

# Support for councils to re-model libraries for changing times

## The Challenge

Delivering high quality and effective libraries in the next few years will be challenging. Marginal improvement and efficiency alone are insufficient to maintain and modernise the public's library services. To avoid ad hoc closures and service reductions, we need to take a strategic approach and consider radically different solutions

The most pro-active councils are already looking at very different ways of providing building based, on-line and community library services including shared services and considering new forms of management and methods of delivery such as a less buildings-based more mobile service, wider use of the internet and the transfer of service delivery to social enterprise or private sector providers. Many others are beginning to consider these options.

This proposal will provide support for councils which wish to take this agenda further, to get more out of their public libraries; to seize opportunities like those afforded by new digital developments and to provide better services to library users.

It will align and target the existing improvement support provided by MLA and IDeA to support locally-driven change and innovation in a cost effective way.

## The proposal

LGA Group and MLA will work together to support councils, especially where councils want to work together in partnership; by introducing and brokering councils to work together and help them to establish new delivery mechanisms to build economies of scale and sustainable critical mass. The LGA group and MLA would also aim to engage the library professional bodies in this work.

The proposal aims to:

- ensure that the public continue to have access to a high quality public library service
- support local authorities in driving down the cost of the public library service whilst retaining its quality
- identify best practice and innovation which can be disseminated and shared
- provide high quality support for local authorities which the post-programme evaluation shows has made a real difference to the way in which they are approaching the 2011 planning cycle and the future of their library service
- support the library services involved in the programme in developing high quality business plans for 2011 and beyond
- create the conditions to accelerate reform in public library services; showing a commitment to support locally-driven change and innovation.

This work should start immediately, so that the outcomes inform planning for ensuing years' budgets in local authorities.

### Principles underpinning the delivery of support:

- That the solutions for each council will be locally appropriate, and will be owned and driven by councils;
- that the development of an offer to each council will include a range of options and not a “one-size-fits-all” solution;
- that discussions on appropriate solutions for the library service will take place within an awareness and understanding of the corporate context of the council as a whole; and
- it will build upon the strengths of the culture and sport improvement programme to date.

### The delivery mechanism

The proposal is for intensive in depth support to a smaller number of councils (around ten) and, depending on available resources, for a broader ranging programme for a further 30 to 45 authorities.

### The in-depth programme

Approximately ten authorities will facilitate councils to work together; providing up to ten days of direct support to each which could involve access to external expertise as well the engagement of peers at political and at senior officer level (drawn from both corporate functions and the service). The programme will:

- help the authority clarify the challenges facing it and to better understand the options available if it considered more radical step change to be appropriate
- enable the council to undertake some very basic options appraisals.
- assist with the process of step change providing access to data and information about what people want from their library service and sector-led best practice in how to deliver this
- facilitate and broker partnership arrangements with other councils interested in exploring joint options for delivery and involving RIEPs as appropriate
- collate the learning from the ten councils supported including, developing in depth case studies and the presentation of the learning back to the sector and other councils

In addition the broader number of councils will have:

- access to a facilitated diagnostic activity with key decision makers including political leaders and Chief Executives
- action learning sets between groups of councils where similar issues, concerns or solutions have been identified.

### Identifying partners

It is proposed that a shortlist of councils will be identified where there is both a recognised need and desire to address these challenges quickly; this will principally be based on self-nomination by the councils. Such short listing should not be seen as a judgement upon the performance or competency of a council. Rather, it would be a judgement on who would be most likely to benefit; who can deliver within the agreed timescale; who has political support for involvement and where learning could be best captured.

The councils would initially be contacted by the MLA Regional Manager. Subsequent scoping discussions with the council would need to include the council's political leadership and chief executive as well as representatives of the library service. Before an offer of support could be finalised the council will need to confirm they can commit the necessary time and resource to lead the process with the available support and to agree to share the learning.

### **Governance**

A project board will manage the planning and delivery of the programme. It will be co-Chaired by the MLA and LGA Group with DCMS as an observer. SCL, CILIP and other professional organisations may be co-opted; project management capacity will be provided by MLA. It will report to the Minister and to the Chair of the LGA culture, sport and tourism board on progress, learning and future development.

### **Staffing and resourcing**

It is proposed to allocate resources from MLA's Improvement Funds for 2010/11. Project management capacity for each package provided to a council or group of councils will be provided by MLA's Directors of Engagement and regional managers and they will engage with RIEPs and IDeA as appropriate. They will have responsibility for approaching councils, negotiating offers of support and managing the work of any third parties involved in delivering the support.

### **Sharing the learning**

The final outcome will not just involve the councils enabled to deliver step change in their provision of library services. It will also be that their experience is made available to colleagues across local government. This will be achieved in the following ways including involving the professional bodies – CILIP and SCL in the dissemination of learning that emerges. At the end of the support consultants working with the councils will be required to capture relevant learning and to construct case studies which will then be made available through the IDeA, MLA and CILIP websites. Councils in receipt of support will be asked to participate in learning events and activities including, regional and national events, work with the regional improvement networks and supporting action learning sets for other councils