

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2003 at 10.00 AM**

Agenda Item No.

6

**LIBRARY SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS
(ANNUAL LIBRARY PLAN, SECTION 3.4.6)**

Report of the Director of Community Information

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1. Purpose of report

This item was requested by Keith Emsall for scrutiny by the Committee.

This report seeks to inform members of the current provision of library services for visually impaired people to enable the Committee to scrutinise this area of service delivery.

2 Summary

The report sets out current library provision to people with a visual impairment, provides details of other service providers, benchmarks provision with 18 comparator authorities and concludes with a number of suggestions for improvement within current resources.

3 Conclusion

Members are asked to note the contents of the report and to decide if there is a need to look further at this subject.

1. Background

1.1 Current service provision for visually impaired people: general

Talking books and large print are provided in every library in the County. Access to this material is extended beyond library buildings by the mobiles, Home Library Service, HertsDirect and Cassettes for Blind People Service (CfBP). There is a package of concessions for visually impaired people (VIP) eg no overdue or talking book loan charges. In addition:

- Access to Bee Aware national interlending scheme for alternative formats
- Stock and information on visual impairment
- All service leaflets/publicity produced in line with HCC policy for equal access
- Talking book search available on online catalogue by Mar 2004
- Reader development activities eg National Library for the Blind 'A touch of....'
- Staff training on equality and disability issues
- Access to assistive technology widened, increased and promoted 2003-04
- Local links with local talking newspapers, societies

1.2 Current service provision: Cassettes for Blind People (CfBP) service

This is a free postal service to registered blind or partially sighted people (for full details of eligibility please see Appendix 5 paragraph 1). Most referrals come via Adult Care Services (ACS), a few from libraries and Herts Association for the Blind. The catalogue is sent to potential new users within 1 week. Users receive their first cassettes within 3-4 days of returning the catalogue and on a constant supply thereafter. Roughly one person applies every day, and people join and leave all the time. However, 70 potential new users have been offered the service over the last year but have not returned the catalogue. Information about users and stock is currently on an Access database and not the library Concerto computer system. Key facts and figures:

- 1146 users including 17 young people. 89 users are not entitled to the freepost service and receive their cassettes via their local library
- Weekly staffing: 137.5 hours (includes 37 casual hours); 25 volunteer hours
- Budget 2002-03 £62k included all staffing, materials and service costs
- Stock of 4500 items – mainly fiction but some non fiction and children's books
- Issues are increasing year on year – 17% over previous 2 years

- Collection of 20 audio described videos (mainstream feature films with narration to explain what is happening when the characters are not speaking)
- Staff are often in contact with users and receive very few complaints

1.3 Issues for the service

There is no formal written policy or consultation process for VIP to inform service priorities and developments. Some marketing takes place but not in an integrated way. There are access issues in local libraries: talking book cassettes have no tactile numbering for order of play and newspapers and magazines are not available in all appropriate formats.

Specific issues for the CfBP service are:

- The service is labour intensive, Hertfordshire like comparator authorities struggles to meet demand and target turnaround times
- In house administration is time consuming eg cassettes shelved loose
- A percentage of potential users (which fluctuates constantly but is rarely above 10%) have not returned their catalogues and are not receiving the service
- The audio described video collection needs expanding, updating and promoting
- Take up of RNIB subscription service is lower in Hertfordshire than other comparator authorities: 147 out of 169 local authorities sponsor subscriptions to the service. Of those who do, 75% are paid for by social services

1.4 Conclusions

During the course of research for this paper a number of cost neutral measures that could be taken to improve the service were identified as follows:

Modernising the Cassettes for Blind People service:

- Add both CfBP stock and user records to the Concerto library system to enable automated issue and return and widen access to the catalogue online
- Streamline administrative processes by:
 - Upgrading storage to shelve cassettes in postal boxes
 - Merging client profiles with client reading selections in one file sequence

Widening access to services:

- Draw up, consult on and implement a written VIP policy
- Subscribe to TNAUK e services subscription for newspapers and

magazines for those libraries introducing assistive technology in 2003-04

- Extend web links to national providers (accessible for VIP)
- Investigate tactile numbering of mainstream library talking book stock
- Subscribe to ClearVision so Braille readers and their families can use libraries
- investigate why potential users have not returned their catalogue

2. Rural implications

Many users are elderly and often housebound. 60% of VIP never go out alone. Service improvements, such as making the catalogue available on the Internet, widening web links and closer working with ACS will help VIP in rural areas.

