



**Cabinet
24 April 2017**

**Report from Strategic Director
Community Wellbeing**

Wards affected: All

**Developing a strategic approach for community libraries
in the community and voluntary sector**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This paper details the work undertaken on developing a strategic approach to community libraries. In December 2016, the Council determined to formalise its ongoing operational relationship with the four independent community libraries in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU was developed in collaboration with the community library groups with the draft version being revised following feedback from the consultation process.
- 1.2 It was also determined that 'premises' issues be dealt with by a separate process since they are site- specific. Officers have progressed the MoU and the Preston community library premises (Preston Park Annexe) as distinct matters with the former led by the Culture Service and the latter by Property.
- 1.3 This report also provides an update on the redevelopment of Preston Park Annexe.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees to formalise its operational ongoing relationship with the four independent community library groups in the Memorandum of Understanding, attached as Appendix 1.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Council has reviewed its working relationship with the four independent community library groups in the borough in order to agree and implement partnership arrangements. These libraries are constitutionally and operationally independent of the Council and do not form part of its statutory provision of library services. They are run by local voluntary and community sector organisations who have a strong sense of independence and individual visions for their community libraries.

3.2 Brent's community libraries receive no direct funding from Council library service budgets. They are wholly independent organisations. They are not included within the Council's statutory service, and they have full flexibility to tailor their offer to local need and interest and are eligible for various funding streams as independent organisations.

3.3 The four community library premises are:

- Barham Library, 660 Harrow Road Wembley HA0 2HB (15 year lease)
- Cricklewood Library, 152 Olive Road, London NW2 (999 year lease being finalised)
- Kensal Rise Library, Bathurst Gardens, London NW10 5JA (999 year lease being finalised)
- Preston Community Library, 2 Carlton Ave East, Wembley HA9 8PL (currently has a temporary lease arrangement).

Preston Community Library

3.4 A temporary lease arrangement is in place until the end of the 2016/17 school year as a short term solution. Long term plans for the site are at the development stage.

In September 2016 Cabinet agreed to redevelop Preston Park Annexe for new homes and D1 space appropriate for library use. Since then the Council has appointed 5Plus Architects to lead the design of the redevelopment proposals and undertaken workshops with Preston Community Library to understand their long term service delivery needs and spatial requirements. The next stage of the design process will be to translate the findings into a design solution that is supported by Preston Community Library. Further consultation will then be undertaken on design proposals before final decisions are made.

3.5 The development of the site will provide a potential long term solution for Preston Community Library. However at present the medium term options for the library are not clear. Officers will continue to work to address this with the library within the constraints of the Council's property portfolio and market options.

3.6 Council officers recognise the strong social value provided by Preston Community Library and are keen to support the group in continuing to provide a service throughout the transition process.

Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

3.7 The MoU has been co-produced with the community libraries. Individual meetings were held with each community library group and with internal stakeholders. The process culminated in a combined meeting with representatives from the four community libraries, the Lead Member, the Strategic Director for Community Wellbeing, and managers from the Culture

Service. It was a productive meeting at which the concept of the MoU and its content were broadly welcomed.

3.8 The MoU was amended to reflect initial feedback from the combined meeting and then circulated to allow time for further circulation. A collated set of suggested revisions were supplied by the groups. These were taken into account in producing a revised version of the MoU which was subsequently recirculated to the groups for approval: no further amendments were requested.

3.9 The purpose of the MoU is:

- To clearly set out and formalise the working relationship between the Council and the Community Libraries.
- To support community and voluntary sector development, making best use of and within the confines of existing Council resources.
- To contribute to the Council's strategic priorities which make up its Brent 2020 Vision, through increased access to culture and learning opportunities.

3.10 Four key areas of mutually beneficial partnership working have been agreed: Stock and resources; Operational advice and guidance; Information Technology; and Grant funding and community engagement.

3.11 The implementation process will include quarterly meetings chaired by the Lead Member, individual meetings with community library groups and annual advisory Meetings.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications to the Council if the current support arrangements are formalised. Staff time and support is contained within the existing staffing budget. However any change in the staffing establishment or in the number of community libraries in the borough would impact on the feasibility of the offer.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 By section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council is under a statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service for all persons desiring to make use of the same. Having previously carried out a detailed needs assessment of population, the Council considers that its existing library provision complies with its statutory duty, and that it is not necessary to provide further library services in additional locations in order to comply with that duty.

5.2 It is, however, open to the council to provide assistance and/or financial support to community libraries in the exercise of other discretionary powers. For example, it is open to the council to provide such assistance and/or funding under the general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 on the basis that it would be desirable to do so.

6 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 There have not been any significant changes to the statutory library offer since the implementation of the Libraries Transformation Project.

7 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 At the current time there is enough capacity within the Culture service and related services to continue to support the community libraries in an advisory role and to provide training and assistance with grant applications.

Background papers

Appendix 1: Memorandum of Understanding

Contact Officers

Melanie Smith,
Director of Public Health
Melanie.smith@brent.gov.uk
020 8937 6227

Rashmi Agarwal,
Head of Culture
Rashmi.agarwal@brent.gov.uk
020 8937 3143

PHIL PORTER
Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing