

## Response to Edinburgh Future Libraries Consultation, 9 December 2024

### Introduction

New Town & Broughton Community Council (NTBCC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals for the future of Edinburgh Libraries. Some NTBCC members have already responded individually to this consultation, but here we submit a response agreed by the whole of NTBCC.

Overall, NTBCC is highly supportive of the aims, and most of the goals within the strategy. NTBCC cannot support any reduction in opening hours. Rather, it encourages increased evening and weekend opening hours, perhaps at reduced staffing levels compared to core hours. NTBCC agrees with the service's aim to be a modern, responsive, supportive service for all of Edinburgh's residents.

### Draft strategy

NTBCC agrees to an extent with the vision, mission statement and purpose, in particular that Edinburgh Libraries aims to support all residents 'to reach their full potential'. However, it only agrees with the purpose. This needs to clearly acknowledge that libraries can and should provide support for all to develop their digital, media and information literacies. We reiterate that literacy is much more than being able to read words on a printed page or screen: it is about being able to understand the meanings and implications, work with information from different sources, reconcile differing statements, recognise mis- and dis-information and above all use combinations of information in constructive ways.

In short, there needs to be a more modern vision of libraries as information and resource centres for the community.

Further, the library service needs to be multilingual throughout, not limited to English, in view of Edinburgh's diverse population. The concept of community centre libraries should be broader than suggested in this consultation, including visitor information services and meeting areas etc. Books should only be a minor part of what libraries offer in the 21st century. What matters is the information libraries give access to, and reading for pleasure in any format, not just printed books.

A further area for action is literacy around artificial intelligence, where libraries should help the general public be aware of how to use AI, along with the advantages and concerns about such technologies.

## Aims and goals

### Aim 1: Advance reading, literacy, learning and cultural experiences

NTBCC strongly agrees with this aim's goals 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8. NTBCC agrees with the other goals. We do not see planning and promotion of events around busy and quiet times (aim 3) as times as particularly important. Instead we suggest that times are based around demand. Similarly, collaboration (aim 4) makes sense but is less important than your own services. However, overall we strongly agree that this aim, possibly with slight tweaks to the goals, should be in the final strategy.

### Aim 2: Enable and develop digitally connected communities

NTBCC strongly agrees with all of this aim's goals, and hence strongly agrees that this aim should be in the final strategy. However, there needs to be recognition, and hence implementation of actions, to handle librarians being asked to act as digital proxies, helping users access and work with online accounts and similar. That is, if a user asks a librarian details to log into and then take actions within a personal online account (e.g. a benefits claim, a bank account), this places the librarian in a very difficult situation. Hence clear, supportive policies and management support will be needed.

### Aim 3: Encourage healthy, thriving and inclusive Communities

NTBCC strongly agrees with all of this aim's goals, and hence strongly agrees that this aim should be in the final strategy. However, NTBCC recognises that all of these goals, along with many of the other goals, will need funding, training and resources.

### Aim 4: Support play, learning and development of children and young people

NTBCC strongly agrees with this aim's goals 1, 2, 5 and 6. NTBCC agrees with the other goals. We do not see recreational activities and clubs for children and young people as being completely central to libraries, but as a nice-to-have if space and resources permit. Similarly, there is nothing wrong with building on national promotions around reading for pleasure, but we reiterate the need for libraries to be knowledge portals and centres of digital, media and information literacies. However, overall we strongly agree that this aim, possibly with slight tweaks to the goals, should be in the final strategy.

In connection with ‘activities’ NTBCC suggests the consultation is not clear which activities are specifically proposed for children in libraries, rather than children in schools. Clearer differentiation is needed.

However, given the dearth of school libraries and librarians, especially in primary schools, there needs to be some collaboration between schools and Edinburgh’s libraries to make the most of trained librarians across the city.

### **Aim 5: Continue to listen, learn and develop the service**

It almost goes without saying that continuing to develop any service is key to its success. NTBCC supports the goals within this aim, especially monitoring the impact of the new strategy. Clearly, if a service does not understand what it is doing well and poorly – and why – there is a high chance it will be suboptimal. Any monitoring should also aim to recognise unintended benefits and unexpected problems.

### **Options for changes to opening hours**

NTBCC very much welcomes the planned overall increase in opening hours. However, we are curious how this can be combined with making financial savings: we fear this will be obtained by diminution of services, reductions in staff numbers or increased reliance on unqualified, volunteer staff who are thus ill equipped to deal with the diversity of needs users will present them with.

NTBCC cannot support any reduction in service hours. Moreover, given libraries need to provide support for a diverse user-base, not just those who work in the day-time, extended evening opening is needed, although maybe at reduced staffing levels. Hence NTBCC does not have a preference among the options presented in the consultation.

### **Proposed changes to the timings of event and activities**

All NTBCC can say here is that it is up to the library service, based on its knowledge of its users, to arrange when events and activities should be, and to make the best use of its resources. NTBCC assumes that the library service knows what happens in Edinburgh’s local communities, and hence when

### **About you**

Because this is a collective response, we cannot answer any of these questions.

## Feedback about the consultation process

The consultation was clear, if a little long-winded. Both in survey form, and in acceptance of this prose response, it gave NTBCC the chance to have its say.

Submitted on behalf of New Town & Broughton Community Council

9 December 2024

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