

Minutes

National Library Steering Group

Date Tuesday 7th April 2020
Time 14:00 – 16:00
Location Virtual Meeting

Present:

Sue Williamson	Director, Libraries, Arts Council England (ACE) (Chair)
Prof. Steven Broomhead	Chief Executive, Warrington Borough Council
Jenna Birley	Governance and Business Support Officer, Libraries, ACE (Minutes)
Fiona Davidson	Communications Manager, Libraries, ACE
Isobel Hunter	Chief Executive, Libraries Connected (LC)
Sean Kelly	Regional Development Officer, Libraries, ACE
Sophie Lancaster	Senior Manager, Libraries, ACE
Leah Mason	Business Administrator Apprentice, Libraries, ACE
Nick Poole	Chief Executive, CILIP, The UK library and information association
Samantha Ramanah	Advisor – Culture, Tourism and Sport, Local Government Association (LGA)
James Urquhart	Senior Manager, Libraries and Literature, ACE
Liz White	Head of Public Libraries and Engagement, British Library (BL)

Apologies: Ian Leete Senior Adviser, Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, LGA

Presenters: None

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 Sue Williamson welcomed everyone to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.
- 1.2 Apologies were noted from Ian Leete, and Samantha Ramanah was present in his place representing the LGA.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 There were no interests to declare.

3. NAME, SCOPE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 3.1 Sue Williamson began the discussion of the name, scope and terms of reference for the group. Sue noted that the organisations present had worked extensively over the past two years to collaborate more effectively and that shared aim would be to continue that collaborative working spirit.
- 3.2 The name of the group was discussed and it was noted that 'National' could be interpreted as speaking for the devolved authorities. It was suggested that this be used with caution, or to substitute 'English/England' in its place.
- 3.3 It was suggested that the group have a name that better represented the needs of the library sector.
- 3.4 The group did not raise any issues with the proposed reporting structure and frequency of meetings.
- 3.5 The group agreed to discuss this item further in the later theory of change item.

4. VISION STATEMENT

- 4.1 Sue Williamson had circulated the vision statement of Libraries Connected prior to the meeting. The group were asked if they, and their organisations, were willing to subscribe to this same statement:

'Our vision is an inclusive, modern, sustainable and high quality public library service at the heart of every community in the UK.'
- 4.2 The group expressed the need to have this shared vision reflected in the Terms of Reference.

4.3 Those present AGREED to subscribe to this statement of shared purpose.

5. THEORY OF CHANGE DISCUSSION

5.1 Sue Williamson introduced this item and asked the group to discuss the scope of the group going forwards using a theory of change model.

5.2 Sue initiated discussion by proposing three problems facing the public library sector that this group could work to address:

- the long-term financial resilience of public libraries
- the negative or neutral image of the sector in the media and amongst decision-makers
- what is a public library service and how do libraries integrate hyper localism and the need to operate on a national stage

5.3 It was affirmed by the group that the public library sector will require a completely different funding model if it is going to be resilient.

5.4 The group felt that their responsibilities as reflected in the draft Terms of Reference should better articulate how they will work towards the changes required to address problems in the sector, and how the sector itself will inform this direction of travel.

5.5 It was noted that the notion of what libraries do is very much linked to the DCMS' definition as described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, and that the sector should examine this definition as part of the work of this group.

5.6 It was suggested that English public libraries instead work to an internationally recognised definition of a library service. The following were suggested:

- an academic definition as proposed by R. David Lankes, 'The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities.'
- an international definition as adopted by IFLA and UNESCO in their 1994 Manifesto, 'the public library [is] a living force for education, culture and information, and [is] an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.'

5.7 The group discussed the issues public libraries have promoting their hyper-local community offers alongside their national impact and significance. They noted that the work being undertaken on the refreshed Universal Offers, professional standards and accreditation will help address this.

