Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Libraries Review Needs Assessment Executive Summary

Produced by:

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Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

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1   Executive Summary

The Library Service within Barnsley Council forms part of a broader customer services offer comprising of the contact centre, the web development team (including digital champions) and the service development team. From this cluster of services, a financial saving of £872k was proposed to be achieved by 2019/20 from which it was anticipated that £165k would be derived from the Libraries Review.

In recent years we've seen more people visiting libraries, but less books being borrowed. There's more demand for digital and online services, for internet access and for flexible opening hours. Due to the changing demands, advancing technology and reducing budgets it's really important that our library service evolves to meet these changing needs. In future we need to support a wide range of council strategies: Digital First; Barnsley Health and Care Together; Public Health Strategy and Jobs Plan and Customer Service Strategy to support our libraries to deliver 'Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021' and encourage a 'Libraries First' approach.

As part of the Barnsley Council libraries review a needs assessment has been produced to ensure that we create a more modern, dynamic and adaptable library service that better meets the needs of the community. Various information has been utilised including national guidance, examples of needs assessments and reviews from other authorities, the public inquiry into Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's (MBC) Library Service and the letter in response to a local inquiry into library provision in Lancashire in April 2017. The requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964[1] details that all authorities have a statutory responsibility to "provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons". Local authorities have a duty to allow free access for all who wish to use it, but their obligation to lend extends only to those who live, work or study full-time in their area.

It is essential that Barnsley Council must consider the performance, financial and the demographic needs of the area to ensure that we understand demands both now and in the future.

The work undertaken by the Libraries Taskforce around casting a vision for what a modern library service will look like has been considered. They have a clear outline of where they want to go, and an action plan for how they are going to get there. They haven't yet set out the guidance of what a local needs assessment should cover in respect of Libraries, so the work undertaken by other Local Authorities who have recently produced such needs assessments has been used as a guide.

Overleaf is an infographics produced by the Libraries Taskforce[2], which summarises how libraries provide lifelong services, and what contribution they make to wider society.

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[1] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75

[2] The Taskforce's role is to enable the delivery of the recommendations from the Independent Library Report for England and to build upon and add value to existing good practice, partnerships and other activities that are already supporting public libraries. It also promotes libraries to national and local government and to potential funders, and creates a strong and coherent narrative around the contribution public libraries make to society and to local communities. It reports to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

Figure 1: Libraries Deliver: Libraries are for everyone, throughout their lives

(Source: Libraries Task Force, Libraries Deliver Libraries are for everyone, throughout their lives (2018)

All the data and information that has been used within this needs assessment is of the best available quality and latest time period as of February 2018. The performance data used is from 2017 (calendar year).

For each library we have defined a catchment area which is based on the closest Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)[3] to each library. There are 147 LSOAs in the borough. LSOAs allow for more detailed breakdowns of need and ensure that the needs of all the population are taken into account. The allocation of an LSOA to its closest library is based on the straight line distance between the library and the centre of the most densely populated area within a LSOA.

The resident population within Barnsley continues to rise, and grow older, with those aged 65 and over showing the largest increases. New housing developments will increase the number of residents and potential customers within the Penistone, Hoyland and Urban Barnsley library catchments.

In recent years we have seen increased migration levels particularly from Romania and Poland, as a result of this demands for books in other languages has increased. Additionally a new, independent Polish library has opened within the town centre. User data shows there has been an increase in demand from these people to use computers and access the internet.

> *Libraries also provide a valuable introduction into a community for newcomers, through assistance with specific needs (such as language training and citizenship support for recent immigrants where required) and, more generally, by using their knowledge to marshal a wealth of information on the local area, services and community. … Libraries are recognised for*

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[3] https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographies/censusgeography#super-output-area-soa

> *leading and supporting activities that help to build understanding between different generations and cultures within the local community.*

(Source: Libraries Deliver Report by the Libraries Task Force, 2018)

Educational achievement across Barnsley is improving particular for those aged less than 11 years old, but a large number of residents either have no qualifications or poor levels of achievement and recent literacy figures show that levels need to improve across much of the borough.

> *Libraries reach and support the whole community regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status or educational attainment. … The Warwick Commission[4] in 2015 highlighted the need to guarantee equal access for everyone to a rich cultural education and the opportunity to live a creative life, in the interest of business and wider society. … Reading and literacy are two of the most fundamental skills in life … libraries are a catalyst for improved reading and literacy skills.*

(Source: Libraries Deliver Report by the Libraries Task Force, 2018)

Barnsley residents have a high dependency on state benefits or receive low pay therefore experience poverty and unable to pay for luxuries including the purchases of books, newspapers and access to the internet. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation ranked Barnsley as 39th most deprived out of 354 local authorities. At ward level, deprivation levels across the borough vary.

