

Stoke-on-Trent Libraries – Helping the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent to realise their potential

There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.
~ Andrew Carnegie

Google can bring back 100,000 answers, a librarian can bring back the right one.
~ Neil Gaiman, Duke University Medical Centre Library 2011.

Introduction

Libraries are seen by all as a welcoming, non judgemental space that the community, no matter who they are or what their skill level is can use for many and differing activities.

Vital to the wellbeing of society, libraries offer a service that is valued as local and is owned by the community; a service of choice appreciated and enjoyed by young and old alike.

No other organisation fulfils this role without either having something to sell or criteria that exclude. Libraries are a uniquely valuable social and community asset with a brand identity that has been built up over 150 years. Even now the library offer has evolved the library service still provides an anchor for local identity and a store of social and cultural capital that is impossible to replace.

Stoke-on-Trent Libraries

The library is many and different things to people from all backgrounds and walks of life – a place to meet, a community centre, a place for study, a place to sit and read and spend time, a place to discover new skills and creativity, a place to develop knowledge and existing skills.

Stoke-on-Trent Library Service provides a network of libraries at the heart of communities offering a vast storehouse of knowledge with skilled staff to help people to access high quality information, a wide range of all the best in fiction and non fiction books, a range of audio visual material to hire, ICT facilities both public PCs and WiFi, storytimes and rhymetimes for parents and toddlers and a range of exciting events for families and all age groups.

The Future

To be the public face of a brilliant council

Create a new iconic city centre library fit for the 21st Century. This will deliver the key messages both that the City is open for business and that it supports and develops its citizens to achieve and contribute. ***This single space will be an outward symbol of the City's transformation.***

Develop café areas for people to sit and relax with friends, read books and magazines. People can spend time in a relaxed atmosphere waiting for their appointment with an advisor from the other services being operated from the centre.

Provide parking facilities, create ease of access for those travelling by public transport and provide public toilets for those who wish to stay all day to study and read.

Develop the use of E-Books and E-talking books in line with the best of what is available from suppliers and ensure improved access for all, including those who prefer to be virtual visitors.

To place libraries at the heart of the local community

Libraries in localities - The local library is the first point of entry into the City Council. It offers a welcoming space, and an exciting and vibrant venue, in which people feel comfortable and relaxed. The Stoke model illustrates how library transactions offer a start point to other council services and mould positive perceptions of the City Council. ***Libraries transform locality into community.***

Libraries offer community space for people to meet, to read, to relax, to have fun; they reduce social isolation. Libraries engage naturally with the community all day and every day and are trusted by everyone. This is why in any shared facility the Library Service is the logical lead partner.

Contribute to social cohesion in the City by delivering exciting, fun family activities in all libraries. These bring families together to build confidence to play, develop and learn.

Promote reading for pleasure for all ages so that people understand the journey a book can take them on. Through individual reading or membership of reading groups reading can alleviate despair, loneliness, poverty, worry and ill health, expand people's horizons and take them on a voyage of discovery. ***All free within the City Library Service.***

Support people to maintain and improve their mental wellbeing through the provision of shared reading (read-aloud) groups and one-to-one read aloud sessions for those who are isolated and experiencing loneliness.

Promote and support independent living through the Homelink delivery service. Develop the 1:1 reading sessions for housebound people, working with volunteers to deliver.

Work with and support volunteer groups to provide Community Book Collections to locations in hard to reach areas of the City. Investigate additional models of volunteer collections to ensure access for all to books and reading.

Contribute to the empowerment of communities through leading on and supporting co-produced cultural and locality initiatives and through creating and developing a volunteer programme within libraries.

To support the cultural and educational life of children and young people

The Library service recognises and respects the importance of parent as first educator. Starting with Early Years the service works with families to improve literacy skills, raise aspiration and to build confidence.

Work with partners in health, children`s centres and other early years settings to encourage early take-up of reading in families, to improve and develop speech and language skills, bonding and secure attachment.

Work with children, families and schools to support and develop reading for pleasure and promote literacy both at home and in school. Library staff open the door to opportunity and promote new pathways for the families the service engages with. ***All this helps to mould an educated and skilled workforce to support new business in the future.***

Work with Youth Services to reduce anti-social behaviour by offering relevant, exciting activities and events which will engage this age group.

To provide a gateway to employability and empowerment

Using specialist staff and empowered volunteers provide ICT classes and 1:1 sessions working with old and young alike, and with specialist groups including NEETs, probationers and adults with learning disabilities to enhance employability.

The service will play a part in the development of the Public Libraries Information Offer which focuses on the *digital by default* agenda for Central Government covering the critical areas of information and services. All information will be published on the single website www.gov.uk by the end of 2012 and the government will move to a 'digital by default' approach to its transactional services by 2015. Assisted Digital services will be put in place to help people who need support to use these online services, this will be available through Libraries.

Libraries will help and support citizens to access Central Government information and services. Priority areas are:

- Jobs, Careers and Skills
- Health
- Your Money (personal financial information)
- Benefits advice
- Rights and citizenship
- Business and Enterprise

Libraries are a major partner in the literacy agenda supporting adults with poor reading skills to improve literacy skills and confidence through the Six Book Challenge and the 1:1 literacy sessions held in libraries

Work with Job Centre Plus ***aligning our ICT provision and staff skill sets to combat worklessness within the City***

Promote health literacy and healthy lifestyles through continuing partnership with the NHS.