

## SERVICE DELIVERY, PERFORMANCE & CUSTOMERS EXECUTIVE ADVISORY PANEL

**21<sup>st</sup> March 2022**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Transfer of Raunds Library to become fully community managed</b>
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### List of Appendices

**Appendix A – Business Plan (Exempt):** The business plan provided by the Academy Trust and the Raunds Community Library Trust follows a set template used for all the community managed library transfers. It includes the mobilisation workplan and the financial spreadsheet.

**Appendix B – Raunds Community Library Financial Detail March 2022 (Exempt):** The cash flow projections that accompany the Business Plan.

**Appendix C – Raunds Library Start up Work Plan March 2022 (Exempt) :** The work plan timeline referred to in the business plan.

### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. This report is to inform the EAP of the intention to seek approval from the Executive to progress with the transfer of Raunds Library to become Community Managed under the same financial conditions that were offered to the other community managed libraries.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1. Since the Library Transformation programme began in 2018, under the former County Council, work has been ongoing to transfer those libraries which were not required as part of the statutory library provision, to be community managed by local groups. To date, seven libraries in North Northamptonshire have successfully transferred to this model.
- 2.2. Conditions for the transfer were that the Council would continue to provide computer systems and hardware, existing and new book stock and a level of professional support to enable the library to remain part of the network of libraries countywide. This was on the condition that the community-led group put forward a viable business plan outlining how they intended to cover the costs of the property which houses the library and any staffing required to run the library, whether paid or volunteer.
- 2.3. Where library buildings were owned by the Council a reduction of 40% of the market rent was offered to groups wishing to lease the building from the Council for the purpose of providing a community managed library.
- 2.4. The Raunds Community Library Trust (RCLT) has been running the library in Raunds since October 2020 under a Tenancy at Will provided by the Council on the understanding that a viable business plan would need to be forthcoming in order for the library to be transferred to be community managed.
- 2.5. Negotiations between RCLT and the Raunds Town Council have been ongoing but no viable business case was put forward and as a result of the pandemic meant that progress towards a viable plan stalled for some time.
- 2.6. An Academy Trust with experience in financing and running another Community Managed Library in North Northamptonshire (Rothwell) has very recently partnered with RCLT and together they have produced a business plan (Appendix A) which has been reviewed and assessed as viable.
- 2.7. Approval will be sought from Executive at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 to progress with the transfer of Raunds library to a fully community managed library.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive Advisory Panel:
  - a) Notes the business plan (Appendix A) and the request to be made to Executive at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 to approve the transfer of Raunds Library to be community managed by the Academy Trust and Raunds Community Library Trust (RCLT)
  - b) Notes the request to Executive at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 to approve the 40% reduction in rent payable by the Academy Trust and Raunds

Community Library Trust (RCLT) for the lease of the existing library building to preserve the integrity of the Library Transformation Programme and ensure parity between this community managed library and all other community managed libraries in Northamptonshire.

- 3.2 Reason for Recommendation: The approval of these recommendations will ensure that the library can continue to operate in Raunds as part of the existing library network at no cost to the Council, providing access to core library services including free public internet access for citizens.
- 3.3 Alternative Options Considered: No other viable business plan has been forthcoming since Northamptonshire County Council approved the recommendations in the report dated 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018, and in accordance with the decision taken by Northamptonshire County Council Raunds library would be closed and the property re-used or disposed of by North Northamptonshire Council.

#### **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1. In 2017, as part of the requirement for Northamptonshire County Council to manage its financial challenges and produce a legal budget a detailed needs analysis was carried out to identify which of the county's 36 libraries were required in order for the Council to meet its statutory duty of delivering "...a comprehensive and efficient library service..." as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.
- 4.2. The result was that 15 libraries were identified as being statutorily required. 3 options were proposed for consideration and an extensive public consultation undertaken about the proposed options. The preferred option as for the remaining 21 non-statutory libraries to be offered out to local community organisations to be run as community managed libraries with support from the Council. If no group came forward with a viable business case for a particular library, then that library would close.
- 4.3. In February 2018, Northamptonshire County Council received an advisory notice from their auditors that their proposed budget would not meet legal requirements. The Council took the decision that they could no longer support a community managed offer and any of the 21 libraries wishing to stay open would need to be run independently. This was not one of the options that had been consulted on and the Council was subject to a Judicial Review, at which point the process was halted.
- 4.4. During the Judicial Review a new Chief Executive joined the Council and restored the original proposal to offer the non-statutory libraries to be community managed with some support from the Council.
- 4.5. Conditions for the transfer of libraries were that the Council would continue to provide computer systems and hardware, existing and new book stock and a level of professional support to enable the library to remain part of the network

of libraries countywide. For their part the community group had to put forward a viable business plan outlining how they intended to cover the costs of the property which houses the library and any staffing required to run the library, whether paid or volunteer.

