all staffing being provided by local volunteers.

Surrey Council's decision was challenged by SLAM on the basis that the Council had failed to discharge its public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Act required the Council to give rigorous regard to how removing paid staff would affect the accessibility of libraries to protected groups, including children, elderly, and disabled persons. Witness statements in support of the claim argued that paid staff were crucial in providing assistance to vulnerable users. Paid staff were able to develop knowledge, both of the library service and its users, which community volunteers spending a few hours in the library could not be expected to provide.

4.0 Conclusions

General

- 4.1 The need for cuts in local services has led councils across England to review library service provision. A number of councils have closed libraries, or have plans to either close libraries, co-locate services or make increased use of volunteers in delivering services. Many local communities who are unhappy with their council's decision-making (with good reason) have either taken their councils to court or asked the Secretary of State to order an enquiry.

Cases which have been taken to judicial review or enquiry have highlighted the need to assess needs of communities and fully understand current service provision before suggesting cuts to services.

A robust and quality consultation process is necessary in order to achieve a high level of understanding both of the services provided and to assess the needs of local communities.

Wolverhampton Council and the consultation process

- 4.2 In respect of the above comment on consultation and needs assessment, Wolverhampton Council may have a vision for Community Hubs, but has enough research has been done in respect of understanding local community needs and current service provision?

It is not good enough that the Council try to support their vision by referring loosely to various strategies, plans, etc.

With regard to consultation, "To be proper, consultation must...include sufficient reasons for particular proposals to allow those consulted to give intelligent consideration and an intelligent response."²⁵

Unless the Council undertake a quality consultation, including an in-depth equality analysis, they may be in breach of their statutory duties regarding service provision.

Options

- 4.3 The Council's vision thus far seems to be presenting a single option for the future, and yet the Council's budget consultation and report on youth zones has questioned the venue for co-location of youth services. The FECH focus group has also questioned co-locating youth services at community hubs.

With the development of the BSF schools the ideal situation for youth services would be that they are located on school premises where there are already facilities which are best suited.

After gathering information concerning the needs of individual communities there is a need for the Council to present options to residents of these communities.

²⁵ *R v North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Coughlan* [2001] QB 213 and *R v Secretary of State ex parte Doody* [1994] 1 AC 531.

Libraries, community centres and other local services

4.4 Evidence in this report demonstrates that libraries are needed in all communities; equally there is a need for community centres in all communities. The Council's vision for three large service hubs and twelve smaller Community hubs across the whole of Wolverhampton will not provide for this need. In Tettenhall Regis and Wightwick wards alone there are ten defined communities. The positioning of both the larger and smaller hubs (fifteen in total) will mean that some communities will benefit and others will lose out.

Finchfield community is one of many communities that may be affected by the Council's proposals. The community feel that Finchfield library is already a community hub and is key to social cohesion. The library provides for all groups of people who live within the community including vulnerable groups, people with mental health problems, people with health problems, the elderly, mothers with young children, toddlers, children at school and youth. It is an important resource for local playgroups and schools who both visit and are visited by the library. Finchfield Library already satisfies the majority of the proposed benefits of the Council's vision for Community Hubs.

Finchfield does not have a community centre.

At present the council are working at a neighbourhood level not community level. Local services need to be in their local community. Some services are more suited to being neighbourhood based.

Evidence from the FECH focus group and Brent SOS indicates that some service users will not migrate to other locations.

The definition of 'community' in the Council's vision needs to be carefully considered because at present it is being used in different ways by the Council and members of local communities. There is a difference between local service provision and neighbourhood/area based provision.

Some users will stop accessing a service if it is moved from a location that is easily accessible and they are accustomed to.

Child poverty and educational attainment

4.5 Numerous reports cite access to reading materials as being crucial to children's attainment. Not only do libraries give access to books, they are also an opportunity for a social experience linking reading with talking, socialising, comparing likes and dislikes with enthusiastic professional staff. Parents who were taken to libraries as children follow the example set to them and take their children in turn. Grandparents also play a key role in helping children to visit libraries. Many children in Wolverhampton do not have ready access to books at home. The Council's vision for Community Hubs has the potential to locate libraries away from their local communities; this could create barriers which would prevent children visiting the library.

Children who visit libraries achieve greater levels of literacy and numeracy than those who do not. Having a local, accessible library embedded in the heart of a community makes it more likely that children will become active library users.

A local, accessible library service with experienced professional staff narrows the attainment gap between the children in poverty and those who are not.