3. Financial Implications

The implications of this report are cost neutral.

Background material referred to by the author while compiling this report:

- *Library Services for visually impaired people: a manual of best practice*, October 2000 (Re:source)
- Davies, J E et al *Out of sight but not out of mind: VIP perspectives of library & information services*, 2001
- Kinnell, M et al *Public Library Services for visually impaired people*, 2000
- RNIB *A closed book: public library services for blind and partially sighted people*, 2002

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Glossary

ACS	Adult Care Services
CD	Compact Disc
CfBP	Cassettes for Blind People Service
CRL	Central Resources Library
DAISY	Digital Accessible Information System
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DH	Department of Health
Fte	Full time equivalent
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILL	InterLibrary Loans
LP	Large Print
NLB	National Library for the Blind
NOF	New Opportunities Fund
PN	People's Network
P/T	Part time
RNIB	Royal National Institute of the Blind
TNAUK	Talking Newspaper Association of the UK
VIP	Visually impaired people

Appendix 2:

Other Service Providers

1. Royal National Institute for the Blind Talking Books Service

The largest national collection with 13,000+ titles (fiction and non fiction) and 50,000 members. Unabridged titles are recorded on CD using professional actors. DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) software is used which improves the quality of sound and has the flexibility to move around by page, chapter etc. Currently users can have either CDs or cassettes but eventually all the stock will be on CD. Large numbers of people are switching over. The annual subscription is £60 and includes the loan of a RNIB CD Daisy player.

All other talking book services, including CfBP, still use cassettes as DAISY is not yet commercially available on CDs or standard CD players.

Eligibility and administration

Anyone in the UK who cannot read N12 pt or less at normal reading distance with spectacles can join. The catalogue is available in large print, audio, Braille, Moon, Disc and electronic file but not yet on the Internet.

The service has a 7 working days target turnaround for sending out first books and operates on an exchange basis. Target turnaround time is 3 working days.

Local authority subscriptions 2002/03

87% (147 out of 169) of local authorities sponsor subscriptions to the RNIB Service. HCC is among only 13% who do not do this. Of those who do, 75% are sponsored by social services, 25% by library authorities Gloucestershire, cited as an example of good practice, offers a choice of service to users. Of 1067 users, 334 use the RNIB, 387 the library postal service and 402 both services.

Cost comparisons of Cassettes for Blind People Service and RNIB

The 2002-03 cost of CfBP was £62,000. Estimated costs, not including administration and user support costs, if HCC acted as an agency for RNIB are £61,020 for 2003-04. This is calculated as follows: 1017 (947 postal users + 70 users who have still to return the catalogue) x £60 RNIB subscription cost. RNIB would not cater for those receiving CfBP via their library.

2. Calibre Cassette Library (Registered charity established 1974)

This is a free postal lending service to individuals with 19,500+

members. For copyright reasons, users have to provide evidence that they cannot read ordinary print. Group membership for care homes etc costs £50 pa. In addition:

- Catalogues are available in LP, cassette, computer disc and online formats
- The children's catalogue includes age categories to help with selection
- 6,000 titles on cassette for adults; 1,000 titles recorded specially for children
- InterLibrary Loans are offered to public libraries via the British Library system

3. Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (TNAUK) (Registered charity)

TNAUK produces 200+ national newspapers/magazines recorded on audio cassette for 200,000+ listeners. 41,000+ cassettes are dispatched a week. Local newspapers and magazines are supplied free of charge by over 520 local talking newspaper groups affiliated to TNAUK. Details of the service:

- 30 staff manage the national service, assisted by 200+ volunteers
- Subscription rates range from £45 for 3 publications to £105 for 10-15 publications. Concessionary rates are available
- Libraries can subscribe to titles produced electronically. Costs £50 pa per site for daily Bulletin Board/website options, £250 pa for weekly CD-ROM
- Subscribers are offered a choice of formats - audio tape, computer disk, email, CD-ROM, via the TNAUK Bulletin Board and the TNAUK website

