

Equalities Update for Executive Report on the Future Delivery of Library Services – 22 November 2011

The findings of the Equalities Impact Assessment for the 14 June 2011 Report on the Future Delivery of Library Services in North Yorkshire included information both pre and post the three month consultation. It identified those changes had potential to have an adverse impact on the protected characteristics of Disability – including Carers and Age, both children and older people. No additional areas of adverse impact have been identified in our discussions with groups across the county.

The Action Plan highlighted a number of ways in which the library service proposed to mitigate any adverse impact. The actions were to

- Provide a service from the Supermobile in larger/more remote rural communities most distant from branch libraries
- Monitor the impact of the proposals
- Work with local community and voluntary groups and ensure they receive the support they need to develop solutions to ensure the long term sustainability of their local library, including community-owned libraries
- Ensure equalities and inclusion issues are included in training for and agreements with community groups
- Expand the Home Library Service (HLIS)
- Promote the use of the library service on line
- Continue to work with disability groups to develop a range of accessible options to meet their needs, building on the existing HLIS, audio and on-line service
- Continue working with partners to help ensure computer and internet provision includes assistive technology
- Monitor the impact of the proposed changes.

The Supermobile commenced its new route on 24 October 2011. Details of the timetable can be found in Appendix #. At the time of writing the Supermobile is proving to be a popular service with a number of new members, including children and older people joining the library service for the first time.

The impact of the Supermobile continues to be monitored, as well as other changes to the service, including the effect of the 10 mobiles coming off the road. To date, 45% of former mobile users are now borrowing material from a static library, and 20% now live in the catchment area of the Supermobile's new route.

Prior to the reduction in the mobile service, all county councillors and affected parish councils were contacted, asking for names of those who might require the Home Library and Information Service as well as ideas of potential community space for an outlet or collection point. The mobile drivers handed out similar leaflets to people using the mobile during the last six weeks of the

service, and were also asked to identify those that might need HLIS once the mobiles stopped.

As a result all the disabled /older Home Library and Information Service customers previously receiving the service via a mobile library were transferred to the HLIS volunteer service and received a volunteer visit by the end of October.

A further 67 former mobile users have now started to receive the service and local volunteers will also deliver books from the evening stops to older people who find access difficult during the winter months. It is expected that these library users will return to using the Supermobile themselves in the lighter evenings. Library staff are now exploring further expansion of the HLIS around the new Supermobile stops.

It is our intention that the HLIS will expand to meet the needs of those older people and disabled people who are not able to access a library in any other way.

In addition to this, the outlets and local collections we are establishing in conjunction with local communities will ensure people still have access to the service.

We are also promoting the use of the library service on line primarily via the website, but also through leaflets and through the HLIS, and generally we are seeing an increasing number of people accessing on line resources, including e-books.

Work with local community and voluntary groups has been ongoing since the consultation period. In addition to the involvement of County Council staff, local groups have also had independent support from the voluntary and community sector via the Active Communities Project.

During the consultation, concern was raised about access to library services for older people and children if the original proposals should be implemented. Local community groups have also expressed this concern and have been working hard to ensure their local libraries are kept open and the opening hours are maintained, or even increased. The report to the Executive is recommending that we continue working with these groups with a view to entering into a service agreement with them either to run the library or to maintain/improve the hours and use of the library. Where local communities are taking over the running of their libraries the County Council will work with them to ensure the service is available to all sections of the community, and that any changes to opening hours do not disadvantage children for example. Some groups already have plans to run activities for children and older people in the library.

The library service will continue to run the Book Start programme and Summer Reading Challenge across the county.

As well as the proposal to transfer the running of 8 libraries to the local community this report also contains proposals to reduce the opening hours across all the libraries which will retain paid NYCC staff. The Council will

consult with the local communities and local groups about how they would like these opening hours to be deployed, with the aim of maximising the availability of the library service. We will ensure children are able to participate in these local consultations.

There will be an increasing number of volunteers in libraries and we will be encouraging young people to take up these opportunities, which will provide them with valuable work experience. We have already found that young volunteers involvement in the Summer Reading Challenge and Harrogate Library has given them some of the skills and experience to move on to further education or employment.

We are continuing to work with disability groups to develop a range of accessible options to meet their needs, building on the existing HLIS, audio and on-line service, and have asked to meet with partnership boards for older people, learning disabilities and physical and sensory impairment, as well as youth councils to discuss the implementation of the library proposals and how we can ensure the library service continues to meet people's needs.

The equality impact assessment also identified that minority ethnic people are under-represented in the customer profile. The service has a number of projects to increase uptake, as outlined in section 2.2 of the equality impact assessment. This form of positive action will continue within the new proposals. There are already good examples of minority ethnic people volunteering, particularly in Harrogate Library, and it is hoped that we will be able to build on this.

We will continue to monitor the impact of the changes, and are hopeful that the involvement of local communities in the library service will reduce any adverse impact.