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**To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.**

**Subject: Community Managed Libraries in Coventry**

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## **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 The purpose of this Briefing Note is to provide the Scrutiny Board with some brief background information on the development of community managed libraries in the city, and to introduce the item on the Board's agenda for this meeting.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Board are recommended to note this report, and to provide any recommendations following the discussion with representatives attending the meeting to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

## **3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 The City Council introduced the Connecting Communities programme in 2015/16 and this included a range of changes to Library Services along with changes to various other Council services based in localities. One of the key aspects of the libraries' elements of the Connecting Communities programme was the clear intention of the Council to try wherever possible to avoid libraries closing permanently to local communities. The creation of three community managed libraries was a key part of the successful delivery of this intention.
- 3.2 As the Council worked on the implementation of the Connecting Communities programme officers reviewed the pattern of approaches taken by other local authorities who had also attempted similar exercises in protecting much valued community assets whilst reducing budgets in response to wider financial challenges. It became clear to both officers and various interested parties, that the key issue in successfully delivering community managed libraries was the strength of the organisations and the maintenance of some support to these organisations post library transfer.
- 3.3 During the course of 2018/19 the Council successfully managed the transfer of management of the following three former Council libraries:
- Cheylesmore Library – transferred to Cheylesmore Community Centre
  - Earlsdon Library – transferred to Earlsdon Carnegie Community Library (ECCL)
  - Finham Library – transferred to Finham Library Action Group (FLAG)
- 3.4 The transfers were delivered in a managed way with considerable dialogue between the Council and the new community organisations. Many different Council services were involved and each library transfer followed a slightly different path, but in particular the Library Service maintained very close liaison with the new partners with strong relationships being maintained to the time of this note being prepared.
- 3.5 Whilst each of the different libraries are quite different the Council has worked in partnership to ensure that each library continues to offer:

- Free Internet / PC access to Coventry residents through open access PCs (and e-books / e-audiobooks) provided by the Council (and supported by CCC ICT), plus online resources.
- A limited range of both children and adults Library Service book stock to any local resident who is a member of the Library Service, and access the wider stock via reservations etc. Often this stock is supplemented by the different partners own stock.
- Provision for printing / scanning etc at reasonable cost to local residents.

3.6 Each of the three community managed libraries have developed in interesting and innovative ways. Representatives of each of the libraries will be present at the meeting and will share with members both the successes and challenges of their time providing these much valued community resources. Key things the Board should be aware of are:

- **Cheylesmore Library (<https://cheylesmorecentre.co.uk/>)**

Cheylesmore library is now fully integrated into the Cheylesmore Community Centre, with a distinct group of volunteers who work with the Centre to ensure that Cheylesmore residents continue to have access to library services. The Council provided a transition grant to support building work to facilitate better access to the library and create more flexibility in the use of bookable space in the Centre. The Centre building is held on a lease by the Community Association from the Council.

- **Earlsdon Library (<https://earlsdonlibrary.org.uk/>)**

The grant provided to support the transition of Earlsdon library has resulted in an impressive re-configuration of a large section of the space to create a multi-use area facilitating events and other related activities. The library has a large cohort of volunteers which has needed to be constantly refreshed and has good connections into the Earlsdon community. The library is currently held on a short term lease by ECCL from the Council.

- **Finham Library (<https://www.finhamlibrary.uk/>)**

The development of Finham Library has been positively supported by the local community in the Finham area with FLAG choosing to use the transition grant to create a Community Library and Café on the Green. The range of events and activities taking place at the venue are focused on the demographics of the Finham community. The library building is held by FLAG on a lease from the Council.

3.7 The Library Service continue to provide mainly remote support to the three partners. A Library Development Manager arranges to visit roughly quarterly and refresh the book stock and discuss any local issues. Each library has a 'buddy' library who are able to respond to calls and enquiries, particularly regarding the computer systems used to lend Council books. The recent change in Library Management System resulted in all volunteers having training cascaded though. The Council still provide support (particularly to Earlsdon and Finham Libraries) through Property Services, although the community organisations have taken on aspects of the running costs over the time since transfer.

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