4. The National Library for the Blind (NLB) (Registered charity)

Europe's largest collection of Braille and Moon books, currently 350,000 volumes. This is a free worldwide postal library service. Users do not need to be registered blind or partially sighted. Specific services include:

- Learners' library to help those learning to touch read in Braille or Moon
- A range of website services eg electronic books; reference material; discussion boards; book browsing software and Fiction Café for young people
- Campaign on behalf of VIP eg inclusion in UK public library services
- Support VIP musicians worldwide with a library of Braille music scores
- Provide advice/information to help organisations make services accessible

- Range of targeted catalogues and booklists available on request
- 2 quarterly magazines for members. Available in all formats

5. ClearVision

A postal lending library of mainstream children's books with Braille, print and pictures, suitable for VIP and sighted children and adults to share. 130 families and 170 Braille reading adults use the service which has 12,000+ books. Membership is free and includes 6 books on a 6 month loan which can be exchanged. In addition:

- 100+ library authorities subscribe (£40 fee) so Braille readers and their families can use libraries. Annual loan of books, can be exchanged 6 times
- 150 schools, nurseries, VIP services use ClearVision
- Books sent according to age, interests etc. No booklists are produced

Appendix 3 Comparator authorities providing Cassettes for Blind People postal service

Service	Hertfordshire	Cambridgeshire	Essex	Gloucestershire	Northamptonshire	Warwickshire
Staffing	162.5 hours per week approx H1x 3 18.5 hours H2/3 x 1 25 hours H5 X 1 20 hours Since May 02 to date 37 hours agency staff – was previously provided by CRL staff; approx 25 volunteer hours	45 hours per week 3 P/T staff (grades not given)	163 hours approx 3.4Fte + 1 Fte additional staffing brought in from other service areas	75 hours per week 1 Manager 1sc 1 –2 30 hours	56 hours per week 1 x sc 4 18.5 hours 1 x sc 1-2 37 hours	25 hours per week 1 co-ordinator N.B. run by Warwickshire Assoc for Blind grant aided by library service and on contract from social services
Volunteers	15: 50% attend regularly providing half day each per week on average = 25 hours a week	Used only for specific projects, not day to day service	None	None	None	25
Budget	Materials Fund £12,000	Materials fund/stationery £15,000	£85 total cost of which £30k spent on materials fund	£15,000 materials fund	Materials fund £10,000 Pochettes/boxes £1,000	Library service provides £3000 Materials fund Service generates £10,000 in bequests, £5000 of which spent on stock
Users	1036	877 no waiting list	1700 users – not meeting demand	789	656	500

Service	Hertfordshire	Cambridgeshire	Essex	Gloucestershire	Northamptonshire	Warwickshire
Turnaround	3 day target Currently 4 days	48 Hours	3 day target currently 5 days	24 hour target but recent staffing cuts of 16-20 hrs reduced to 1 week – have received complaints	5 working days	Same day
Automation	Manual system	Still manual considering automation but issues over history, cataloguing genres	In process of transferring to ELAN system for issue/return Loan history will still be manual	TALIS for issues/return + stand alone system for history/RNIB info etc.	TALIS for issues/return History manual	Automated system for issue/return
RNIB subs			In addition spend £50K on RNIB/ NLB subs – specific numbers not available	334 RNIB subs £20,040	450 RNIB subs @ £27,000 254 TNAUK	

Notes

- Kent provide an in house service, but owing to the untimely death of the service manager, details not currently available
- Alternative provision is made in other comparator authorities: Bedfordshire (Home Library Service); Buckinghamshire (work with Calibre based in Aylesbury); Hampshire, Leicestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Surrey (authority funds RNIB subscriptions)
- No provision is made in Cheshire and Suffolk

Legislative and policy framework

1. National framework

1.1 Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964

Places a statutory requirement to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. “Comprehensive and efficient” is not defined but it does oblige authorities to ensure that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other material ‘sufficiently in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children’.

1.2 Disability Discrimination Act, 1995

Since 1996, any service provider has a duty not to refuse or provide a worse standard of service and not to offer a service on worse terms to disabled people than to non disabled people. Extra charges cannot be incurred for service provision in relation to a person’s disability eg provision of audio cassettes.

1.3 Libraries for all (DCMS)

This policy document recommends that library authorities adopt a strategic approach to combating social exclusion within their communities based on a six-point plan. This approach is used in Hertfordshire.