- 5.8 It was also felt that this group, as a long-term strategic thinking body, could help library services do this.
It was noted that the sector needs to better articulate its 'ask' to central government. Currently, the sector's 'ask' is viewed as politically obtuse and lacking unanimity.
- 5.9 The group discussed the problem of reconciling national government strategies with frontline delivery in the public library sector and the perception that there is a split between library leadership organisations and those delivering library services in area.
- 5.10 As part of the group's strategic oversight, it was suggested that a shared communications strategy would be integral to addressing some of these issues, including the previous suggestion that the perception of the public library sector is negative/neutral. The group acknowledged the need to agree messages and differentiate between times they speak in a shared voice, rather than on behalf of their individual organisations.
- 5.11 It was suggested that the group build on the starting point of the joint piece of work by CILIP and LC: Scoping Study towards a Blueprint for Public Libraries as articulated in the report published in September 2019
- 5.12 It was also suggested that Nick Poole share CILIP's theory of change document as an example for the group to consider for their own work.
- 5.13 The group discussed the proposed membership as listed in the draft Terms of Reference. The principal objective regarding the selection of the membership was to have a neutral collective that was representative of and accepted by the public library sector.
- 5.14 It was felt that the membership could go some way to addressing the perceived split between the leadership organisations and the front-line staff.
- 5.15 It was suggested that a Library Head of Service join the group. Those present discussed the possibility of using LC's 'Basecamp' network to source and select someone to take this on, following the drafting of a role description which could be circulated to the network.
- 5.16 Following this discussion, the group AGREED:
- a) to use as a starting point for the scope and purpose of the group, the issues identified by Sue Williamson in paragraph 5.2 above
 - b) to use the work started in the 'blueprint' document to further inform the group's work going forward
 - c) that the Terms of Reference need to better reflect the sector's needs in the description of the group's purpose
 - d) that the membership should include a Head of Service
 - e) that the membership be circulated outside of the meeting with particular clarification on ACE's role(s) within the group

- f) that there was a need for a shared communications strategy, to be led by Fiona Davidson in conjunction with the relevant communications leads from the group's membership organisations
- g) that Jenna Birley would redraft the Terms of Reference and circulate to the group to be approved electronically in advance of the next scheduled meeting.

Fiona Davidson

Jenna Birley

6. PROGRESS ON THE TASKFORCE ACTION PLAN AND FUTURE PLANS

- 6.1 Sophie Lancaster provided a verbal update on the progress of the Taskforce Action Plan actions that ACE had agreed to progress beyond the life of the Libraries Taskforce. These projects included:
- the Public Library Skills Strategy (PLSS, being led by LC and CILIP)
 - the Regional Support Offer (RSO, being led by LC and ACE)
 - the open data project (led by DCMS)
 - the review of Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries (led by DCMS)
- 6.2 The group noted that ACE had a formal agreement to report on these projects to DCMS and share relevant information with their libraries team. Similarly, ACE's libraries team had asked for DCMS to reciprocate sharing information. This will formally be undertaken at the monthly ACE/DCMS liaison meetings.
- 6.3 DCMS had also asked ACE to report back to them on the Public Lending Right (PLR). The group AGREED that Liz White would approach the PLR team at the British Library who were best placed to do this.
- 6.4 Sophie informed the group that, because of the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, progress on many pieces of work had been slowed significantly or paused completely.
- 6.5 It was AGREED that Sophie would provide brief updates on these projects and the work of DCMS at future meetings.

Liz White

Sophie Lancaster

7. SINGLE DIGITAL PRESENCE

- 7.1 Liz White AGREED to circulate an update on the Single Digital Presence via email.

Liz White

8. COMMON SCHEMA FOR LIBRARY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMSs)

- 8.1 James Urquhart introduced this discussion item and asked the group for their thoughts on whether a common schema for LMSs was a project this group could develop.

- 8.2 It was noted that a common schema for LMSs had already been discussed amongst public library leaders and DCMS but had not gathered momentum at the time. It was also noted that there was significant crossover with this and the work the BL are undertaking on the Single Digital Presence.
- 8.3 The group felt the direction of travel in this area was towards differing LMSs with a shared overarching, possibly national, interoperability. The group discussed restarting the project but felt that, because of the overlap with other areas of work such as the SDP, the work of the Book Industry Communication (BIC) and the Universal Offers, that James observe BIC meetings for the time being to develop closer understanding of value and opportunity in this area.
- 8.4 It was also suggested that James pick up the issue with the BL SDP project manager.
- 8.5 Nick Poole offered to assist James with any further work and/or conversations as needed.

9. COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARIES (CMLs)

- 9.1 Sean Kelly introduced this item which asked the group to consider whether they could agree a position and key messages regarding CMLs.
- 9.2 It was noted that those present had a number of divergent opinions on the subject.
- 9.3 It was also noted that CMLs are now part of the public library landscape and they lack the support and guidance of a national organisation.
- 9.4 Sue Williamson asked each person present to prepare a summary on their organisation's position on CMLs, highlighting what their key issues are and also any areas they believe there is no commonality on opinion with their significant stakeholders, including each other.
- 9.5 Those present AGREED to move this conversation to the next meeting and to prepare a summary document on their positions in advance for discussion.

10. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 10.1 The group discussed the next meeting. In addition to the items mentioned above, it was decided to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on public library services and how to use the momentum of their highlighted importance to communities beyond the end of national lock down.

10.2 Sue Williamson asked that those present work to finalise the Terms of Reference in advance of the next meeting.

11. FUTURE MEETING DATES

The proposed future meeting dates were noted.

Date and location of next meeting: Tuesday 9th June 2020, 14:00 – 16:00, Virtual Meeting (TBC)