- 4.6. In recognition of the contribution that the organisations were making and the value to local communities of having local access to library facilities, the Council agreed to offer a 40% reduction on market value rent costs to those organisations wishing to lease the library building for the purpose of running a community managed library.
- 4.7. A process was put in place for community organisations to submit business plans for review by the Council in order to assess their viability and progress them to be transferred.
- 4.8. The first library to transfer was Roade Library which became community managed in October 2019 and other libraries have followed as they have been able to demonstrate the financial viability of their business plans.
- 4.9. There are currently 15 community managed libraries operating successfully countywide with 7 of these being in North Northamptonshire.
- 4.10. The onset of the pandemic and the requirements to close public libraries during the lockdowns from March 2020 had a significant effect on community groups that were still working towards transfer and so some, including Raunds, were delayed.
- 4.11. To ensure continuity of library services from Raunds library the Raunds Community Library Trust began to run the library with volunteers under a temporary Tenancy at Will provided by the County Council, re-opening the library in October 2020 once restrictions were eased.
- 4.12. Following the disestablishment of the County Council and the creation of North Northamptonshire Council, responsibility for the library service and the library properties in the North transferred to the new Council on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.
- 4.13. A business case has now been received from Raunds Community Library Trust in partnership with an Academy Trust which is assessed as viable. As responsibility for libraries now sits with North Northamptonshire Council, approval is required from the Executive to proceed with the transfer of Raunds Library to become community managed under the same terms as all previous libraries which have been transferred.

## **5. Issues and Choices**

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- 5.1. The Raunds Community Library Trust (RCLT) have been successfully running the library facility under a Tenancy at Will for many months and officers are confident that the group have the means to fulfil their role in delivering library operations. However, without external funding their model would not be sustainable as the group could not take on full responsibility for the building.

Over the last few years, with support from the Library Service managers, the group have sought funding streams and opportunities but have been unable to obtain enough to become self-sustainable. It is unlikely that given more time an alternative viable solution will be forthcoming.

5.2. The Academy Trust have experience in jointly managing another successful community managed library in North Northamptonshire. Their business case demonstrates the synergies between the objectives of the Academy and those of the Library Service. Not only does the partnership enable the financial viability of the library but it also provides opportunities for young people to gain valuable learning, skills and experience from working within a library environment. This added value brings benefits to the local community of Raunds as well as providing opportunities for students to become responsible citizens, successful learners and confident individuals. The full Business Case for the proposal for these two Groups to work together to deliver a Community Managed Library in Raunds is in the **Appendix A**, but in summary.

5.3. The Objectives of the Academy are:

- a) to advance for the public benefit education in the United Kingdom, in particular but without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, by establishing, maintaining, carrying on, managing and developing a school specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs offering a broad and balanced curriculum.
- b) to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of the areas in which the Academy is situated the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants.

5.4 The shared aims of the Academy and RCLT are:

- to encourage reading and the love of books by providing library services
- to provide a safe welcoming place to meet for community residents
- to enable lifelong learning by providing access to a variety of educational and reference materials
- to promote digital literacy and internet access
- to help people access information via a number of formats
- to provide a helpful and safe space to study
- to enrich cultural life
- to become a key part of the community with links to local schools and other voluntary organisations
- to provide a venue for all ages of the public in Raunds and the surrounding area to relieve isolation and loneliness and enhance social wellbeing

## 5.5 In the short term, planned deliverables are:

- The library will look to operate its book lending service for 12 hours a week, with a view to increasing this within 12 months.
- Introduce new - and continue successful - activities to encourage increased use of the library
- Homework Club and holiday activities
- Develop a professional website which will be a key place for information on events, workshops and trips and will be used to book places and room hire
- Outreach service to residents who cannot readily access the library services

## **6. Next Steps**

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- 6.1. Once the Executive have approved the attached business plan the library service will update the existing Service Level Agreement with the Raunds Community Library Trust to reflect the full transfer.
- 6.2. The Council will liaise with the Academy Trust to get the terms of the lease agreed for the building and once this is formalised and signed the current Tenancy will be terminated.
- 6.3. The Raunds library will be officially a community managed library in North Northamptonshire and will be run in accordance with the Service Level Agreement.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1. Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1. Council Officers have reviewed the business plan and are confident that the proposals are financially viable.
- 7.1.2. Following the signing of the lease, NNC will receive rent payments from the Academy Trust of the market rate with 40% discount. The full market rent is £17,000 pa, so the discounted rate payable is £10,200 pa. The building is owned outright by NNC and all of the associated running costs are currently paid for by the Council. The proposed lease arrangement will bring in additional income for the Council alongside the fact that the running costs will be borne by the new occupants. The only costs to the Council of the proposed new arrangement are the costs of maintaining the IT systems and lending stock that make the operation of a public library system possible. Details of the provision by the Council and the expectations of the Group taking on the running the library offer are contained in the Service Level Agreement.
- 7.1.3. This will be discussed in detail with the Group before it is signed by all parties.

## 7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1. There are no legal implications arising from the proposals other than those associated with leasing the property.

7.2.2. Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 the Local Authority has a duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service. This wording has always been open to interpretation. NCC undertook a Needs Analysis to identify which libraries were required to make up the statutory offer. Raunds Library does not form part of that statutory offer, so the Council has no legal duty to maintain a public library in this locality. The Community Managed Library programme was instituted by the former NCC as a way of maintaining library provision in as many locations as possible across the county at minimal cost to the Council. The proposed lease arrangement will be for a term of 6 years and 364 days as the Academy is not permitted to sign of lease of 7 years or more. This will be a full repairing lease.

