

# Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel

## 1 August 2017

**Commenced:** 6.00pm

**Terminated:** 7.10pm

**Present:** Councillors K Welsh (Chair), Bailey (Deputy Chair), Beeley, Bowden, Bowerman, Glover, A Holland, Homer, Newton, Patrick, Pearce, Reid, Sharif, Sidebottom.

**Apologies for absence:** Councillors Affleck, Feeley, Piddington, F Travis, Whitehead.

The Chair opened the meeting and received apologies.

### 9. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel held on 13 June 2017 were approved as a correct record.

### 10. LIBRARY SERVICES

The Panel welcomed Councillor Ged Cooney, Executive Member (Healthy and Working) and Emma Varnam, Assistant Director, Stronger Communities to receive an update on planned developments to Tameside Library Services, implementation plans and projected outcomes.

Libraries are a highly valued statutory service and it is important to ensure that delivery is able and ready to keep pace with digital and technological advancements. With a downward trend in both issues of material and visits, Tameside libraries must adapt and diversify to ensure they remain relevant to users.

In June 2016 a decision was taken to commence public consultation on a new vision for Tameside Library services. The vision includes the introduction of technology to allow users to access resources independently whilst extending opening hours at most libraries. Results from the consultation were then used to inform an effective strategy to develop and improve the range of services on offer.

The Panel heard that the closure of more libraries was not an option, with the new vision planned to enhance access to digital services, increase the functionality of the on-line library catalogue and improve access through increased opening hours and the installation of self-service technology. It was detailed that a mix of staffed and Open+ operating hours will be introduced across libraries in Autumn 2017. Ms Varnam advised members that self-service technology will be installed at Ashton library, however the opening hours will remain unchanged and it will be fully staffed during these times.

Open+ will allow libraries to extend opening hours, with the introduction of unstaffed periods. Access to Open+ libraries will only be available to library members who have voluntarily signed up to a code of practice. A person's library card and new pin number will release door mechanisms, activate lights and computer facilities, with CCTV capturing entry, exit and live monitoring.

Cllr Cooney advised members that the service is looking to realise a number of benefits from the introduction of Open+. Residents will be able to borrow, return and renew items using self-service machines. They will be able to pick up and borrow any items previously reserved, as well as having full access to computers, print and photocopying from coin operated machines.

Ms Varnam highlighted the growing need to support residents with the use of computers, in order to help bridge a knowledge and technology gap. The computer suites in libraries are thriving with staff available to assist with any problems. For residents without a computer in their home the library is often the only place available to complete online forms such as housing and employment applications. Maintaining access to computers is a key part of this vision.

The work to realise the new vision is well underway, with the need to familiarise customers with the new concept and the way unstaffed libraries will operate. Maintaining equity across all services means that work has been undertaken to talk with and listen to any affected people and/or groups and feed this back into the model. Social media communications have commenced and flyers are being given to all library customers advising of the changes.

Ms Varnam advised that in addition to the developments being made to physical libraries and buildings the service has undertaken work to ensure that the digital offer to residents is improved. With the growth in smart phones, tablets and mobile reading devices the Council now has a comprehensive digital library resource. This part of the service provides online access to resources 24 hours a day, with access to ebooks and a wide range of resources.

The Panel asked about the investment being made in library services, the way Open+ will impact current staffing levels and the way usage and outcomes will be monitored.

Cllr Cooney advised members that the decision to plan such an investment has included a period of public consultation along with a review of the way in which an organisational change can improve the offer available to users. It was reported that capital has allocated to the development work, with recurrent annual revenue savings planned to be achieved by the service. The introduction of Open+ has resulted in a need to reduce staffing across the service and the will be managed in the most appropriate way to ensure the best possible outcomes for the individuals affected. When fully operational, work will be ongoing to monitor the effectiveness and usage of Open+ and the self-service machines.

The Panel praised the service on the way it has diversified, which specific reference to the development of a comprehensive digital and online offer.

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Cooney and Ms Varnam be thanked for attending the meeting.

## **11. UPDATE ON CURRENT REVIEW**

Panel members received an update on the final working group meeting of the Community Safety review. It was discussed that arrangements will now be made for the new review of Business Growth in Tameside to commence.

**RESOLVED:** Members of the Business Growth Working Group to be notified of arrangements for the first working group meeting.

## **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Place and External Relations Scrutiny Panel will take place on Thursday 12 September 2017

## **13. URGENT ITEMS**

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting. **CHAIR**