Combating elderly isolation

4.6 Wolverhampton has an increasing elderly population. Looking after the elderly population will become a major issue for the City in the near future, impacting on healthcare and other services. Both research on elderly isolation and the increase of the elderly population supports the need for accessible local services of all kinds. Libraries and community centres play a key role in bringing together different generations in a positive way; they contribute to reducing elderly isolation and are key to older people being able to live life to the full.

Within the local community (as identified by local people) there is a need for local services that are accessible to the elderly population living in that community to reduce elderly isolation, contribute to health and wellbeing and allow older people to feel part of a community.

Health and well-being

4.7 Libraries have a great social value including promoting community cohesion and sense of place; they help people to feel good about where they live.

Libraries are sources of self-help, information and signposting. They provide a non-judgmental, safe space in which vulnerable people can access information and enjoy social contact thus reducing isolation and increasing a sense of well-being. Evidence supports the fact that, within Finchfield, the library plays a key role in reducing elderly isolation.

The social value of libraries and their contribution to health and well-being may not be fully understood by Wolverhampton Council.

Ease of access is crucial to making the health and well-being benefits of libraries available to the most vulnerable groups in our communities. Co-locating services may create a barrier in terms of both travel time and costs. It may also have a negative impact on people's perception of the libraries as a welcoming safe environment.

Local services contribute considerably to people's sense of place and sense of living in a safe environment; they have a positive impact on an individual's health and well-being.

Libraries are seen as the first port of call for many agencies when disseminating information.

5.0 Recommendations

A full council debate

- 5.1 There should be a full Council debate on the importance of local library services. FECH was not the only group to organise a petition – the cumulative total of petitions should be taken into account.

Evidence-based proposals

- 5.2 The Council need to show evidence in support of their proposals. The current drivers for the Council's vision appear to be the Draft Budget Strategy 2012/13, the Medium Term Financial Report to Cabinet 5/10/11 and the Accelerated Asset Review. While recognising the need for financial savings there are risks in relying on financial drivers and Asset Review without a concurrent Library Service Review. The Council need to demonstrate how they are complying with the Libraries Act and are taking into account the Future Libraries Programme.

Consultation

- 5.3 The Council should undertake a robust, quality consultation process. This needs to be widely promoted to ensure that it reflects a wide spectrum of views. In order to build trust the consultation process should be transparent and should clearly demonstrate how information collected has informed and will inform decision-making. Feedback should be given to participants. Adequate information needs to be provided so that participants can make informed decisions.

A wide range of consultation methods should be used including:

- Resident/user focus groups
- Review groups
- Dedicated web page and online survey
- Stakeholder conference including representatives of statutory, community and interest groups
- Citizens' summit
- User panels
- Questionnaire/survey

The consultation should tap into existing groups such as: school councils, PTA organisations, service user forums, trade unions, community groups, interest groups...

The consultation should aim to:

- understand current use of services (including hidden benefits such as social value)
- assess the different needs of individual local communities
- inform and shape decisions

Consultation should be ongoing through the development of Community Hubs. The Council should engage at several stages. For example:

- Initial engagement in order to inform and gain feedback on the response to the Council's broad vision
- At the point of developing options in order that the Council understand different communities' preferences
- Following implementation of Community hubs in order to review and evaluate

Independent Equality Analysis

5.4 There is a need for an independent equality analysis of existing and projected local needs. The Council's drive to save money creates a conflict of interest between required savings and community needs. The Council should clearly demonstrate what mitigating steps they will bring about to counteract any adverse affect of their vision for Community Hubs. The equality analysis should be ongoing so that it considers both the potential and actual impact of Community Hubs on protected groups.

Community

5.5 The Council's current use of the term 'community' is more likely to confuse rather than inform. We recommend that the Council clearly state what their definition of 'community' is in respect of Community Hubs.

Community Hubs Best Practice

5.6 The Council so far seems to use ad hoc models of community hubs to support their vision. We recommend that the Council looks in greater detail at current research and best practice in delivery of services within the community. This information should be presented and used to support their proposals and provide an evidence base to inform communities.

Transport and Access

5.7 Ease of access to all hubs is crucial. The Council should produce an accessibility study for all areas and present information such as:

- A map indicating location of proposed hubs
- Locations of hubs in relation to bus routes
- Levels of car ownership in each community (not neighbourhood)
- Walking distance from each community to their nearest hub
- Safe cycling routes to community hubs
- Research into travel times and costs

The Council should clearly define what they consider to be a reasonable distance for people to travel. Where there is a high concentration of older or disabled people this should be taken into account.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF)

5.8 In respect of the BSF programme we recommend that the Council investigate the possible use, in particular for youth provision and services, of BSF school facilities.