7.2.3. The relationship between the Council and the Group taking on the running of the library will be managed under a Service Level Agreement as mentioned above. Whilst this is not a legal document, it is signed by both parties in good faith. The performance of the Group running the Community Managed Library is regularly monitored against the Service Level Agreement and an improvement plan will be put in place if necessary.

7.2.4. In summary NNC will provide:

- Access to Library Management System (LMS), Self-service and computer terminal for this purpose
- Connection to the Public Service Network - allowing access to library systems
- Initial book stock at agreed level
- An agreed amount of annual new/top up stock
- Agreed number of People's Network terminals for public internet access
- Initial training (to be cascaded)
- Support from Community Co-ordinator
- Stock reservation service and regular deliveries
- Membership cards
- A Service Level Agreement

7.2.5. Group running the library to provide:

- Secure, accessible premises
- Appropriate minimum opening hours to be agreed
- Access to online services via the People's Network provided
- All associated property running costs
- Indemnity and other insurances
- All staffing, paid or voluntary
- DBS costs as appropriate
- Sound Business Plan to be agreed with NNC

- Agreement to a code of conduct
- Performance data on an ongoing basis
- Printing/copying (if required)
- Annual financial report demonstrating re-investment into library of income generated through library fines and fees
- Public Liability Insurance - each Group will need to apply and provide information for their individual circumstances and then be reimbursed by WNC

7.2.6. Property: Lease/sale agreements where applicable will need to be agreed with WNC Property Services, as WNC are the Host Authority for the Library Service Management function.

### 7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. Maintaining a community managed library in Raunds contributes to the following priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan:

- (a) “Active, fulfilled lives” – Improved accessibility and use of leisure, culture, art and sport. Provide Enhanced support to improve mental health and wellbeing.
- (b) “Better, brighter futures” – Ensure every child has equal access to a high standard of education. Promote better training, further education and employment opportunities for young people,
- (c) “Safe and thriving places” – Strengthen the cultural identity of towns, villages and rural communities. Help town centres and villages respond to changing trends.
- (d) “Connected communities” – Inform and listen to our communities, giving them a greater say in their future. Empower a thriving voluntary and community sector.
- (e) “Modern public services” – Provide good quality and efficient services valued by our customers.

### 7.4. Risk

7.4.1. If the business plan is not approved or the standard 40% discount on the lease is not agreed, then the likelihood of the RCLT being able to find an alternative sustainable funding source is very low.

7.4.2. Without external funding RCLT will be unable to take on the library as fully community managed and the library may be at risk of closure in accordance with the NCC Cabinet decision outlined in **Appendix B** – NCC Cabinet paper 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019.



7.4.3. If any decision taken by the Council contradicts any of the previous procedures followed under the Library Transformation Programme initiated by the County Council, then the Council exposes itself to risk of challenge from other community managed libraries who have been through that process.

#### **7.5. Consultation**

7.5.1. A full public consultation took place in 2017/18 on the future of each of the libraries in Northamptonshire including the proposed transfer of non-statutory libraries to community management. This is detailed in the NCC Cabinet paper – 14 May 2019 Item No: 14 – and Appendix A Library Proposals Against Needs Assessment.

7.5.2. Raunds Town Council have been kept informed of the development of the business plan, and the proposed partnership with the Academy Trust was presented to the Town Council at a meeting held on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

#### **7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel**

7.6.1. This report is being considered by the EAP at its meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022

#### **7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny**

7.7.1. This proposal has not been considered by Scrutiny Committee.

#### **7.8. Equality Implications**

7.8.1. Full EQIAs were completed as part of the 2017/18 public consultations. The provision of community managed libraries was part of the mitigations proposed concerning the potential closure of a council managed library.

7.8.2. By enabling Raunds library to remain part of the Library Network as a community managed library, there will be no adverse effects on any individuals within the 9 protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act (2010).

#### **7.9. Climate Impact**

7.9.1. Enabling Community Managed Libraries to remain part of the library network means that those in Towns/Villages without a Statutory council managed library, have easy access to the library service and other associated services without the need to travel. This contributes to the Carbon reduction targets.

## **7.10. Community Impact**

- 7.10.1. Libraries play an important role in Place Shaping and act as community hubs for local residents. They provide local access to a range of relevant services and help to support and galvanise resilient local communities.
- 7.10.2. By maintaining an access point in Raunds for library and other council services the local community will be able to access the support and information they need locally.
- 7.10.3. Community managed libraries are able to tailor their services and activities to the local and changing needs of their communities giving them more say in what their library delivers.

## **7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact**

- 7.11.1. None identified

## **8. Background Papers**

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NCC Cabinet paper - 14 May 2019 - Agenda Item No: 14 - and Appendix A Library Proposals Against Needs Assessment

This paper outlines the background of the library Transformation Programme, the consultation and proposals including those for Raunds library.