1.4 The People’s Network (PN)

As part of the PN roll out, there has been investment in establishing connectivity, digital content and developing staff ICT competencies via the NOF training plan.

The report on ‘Building the new library Network’ (Library and Information Commission 1998) recommended that the new ICT interfaces should provide independent access for VIP to a wide range of information. They should also provide assistive technologies including voice recognition, synthetic speech output, screen magnification, large print output and Braille bars. (The service is spending 25k on these technologies in 2003/04.)

1.5 Library Services for visually impaired people: a manual of best practice Re:source Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, October 2000

A keynote document on good practice produced in partnership with Share the Vision. It draws on specialist experience and offers practical guidance, resources and support to improve the provision of local library services for VIP.

The library services uses the manual to benchmark its provision; most recently in relation to assistive technology and to up-date interlibrary loans provision in alternative formats with the launch of the national REVEAL catalogue for alternative formats on 16 September 2003.

1.6 Comprehensive, Efficient and Modern Public Libraries – Standards and Assessment, DCMS 2001

The Standards seek to quantify “comprehensive & efficient” in the 1964 Public Libraries Act and to assist central government in the delivery of its Modernising Local Government objectives.

1.7 The new library planning framework 2003: Public Library Position Statement

Position Statements are the new planning framework for public libraries replacing Annual Library Plans. They must demonstrate planning and delivery of services in line with the government strategy, Framework for the Future and include local targets for services to specific groups, including people with disabilities.

Library activity should cover: promotion of reading and informal learning; access to digital skills and services including e government; measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship.

There is no requirement for ‘excellent’ authorities to produce or submit a Position Statement to the DCMS.

2. HCC corporate policy and objectives

2.1 Putting People First 1999 HCC equal opportunities policy

‘The council will take all necessary steps to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are taken into account in all areas of its activities. Where barriers to access are identified, we will take action to overcome them.’

2.2 HCC Best Value Promises: links

- To help people help themselves
- Fight for the interests of elderly and disabled people and their carers. We will help them to maintain their independence and get easy access to our services
- Promote equality and improve access to our services, employment and buildings

2.3 Library aims and objectives

- We aim to plan our services around the needs of our users and to reflect the diverse communities within Hertfordshire
- We aim to proactively develop our service to assist in tackling social

inclusion, specifically by addressing issues like charges, improved access, promotion, community research, staff attitudes and behaviour and location of services

- We will provide a range of materials, in a variety of formats to enrich the quality of people's life

Statistics

1. Definitions of blind, partially sighted and visually impaired

- Registration as blind or partially sighted depends on an assessment of the quality of distance/side vision by a consultant ophthalmologist
- Visually impairment is defined as vision which cannot be corrected by wearing glasses. This will include people who may or may not be entitled to register as blind or partially sighted. Those not entitled may still have difficulties reading ordinary print or recognising a friend on the other side of the street

Authority	RNIB Members June 2003	Cassette for Blind Service Postal Service Users June 2003	Registered Blind & Partially sighted DH 2000 statistics *
Hertfordshire	284	947	2542
Cambridgeshire	214	877	1370
Essex	1,996	1700	5018
Kent	2,044	1360	No figure
Northamptonshire	557	656	1730

*Triennial DH statistics still to be published for 2003

RNIB Hertfordshire statistics: based on research due to be published 2003						
Number of people registered blind and partially sighted						
0-4 years	5-17 years	18-49 years	50-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years	Total
22	109	522	413	481	3353	4900

Prevalence estimates based on 2001 census data for the UK by age group						
0-4 years	5-17 years	18-49 years	50-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years	Total
130	393	1761	702	2077	13202	18267

% of those estimated to be eligible who are registered blind and partially sighted						
0-4 years	5-17 years	18-49 years	50-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years	Total
17%	28%	30%	59%	23%	25%	27%

Source: RNIB Research Library July 2003

- 2 million people in UK have a sight problem (Grundy et al, 1999)
- 1 in 50 of the population, would qualify to be registered as blind or partially sighted

- 4 out of 5 with sight problems are aged over 65
- 6 out of 10 people with sight problems never go out alone
- In 1999, 110,000 books were published in UK of which 2000 were produced in large print and 2500 in audio format
Source: A closed book: public library services for blind and partially sighted people RNIB report May 2002