Funding

5.9 We recommend to the Council that, if they have not already done so, they look into funding available for developing new service delivery and partnership methods. Examples of past successful projects that were supported by funding from the Libraries Development Initiative can found via this link:<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/libraries-development-initiative/>

Strategic Plan for Libraries

5.10 The Council should develop a strategic plan specifically for library services in Wolverhampton. Such a document should be developed in partnership with service users.

Appendix 1

1. Number, location and opening hours of libraries in Wolverhampton

Branch Name	Hours per week 2007/08	Hours per week 2008/09	Hours per week 2009/10	Hours per week 2010/11	Hours per week 2011/12
Wolverhampton Central	56.0	56.0	56.0	56.0	56.0
Ashmore Park	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0
Bilston	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
Bradmore	15.0	15.0	CLOSED		
Collingwood	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
Daisy Bank	15.0	15.0	0	0	0
East Park	31.0	31.0	31.0	31.0	31.0
Finchfield	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0
Long Knowle	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.0
Low Hill	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0	43.0
Mary Pointon	15.0	15.0	CLOSED		
Oxley	38.0	38.0	CLOSED		
Pendeford	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
Penn	38.0	38.0	38.0	38.30	38.30
Scotlands and Underhill	15.0	15.0	CLOSED		
Spring Vale	31.0	31.0	31.0	31.0	31.0
Tettenhall	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
Warstones	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
Wednesfield	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0
Whitmore Reans	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0	51.0

2. Footfall/usage of libraries

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Wolverhampton Central	484692	465699	589108	604149	590317
Ashmore Park	67167	57109	58955	53443	57031
Bilston	40577	43212	49764	55770	59085
Bradmore	8979	6721	CLOSED		
Collingwood	7107	7033	7098	6643	7670
Daisy Bank	2669	2899	CLOSED		
East Park	25723	25922	26741	31369	30732
Finchfield	41687	43654	46644	46748	48698
Long Knowle	33783	28028	21658	28171	22685
Low Hill	36227	33345	38259	39754	42601

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Mary Pointon	4871	5915	CLOSED		
Oxley	15115	16887	CLOSED		
Pendeford	51619	38103	58006	52676	54496
Penn	30108	31434	37427	43394	38948
Scotlands and Underhill	2080	2535	CLOSED		
Spring Vale	28028	27417	29588	30030	35373
Tettenhall	66837	61646	66378	67509	71071
Warstones	64809	60268	71539	75751	71292
Wednesfield	77237	71682	72618	118508	110500
Whitmore Reans	48031	50895	64077	68523	58084

3. Lending rates

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Wolverhampton Central	338237	337161	313756	253767	206767
Ashmore Park	58508	59090	51980	54149	60055
Bilston	61095	56251	60210	59596	60148
Bradmore	8505	8085	CLOSED		
Collingwood	12441	13376	12507	12407	12883
Daisy Bank	6131	5437	CLOSED		
East Park	32044	33668	32314	34465	38362
Finchfield	95844	96687	98510	100986	103615
Long Knowle	40947	41169	40135	39507	37832
Low Hill	43401	43539	42562	42935	42346
Mary Pointon	9948	8564	CLOSED		
Oxley	27517	28456	CLOSED		
Pendeford	59129	50972	67020	62958	64209
Penn	72203	73331	69199	63154	64685
Scotlands and Underhill	4120	4337	CLOSED		
Spring Vale	31316	31221	30113	31207	33304
Tettenhall	115778	120082	121997	119641	121299
Warstones	72202	72605	71364	71491	72711
Wednesfield	72515	69742	67772	89147	89064
Whitmore Reans	37102	34484	35053	32729	33962

4. Book stock

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
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Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Wolverhampton Central	117221	119624	97978	91056	93537
Ashmore Park	16330	16286	15358	14845	13985
Bilston	18212	18878	18511	17746	17220
Bradmore	3344	2131	CLOSED		
Collingwood	4614	4712	4643	4390	4363
Daisy Bank	5786	5680	CLOSED		
East Park	10426	10523	12142	11011	11478
Finchfield	18524	19002	18827	19505	18523
Long Knowle	11893	11907	10659	10363	10478
Low Hill	14738	14668	14300	12747	12585
Mary Pointon	7198	7259	CLOSED		
Oxley	9740	9848	CLOSED		
Pendeford	12897	13172	13050	12854	11188
Penn	17181	17064	16056	17318	17925
Scotlands and Underhill	4316	4259	CLOSED		
Spring Vale	9647	9871	10097	9907	9557
Tettenhall	20502	20787	25848	21308	20369
Warstones	15981	16443	15622	11936	13855
Wednesfield	16950	17811	16434	17939	17443
Whitmore Reans	10786	10853	10670	10890	9942

