



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Consultation Document on a Modern and Public Library Service for the Greater Belfast Area
Date:	22 January 2010
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Corporate Policy Officer, ext 6207

Purpose of the Report	
1	To bring to Members' attention a consultation document issued by Libraries NI entitled "Meeting the demands for A Modern Public Library Service Within Northern Ireland – Stage 1: Greater Belfast Area"
2	To note that the report suggests a rationalisation of libraries in the Greater Belfast area with a suggestion that up to 14 libraries in the Belfast area could be considered to be no longer viable.
3	To note that there is a public consultation on the document which will run from 11 January 2010 to 5 March 2010. This public consultation process is supported by 7 public meetings, an equality impact assessment and a questionnaire process.
4	Libraries NI has indicated that it would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Council to discuss the proposals and to seek the Council's views on them.

Relevant Background Information	
5	Libraries NI was created in 2009 to take responsibility for the public libraries service across Northern Ireland. One of the first tasks that the new authority is carrying out is a strategic review of its library provision across the Province. This is being done in a number of phases; the first phase includes a review of the Greater Belfast area.

6 Libraries NI has now issued a consultation document by letter dated 12 January 2010, setting out its initial review of library provision in the Greater Belfast area. This review sets out the fact that there are presently 33 libraries within the Greater Belfast area. It then goes on to state that the viability of each of the libraries was examined under 4 criteria which were:

- fit for purpose;
- capable of delivering on the vision of Libraries NI;
- in the right location; and
- sustainability

Using these criteria it was contended that the following libraries were considered to be no longer viable: Andersonstown; Ballyhackamore; Ballymacarrett, Belvoir Park, Braniel, Cloughfern, Dunmurray, Gilnahirk, Ligoniel, Oldpark, Sandyrow, Tullycarnet, Whitewell, Woodstock.

Details of why the above libraries are considered not to be viable are contained within the main consultation document, a copy of which is enclosed as Appendix 1. However there is no comparison figures with the libraries that are considered to be viable and obviously the Council should now seek access to this information.

Consultation responses are requested by 5 March 2010. Obviously this will be a matter of considerable significance to residents of the City and their Elected Representatives. It is therefore suggested that Members avail of the opportunity of a special briefing by Libraries NI and that a special meeting of the SP&R Committee be arranged for February to consider the matter. In the meantime officers will consult with the Belfast Education and Library Board to gain access to their Review of Libraries Report which was commissioned prior to the formation of Libraries NI. In addition officers will explore some potential options in terms of the shared use of assets that might contribute to the overall debate.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of the report and agree:

- 1 To arrange a special meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to receive representations from Libraries NI in relation to their consultation document on the strategic review of libraries in the Greater Belfast area; and
- 2 That officers should consult with relevant stakeholders to prepare a briefing for this meeting.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Review of Libraries Report.