> *As 35.8% of people living in the most disadvantaged areas visit their library, libraries can play a big role helping everyone with opportunities they might not otherwise have access to. … We want to see active membership growing for both children and adults, particularly in areas of deprivation.*

(Source: Libraries Deliver Report by the Libraries Task Force, 2018)

Demands to use the internet and the use of digital technology is growing nationally and locally within Barnsley and will increase further in the years to come particularly amongst those seeking employment, completing forms and applications or even for social purposes. Barnsley residents have a high level of digital exclusion, which means that many people still need support to do such tasks and lack training or the finances to access digital technology.

> *Public libraries provide a trusted network of accessible locations with free Wi-Fi, computers, and other technology. As the world becomes more digital, access to technology and the ability to operate confidently and safely online are ever more important. A 2014 BT report estimated the value of digital inclusion to a new user at around £1,064 a year; and in 2015, around 11% of the UK population still lacked household internet access. Digital gives people the opportunity to access services more easily, to learn, and to interact with others. Digital skills also boost their employability, and the productivity and prosperity of the organisations they work for.*

(Source: Libraries Deliver Report by the Libraries Task Force, 2018)

The residents of Barnsley suffer from a number of health problems and the demands for social care support are high across the borough. A high proportion of people provide un-paid care to friends and family.

> *Libraries offer a wide range of health information, both online and through quality-assured reading lists dealing with the more common health*

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[4] https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture

conditions. In their role as community hubs, libraries also offer non-clinical spaces in localities where health and wellbeing groups can work with the community in a trusted and non-threatening venue. This helps support people in self-care and in self-management of long-term conditions (LTCs). People with LTCs spend less than 1% of their time in contact with healthcare professionals and rely on community support to help them for the rest of the time.

(Source: Libraries Deliver Report by the Libraries Task Force (2018) making reference to advice from NHS England)

The number of residents with access to transport is growing however a proportion of Barnsley residents still require the use of public transport including bus or train. Currently all residents have only a short distance to travel to access a library and all libraries have good public transport links and access.

In recent years we've seen more people visiting libraries, but less books being borrowed. There's more demand for digital and online services including internet access. Only 6.8% of the resident population are active borrowers of books and some of the libraries are poorly used. Experian Mosaic analysis shows more affluent residents are using library services than deprived residents.

The overall findings from this needs assessment show there is a demand for libraries across the whole borough to meet the needs of those who live work and study in Barnsley. However active user data shows low numbers of users which is at odds with the demand illustrated.

The Libraries Taskforce offers the following summary:

The existing public library estate shouldn't be preserved in aspic. Many public libraries were built decades ago. Since then, there may have been dramatic changes in population, transport, technology and patterns of use. The location or layout of some library buildings are no longer suitable for the things local councils and communities want their library services to do. But any decisions, including where and how it is provided, should be made based on robust evidence including a comprehensive assessment of local needs, and actively managed with the community and library professionals, rather than in being made an ad-hoc or reactive way.

Councils should explore opportunities to integrate and co-locate libraries with other government and partner services, particularly as part of the One Public Estate programme. This can help join up services for users, allow buildings to be opened for longer, and enable costs to be shared. Many libraries are already co-located with local colleges, job centres, post offices, Citizens Advice Bureaux, tourist information, health centres and many other services. They also provide access points for things like IT and language training, and government face to face services. Use of technology to extend access to library buildings outside staffed hours is also growing.

Some people can't visit libraries (for example due to a disability or because the opening hours don't fit their working pattern) or would prefer to use digital means. Councils should plan how to meet these needs through digital and outreach provision.

Libraries are vital community hubs - bringing people together, and giving them access to the services and support they need to help them live better. Our ambition is for everyone to:

- *choose to use libraries, because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so*

- *understand what library services offer, and how they can make the most of what's available to them*
- *be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills and information they need to improve their quality of life*
- *receive trusted guidance through the evolving information landscape and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world*

They also outline specific ambitions for communities, public services and other partners, and library services. To achieve these ambitions, library services contribute to 7 Outcomes that are critical to the individuals and communities in their areas:

- *cultural and creative enrichment*
- *increased reading and literacy*
- *improved digital access and literacy*
- *helping everyone achieve their full potential*
- *healthier and happier lives*
- *greater prosperity*
- *stronger, more resilient communities*

(Source: Libraries Deliver Report by the Libraries Task Force, 2018)

The contents of this needs assessment has identified that residents of Barnsley have a number of different needs, and they are spread across the borough. It is also recognised that the Library service can support council priorities and activities which in turn, can contribute to improving local communities. However, the library service is currently underutilised, and the service should consider other opportunities to maximise the use of the valuable resource that libraries offer, therefore benefitting our communities as a whole.