

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 23 JUNE 2003 AT 2.00 P.M.**

Agenda Item No

7

THE LIBRARY SERVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW

Report of the Director of Community Information

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1. Purpose of report

To present Cabinet with the Library Service Best Value Review Report. The report and its appendices are attached.

2. Summary

The Best Value Review process has concluded as follows:-

- Member Review Group Thursday 22 May agreed final report
- Library Panel 29 May commented on the main conclusions and recommendations
- Summary report to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee Tuesday 10 June
(Comments of the Committee will be circulated separately)

The main outputs of the Library Service Best Value Review can be divided into:

- Improvements to the current service through reallocation of resources
- Development of the service through partnership working plus redevelopment opportunities which gives the potential to successfully reposition libraries in the communities they serve

3. Conclusions

Cabinet is asked to consider the report and the recommendations of the Review Group (pages 2-3 of Executive Summary of the Report. Further detail is given in section 2 'Recommendations of the Review')

4. Background

The scope of the Best Value Review covered the library service as a whole including the static service points and mobile service. There has been a high level of interest and serious engagement with this Review by members of the public across the County, staff, partner organisations (e.g. Districts, Parishes, voluntary bodies), Members and UNISON. Hertfordshire County Council spends £14.5 million on its library service. The service is highly valued and well used by its regular users. However, service performance is not in the top quartile against all indicators (i.e. when compared to its statistical family of authorities). Cost-effectiveness and top-quartile performance are therefore key objectives of this Review and inform the recommendations and improvement plan.

The service achieved a two star good service result from the first part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2002 but achieved a one star uncertain to improve result for the second part of the assessment. However, the Annual Library Plan (ALP) subsequently attained excellent scores from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). There were 3 assessments of the Plan on the following criteria:

- the plan as a planning tool achieved
4 = excellent
- approach to meeting the Public Library Standards (PLS) achieved
3 = good
- evidence that the quality of the library service is improving achieved
4 = excellent

In 2002, Hertfordshire met 20 out of 29 PLS compared to a national median of 14.

The Review addressed the main issues raised by the CPA i.e. falling issue and visitor figures, marketing and promotion and review of service point configuration. The Members Review Group (lists of the participants in the Member Review group, Staff Core Group, Wider Reference Group etc can be found in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Report) identified priorities.

The recommendations and the resulting implementation plan meet the following objectives as defined by the scope of the Review:

- to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the service
- to benchmark Hertfordshire against authorities in the top 25%
- to compare Hertfordshire with authorities providing innovative, cutting edge services
- to assess the views of users, lapsed users and non users of the service
- to determine the priorities for improvement

5. Review methodology

The Review was led by the Member Review Group and followed standard HCC methodology. It was carried out in four stages: preparation, information collection, hypothesis formulation/testing and reporting (Appendix 4 of the Report). At each stage, the core officer group researched information and reported findings. The findings were tested with external challengers at two workshops during the course of the Review. Proposals developed from the workshops were presented at Member Review Group meetings for decisions.

6. Main conclusions

The conclusions of the review can be divided into: -

- **Improvements to the current service through reallocation of resources**

Single staffing appropriate service points and reconfiguring the mobile service will release the resources to enable a package of customer focussed improvements. This may include some the following recommendations: -

Piloting Sunday opening in up to 4 libraries

Reductions in fees and charges

Marketing and promotion to users and potential users to raise awareness and increase usage of services offered

- **Development of the service through partnership working plus redevelopment opportunities which gives the potential to successfully reposition libraries in the communities they serve.**

Appropriate development opportunities include PFI bids, Section 106 funding and partnerships with District and Borough Councils as well as development opportunities relating to the value of owned sites.

Financial Implications

The cost of the review has been met within the budget of the Library Service. The recommendations are cost neutral based on the assumption that savings may be reinvested.