

Foreword

Hertfordshire Library Service underwent a pilot CPA “gap” inspection in May 2002 and achieved a two star good service result. The inspection took place during a major public consultation on library opening hours to which over 11,000 people responded. As a result there will be an overall increase of 30 opening hours per week across the County from January 2003. The consultation has clearly shown that many people wanted to see a more consistent and yet flexible approach to library opening times, with the needs of different groups taken into account.

Provision of library services remotely via the Customer Service Centre and the Automated Telephone Renewals (ATR) continues to grow in popularity. Over 50% of all renewals take place on the ATR. Usage of the library web pages and interactive services through the website are also proving to be very popular. In one month alone (July 2002) over 16000 visitors accessed the library website. Approximately 41% of these visits were made between 5.00pm and 8.00am demonstrating the demand for and success of providing services in this way (and raises questions about measuring performance through opening hours of static service points).

Considerable progress has also been made against the Public Library Standards (PLS). Hertfordshire meets 21 of the 28 measurable constituent parts. However, there are serious tensions between the meaningfulness of the standards in the context of a modern library service and achieving Best Value. These will be explored as part of the library Service Best Value Review October 2002 – March 2003. We will continue to challenge conventional wisdom and look for radical new ways of providing a cost-effective service. This will take into account changes in lifestyles, accessibility, community developments, configuration of static service points and the mobile service.

Hertfordshire’s Library Service works with many partners to achieve local, regional and national objectives. Overall, it is absolutely committed to shaping itself to best meet the demands and needs of the communities it serves.

Councillor Derrick Ashley
Executive Member for Community Information