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First ten areas to join future library programme announced

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Communities around the country will have the chance to test drive an ambitious change programme for libraries Culture Minister, Ed Vaizey announced today.

The Future Libraries Programme, formed by a partnership between national and local government, and driven by councils themselves, aims to help the library service during the current challenging financial situation, with an ambition to ensure libraries play a central role for communities in the Big Society.

Fifty one submissions, representing over 100 local authorities, have come forward with proposals for innovative collaborations and initiatives – ten of these projects will be taken forward and offered practical support and advice in this first phase.

The programme will initially undertake intensive, proactive work on ten projects representing around three dozen local authorities. Bids to take part were assessed on their individual strengths, but also to ensure a balance of the type of project, geographical spread, and rural and urban mix to help ensure the programme shares learning nationally.

The ten phase one areas are:

- Northumberland with Durham
- Bolton, with Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan
- Bradford
- Lincolnshire, with Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincs, Peterborough
- Suffolk
- Oxfordshire with Kent
- Herefordshire with Shropshire
- Cornwall with Devon, Plymouth, Torbay
- Lewisham with Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark
- Kensington & Chelsea with Hammersmith & Fulham

The programme promises to build momentum on the ideas that have been generated and spread learning between library authorities to achieve cost savings, new partnerships and governance models, and to take advantage of digital opportunities. Central to the programme is the vision for library services to have greater connection with other local services and an ambition for services to be designed around the needs of the public, rather than based on organisational boundaries.

The Museums Libraries and Archive Council (MLA) and the LGA Group (Local Government Association Group) will begin work immediately with packages of support and advice for each of the projects. As work gets underway with the initial ten projects, planning for the second phase of the Programme will press ahead to ensure the successes and experiences of each project can be collected and shared with library authorities across England so that the results of the programme can benefit people throughout the country.

Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Ed Vaizey said:

“A strong library service, based around the needs of local people, can play a key role in our ambitions to build the Big Society by providing safe and inclusive spaces for people to read, learn and access a range of community services.

“The enthusiasm from library authorities across the country for this opportunity for expert support, from the LGA Group and the MLA, has been overwhelming. The response demonstrates just how vital library services are to people and communities and that leaders in local authorities are keen to develop their full potential in new and forward-thinking ways. I hope that through this programme we can help support the leadership of services so that they can continue to provide a high quality library service which, in today’s challenging economic times, people need more than ever.”

MLA Chief Executive, Roy Clare CBE said:

"We are delighted that there has been such a strong response from local government to this initiative. This collaboration sees beyond the short term, and sets an ambition for the library service that places it firmly in an era of digital service, consumer choice and public service collaboration across geographical and organisational boundaries. We are keen to ensure that all authorities are part of this ambition in one way or another and the MLA will continue to provide support to these 10 projects and dozens of others as we press ahead."

Councillor Chris White, Chairman of the Local Government Association's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board said:

"It is good that Ministers have recognised that innovation, improvement and saving money come from the people on the ground who run libraries. This scheme will support and showcase genuinely local ideas about how to modernise and improve them. Crucially this means that the people who use and cherish their local libraries will have a much greater say in their future."