5. Active borrowers

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Wolverhampton Central	17552	17120	21865	20814	18792
Ashmore Park	2139	2234	2509	2354	2404
Bilston	2712	2687	3743	3525	3666
Bradmore	499	488	CLOSED		
Collingwood	425	456	357	650	645
Daisy Bank	180	187	CLOSED		
East Park	1385	1408	1730	1832	1891
Finchfield	1990	1983	3442	3318	3262
Long Knowle	1473	1379	2056	1879	1831
Low Hill	1868	1740	2506	2444	2491
Mary Pointon	533	431	CLOSED		
Oxley	1286	1234	CLOSED		
Pendeford	2146	2079	3429	3259	3385
Penn	2149	2189	3450	3146	3192
Scotlands and Underhill	169	140	CLOSED		
Spring Vale	1343	1294	1834	1849	1995
Tettenhall	3016	3109	4264	4167	4156

Warstones	2782	2716	3993	3927	4072
Wednesfield	2832	2908	4128	7782	5954
Whitmore Reans	2185	2215	3036	2961	2879

6. Housebound readers

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of Users	1069	893	923	934	959

7. Number of public terminals and usage rates

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of PCs	163	165	143	132	133
Hours used	157620	148650	152111	157992	145633

8. Other community usage e.g. storytime visits to and from local schools readers groups

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total Children	N/a	24025	23803	24057	26480
Total Sessions	N/a	1751	1562	1587	1621
Total Parents/Carers	N/a	3769	3333	4316	3997

9. Use made by outside agencies

Over the last few years we have held numerous activities and events which have entertained, helped people find new jobs, their way around a computer and improve their health. Also, we have also been working more closely with partners. These include Wolves FC, Exchange Group, Macmillan Cancer Support (information pods have been established in 5 libraries), Access 2 Business, Grand Theatre, City Bar, Café Metro, Pure Gym and Fitness first.

10. Visits per 1000 population (based on population figure of 239, 354)

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
4751.73	4513.83	5171.67	5525.02	5425.36

11. Number of enquiries made

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Wolverhampton Central	184353	209937	220645	222703	168081
Ashmore Park	13702	13351	12714	12155	16666
Bilston	11791	10127	10361	11531	13793
Bradmore	2808	2054	CLOSED		
Collingwood	806	1027	1092	676	637
Daisy Bank	832	663	CLOSED		
East Park	5148	4160	4693	6838	6916
Finchfield	10140	12909	14274	14274	15899
Long Knowle	7228	6695	4212	5941	4589
Low Hill	4225	8138	4966	7332	7657

Branch Name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Mary Pointon	1144	2201	CLOSED		
Oxley	5135	9750	CLOSED		
Pendeford	13884	14335	15457	14144	12649
Penn	5031	8606	6829	16588	17719
Scotlands and Underhill	1482	1300	CLOSED		
Spring Vale	3107	5382	5447	7202	7488
Tettenhall	12584	16562	23543	25142	32981
Warstones	8736	12220	16692	28847	22919
Wednesfield	17641	21996	23517	36231	36972
Whitmore Reans	4719	5538	10764	8840	10894

12. Age of borrowers

Borrower age (in years)	Number of borrowers
0-13	19646
14-17	7307
18-60	60613
60+	14255

13. Financial information: procurement and expenditure

	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Employees	2,806,643.26	2,720,933.38	2,516,699.07	2,487,865.40	2,456,677.54
Premises related	448,055.15	486,848.28	392,984.52	489,161.71	461,659.18
Transport related	56,258.78	52,319.06	53,656.16	50,492.31	52,078.45
Supplies & Services	1,090,470.81	1,029,036.28	914,161.59	1,057,183.28	958,446.70
Income	327,133.31	292,529.81	269,352.04	281,402.34	246,639.59

14. Attendance at local events promoting reading and library services

Attendance at Adult reader / Writer / Literature Events					
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Attendees	2586	901	978	1021	3018

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability publishes on Public Library Statistics. This information can be accessed by following this link:

http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/CIPFA_Press_Stats_2010-11_Actualspdf.pdf

Appendix 2 Local Residents' Comments

Finchfield Library – ease of access

The library's really important for the estate. The old people can get here really easily. They'd have to catch a bus to go anywhere else. They probably wouldn't bother.

