

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 10 JUNE 2003 AT 10.00A.M.

Agenda Item No.

3

SUMMARY OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW

Report of the Director of Community Information

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1. Purpose of report

To provide the Committee with a summary of the Library Service Best Value Review.

2. Summary

This report details the main conclusions and draft recommendations arising from the Best Value Review, some of which address the concerns expressed at a previous Committee meeting (January 2003) re: falling usage and the impact of alterations to charges.

3. Conclusions

The Committee is asked to note the content of this report and decide whether any further scrutiny is required.

The Committee is also asked to note that the timescale for completion of the review is as follows: -

- final MRG Thursday 22 May 2003 to agree draft
- Library Panel Thursday 29 2003 May for comment
- Report to Cabinet for consideration Monday 23 June 2003.

4. Background

- 4.1 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 draft recommendations and improvement plan.
- 4.2 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
- 4.3 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, review of service point configuration and priorities identified by the Members Review Group (MRG Alan Searing – Chairman, Roy Clements, Keith Emsall, Sherma Batson, Michael Colne).
- 4.4 The recommendations and the resulting improvement 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 MRG and followed the standard HCC methodology. It was carried out in four stages: preparation, information collection, hypotheses formulation/testing and reporting. 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 MRG meetings for decisions.

6. Main conclusions

The recommendations made by the review are both to improve the current service and to develop the service particularly by working with partners.

The recommendations are as follows:-

Recommendation 1

Develop, implement and effectively resource a marketing strategy to include identifying target groups; local marketing; income generation and branding

As part of the management development programme the service will give responsibility for marketing and 'outreach' to a nominated manager. Resources will be invested in materials and events to publicise and promote the library service.

Recommendation 2

Improve the library fees and charges structure to encourage greater use of the service, particularly by users from disadvantaged groups

Improving the structure will reduce certain charges from their very high levels and give the opportunity to experiment with other fee levels to see if adjustments will result in higher service use.

Recommendation 3

Abolish charges for access to resources in the Family History Centre at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS)

The income from this charge is declining and the reduction can be offset against other chargeable services. A useful promotional tool to attract service users putting us in line with most other county archive services.

Recommendation 4

Ensure all development/renewal opportunities for libraries are considered, in particular maximising opportunities for joint operations with partners to provide flexible multi-use jointly staffed space

This will give libraries the opportunity to redevelop or re-position existing service points often in conjunction with partners.

The benefits may include better facilities, lower operating costs, better location and reduced maintenance costs. A series of specific proposals will be developed and brought forward.

Recommendation 5 *

Reconfigure the mobile service

The mobile service will be enhanced with better technology. It is hoped to gain greater use of the service by review of the routes and increased marketing of the service. Single staffing will produce an efficiency of £100,000 p.a.

Recommendation 6 *

Single staff appropriate service points

This will achieve significant efficiencies and will make Hertfordshire staffing patterns consistent with those of neighbouring authorities. Efficiencies of £100,000 p.a. will be partly offset in the first year by any necessary investment in premises.

Recommendation 7

Consider Sunday opening at 4 of the main libraries

Consultation has shown some demand for Sunday opening in the larger libraries. A fixed-term pilot in one library would be used to assess the practicality of further extending the practice.

Recommendation 8

Pilot the viability of selling the top best-sellers etc.

Libraries without a bookshop within their catchment area will be identified and the top best sellers will be sold as a value added service. This would be on a cost neutral basis.

Recommendation 9

Develop computer facilities for new and existing services to:

- **Provide credit card facilities for payment on-line**
- **Develop electronic messaging capability to promote new/existing services**

This recommendation will contribute to the County Council's e-Government agenda and promote a modern image of the library service.

Other Recommendations

A large number of other proposals for improvement are given in the Improvement Plan and will be achieved at no extra cost.

* Noting that recommendations 5 and 6 are dependent upon consultation and agreement with UNISON and staff members.

7. Rural Implications

Rural and urban services will be affected by changes such as revisions to mobile routes. However the intention is to improve service and access as a result of these changes.

8. Financial Implications

The cost of the review has been met within the budget of the Library Service. The draft recommendations are cost neutral based on the assumption that any further expenditure can be met from savings achieved.