I pop on the bus so it's easy for me. It's not too far.

It's good because you can wait just inside the library and see the bus coming. It's good for us older people.

Lots of people walk here. Especially off the estate. My nan comes – she probably wouldn't go anywhere else. It'd be a shame if they took the library away - she loves it.

I think the children use it a lot after school. I suppose it's easy for them really.

Where would they move it [the library] to. No, I think it should stay here. It's convenient. Anyway, I don't drive so I don't think I could get anywhere else.

Finchfield Library – A REAL Community Hub

We can't lose our library. Oh no. That would be terrible. Who would want to take our library away? I think that's terrible.

It's the heart of things here [on the estate].

I go with my wife and read the papers while she chooses her books.

I come at least every fortnight. I'd be lost without my books.

We can't do without our library. I'd be lost without it.

Lots of people use it – it's very popular.

You see old people and children here – it's very popular I think.

It's good because everyone can come. It's free as well - that's very good.

I've got mental health problems. I can't always get there but I do use it. I'd hate to see it go. I'm really worried about it. I hope they don't move it.

I came in once and the storytime was going on. I thought it would be really annoying, but then I thought well, that's what should be happening in a library. Lots of things going on - young people and children being involved. I felt good all day after that. It makes you feel part of something. A community I suppose, and we don't get that very often these days - community spirit.

What else have we got round here? Nothing really when you think about it.

What else do we get that's so good and doesn't cost us anything?

We pay enough council tax – they shouldn't take away the library – we pay for it.

This **is** a community hub. Why would they want to change it – unless they want to build an extension – that'd be alright.

No, I'm not signing your petition – you're wasting your time. There's no way the council would ever take this library away. They wouldn't dare.

They can't take the library away – there'd be nothing left.

Librarians v Machines

I think the library wouldn't be what it is without them [the librarians]. We need them.

This isn't my nearest library but I come here because it's so good. It's not as big as some but it's got such a lovely atmosphere.

They can get books for you – they can get any book you need from all over the country.

I haven't spoken to anyone for three days. If it wasn't for the library I might not speak to anyone all week.

I'll sign the petition – I go to the library and sit and read the papers. It's nice and they're very friendly.

I want to speak to a person. You can't talk to a machine. Well, I suppose you could but it wouldn't talk back would it?

I wouldn't use an automatic machine. Older people don't want that type of thing. They have those things at supermarkets now – I never use them.

Re auto book issuing machines : Oh no, I wouldn't want that.

Why does everything have to be machines? What happened to people? Don't they matter any more?

Re the librarians: I think they're wonderful. Just wonderful. I can't praise them enough. They'll do anything for you.

They said just to let them know if my husband needed any books when he was ill and they'd sort it out for us. They know what he likes and I could go and collect them.

The [librarians] here are marvellous. I think they're wonderful really. I think it's the best library – it's because they're so good.

Children

It's good because the children can come here after school. They can walk and come in to do their homework.

I come to the storytime. It's really good and I get to choose my books as well. You know the kids are safe when they're in the library.

The storytime's really good. It's what it's for really – being used by people.

I live in Telford but I come here because I pick my granddaughter up from school here and we come in.

I always took my children to storytime. Children should be encouraged to use the library more. It's really important. They spend too long in front of computers – it's not good for them.

I'm a teacher – I tell all my children to use the library. It's how you learn – anyone knows that. I can't believe they would think of taking it away – that's nonsense.

When my children were younger I took them to the storytime. Then they would do their homework when they were older.

I bring my grandchildren. I don't even live in the area but when I visit my daughter I bring my grandchildren to the library and then they can play in the little playground next door.

The children can ride their bikes here and you know it's safe.

I went in the other week and the mothers were there at the storytime – it was lovely. The whole library felt really good. Alive really. I loved it because I'm on my own and I don't get that type of thing really. I haven't got any grandchildren so it's nice to see the children here.

My mum always bought me to the library so I bring my kids. It's important for them.

Computers and internet

I didn't have a computer but they [the librarians] showed me the ropes and I've got a computer now at home.

The computers are really popular. It's good you can come in and use them.

I use the computers here – the girls [librarians] are really helpful if you need help.

I have to come here to check my e-mails and print things off. I haven't got a printer at home.

I use the photocopier – I need to copy things as part of my work.

I use the internet - I haven't got it at home.

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Safeguarding the Convoy – A Call to Action from the Campaign to End Loneliness

<http://campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/safeguarding-the-convey - a-call-to-action-from-the-campaign-to-end-loneliness.pdf>

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