

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2004 AT 10.00A.M.

Agenda Item No:

4

LIBRARY USER PANELS AND FRIENDS OF LIBRARIES

Report of the Director of Community Information

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1. Purpose of report

To provide the Community Service Scrutiny Committee with a discussion paper on Library User Panels and Friends Groups as requested at their meeting of 15 June 2004.

2. Summary

The report outlines the background to development of LUP and Friends Groups and provides a number of suggestions for improving consultation, incorporating LUP members. The discussion report was circulated to the Library Panel on 7 September 2004 and their comments are included in section 9.

3. Conclusion

That the Community Services Scrutiny Committee note the suggestions contained in this paper, endorsed by the Library Panel and consider whether there is a need to scrutinise the issue.

4. Background

- 4.1 Library User Panels were formed in 1997/8 following a member review of the Library User Groups and their effectiveness. The Library User Panel model was developed to move away from a formal style of meeting, which focused mainly on the receipt of retrospective reports from officers. The new approach for the Panels put the main emphasis on customer consultation conducted in an informal style of meeting to encourage more participation by “lay” users. Panels were also asked to act as “sounding boards” for service developments and new initiatives (Appendix 1 - Library User Panels - Remit).
- 4.2 Twenty-eight Panels were formed, mainly based on individual communities, rather than the larger groupings that had existed before.

5. Library User Panel development

- 5.1 A concerted effort to recruit new members resulted in more “lay” user members joining the Panels. County, District and Parish Councillors continued their involvement but many opted to offer the role of Panel Convenor to lay members (Appendix 2- Library User Panel Model). Panels took different approaches to their consultation role, reflecting the differing needs of their communities.
- 5.2 Examples of early Panel activity are as follows:-
- Bishop’s Stortford new library - consultations with the public on layout and development of the new library
 - Stevenage and Hoddesdon - Stock “surgeries” with the public to receive feedback on stock collections
 - Hertford and Ware - customer satisfaction “surgeries”
 - All Panels - invited to countywide meetings to discuss national issues such as government reports and developments.

6. Changes in public consultation

- 6.1 Since the formation of the Panels, there have been a number of developments which have had a major impact on approaches to public consultation by local authorities: -

6.2 Best Value

The introduction by central government of Best Value assessments and performance indicators required all local authorities to adopt a more formalised and structured approach to their public consultation programmes. Consultation is mandatory and has to meet clearly defined and prescriptive standards. The Library User Panel model does not easily fit with this approach.

6.3 Public Library User Survey

This annual national survey of library users was introduced in 1995/6 and is now mandatory for all public library authorities. Hertfordshire libraries were involved in the pilot programme and now have an archive of information on customer satisfaction and usage patterns, spanning 9 years. This has further diminished the need for consultation through the Library User Panels. Public consultation is carried out in accordance with national standards and is “quality assured” by CIPFA. Outcomes are reported to central government in the Annual Library Plan, through the public library standards and through Best Value Performance Indicators.

6.4 Hertfordshire Corporate Consultation Standards

These were developed to assist service departments to carry out effective public consultations, which will meet the national standards indicated above. Library User Panels do not readily fit the standards, which require a structured and targeted approach.

7. Friends of Libraries Groups

- 7.1 Friends of Libraries groups have been established in some library authorities. In 1999/2000, national conferences and workshops were held to share experiences and for library authorities without such groups to learn about their role.
- 7.2 Friends of Libraries operate independently of library services but work in partnership with library staff. Their primary role is to lobby in support of libraries at national and local level. In some cases, Friends Groups have adopted the American model where funds are raised for enhancements to the service, which often cannot be provided from core budgets.
- 7.3 In Hertfordshire, elected members commissioned an initiative to pilot 2 Friends of Libraries groups. These would have been in addition to the longstanding Friends Group in Chorleywood. It was envisaged that the Friends Groups would replace the Library User Panels in the communities concerned. The initiative was discussed with all Library User Panels and there was some initial interest in this potential change. Panel members became aware of the amount of time needed to establish and run a successful Friends Group. These Groups run their own activities and require a Committee of officers (Chairperson, Finance Officer, Minutes Secretary, Events Officer and so on) to lead the Group. Therefore, when offered the choice of converting to Friends Groups or maintaining the status quo, Panels opted for the less onerous option of remaining as they were.
- 7.4 Discussions in a community without a Library User Panel also foundered through a shortage of people willing to make the time commitment needed to run a successful Friends Group.

The project was abandoned after a year of research, discussion and investigation failed to identify enough people willing and able to take on the new role.

8. Present Position

- 8.1 Many of the original 28 Panels have either elected not to meet or to meet only when a specific need arises, for example to contribute to the Best Value Review of Libraries in 2002/3.
- 8.2 There are 10 Library User Panels, which do still meet 2 or 3 times a year (Appendix 3 – Membership Profiles of LUPS That Still Hold Meetings). These Panels are administered and facilitated by library staff. Library officers attending LUP meetings are entitled to redeem additional hours over and above their normal working pattern. This means that there is an effect on direct service delivery equivalent to approximately one day less per annum per person. Facilitators are increasingly finding difficulty in producing meaningful and fruitful agendas for these Panels in the absence of an identified need to consult the members concerned at that time. The process is expensive and the Panel outcomes do not generally add value to the library service for the reasons identified earlier in the report (Appendix 5 – Cost to Run 1 Library User Panel for 12 months). Out of a grand total of 125 people who could have attended the last LUP meeting only 59 actually attended (Appendix 4 – Attendance Profiles of LUPs That Still Hold Meetings – figures are for the Final Meetings held in 2003/04). In effect over the last year we have spent nearly £10,000 to reach a total of 39 Lay Users.

9. The way forward

- 9.1 The library service has always been, and remains, grateful to the many loyal Library User Panel members who have given their time to support the service. However, in the light of the changes experienced since the formation of Library User Panels, it would now be beneficial to adopt a different approach. This would be more cost effective and productive for the library service and more rewarding for the Panel members: -

10. Suggestions

- Move away from the regular pattern of meetings largely convened when no identified consultation need exists
- Establish a database of Panel members who wish to continue to work with the library service county-wide
- Use the database to form Focus Groups when a specific need for consultation arises
- Use the database to conduct local telephone or postal surveys when a specific need arises
- Divert the resources currently devoted to Library User Panel meetings into the mainstream Consultation Programme for the service and target this time to specific consultation activity.

11. Library Panel Comments

11.1 The Panel agreed the suggestions above and that in addition the following points should be added:-

- That senior library service officers should visit the existing LUPs to explain changes.
- That the comment and suggestion scheme should invite people to have their details included on the database
- That posters publicising the database should be put up in all libraries
- That information should be structured on the database in such a way that details of contacts on a library by library basis can be extracted (this would in effect mean that consultation group could be established for every library. Groups could then be used to target specific areas or alternatively all groups could be used to obtain a countywide opinion).

12. Access to service implications

The changes suggested above should make it easier for the service to consult users on a range of issues.

13 Financial implications

All current activity is contained within core budgets. If the suggestions above are adopted the resources would be diverted to consultation and direct service provision.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

Papers for Agenda Item 4 (Library User Panels and Friends of Libraries) presented to the Library Panel on 7 September 2004.

LIBRARY USER PANELS – REMIT

- ❑ Local focus on an individual community
- ❑ Balanced membership aiming to recruit lay user members
- ❑ Annual cycle
- ❑ Flexible pattern of meetings to suit panel members
- ❑ Set their own agendas and priorities with support from District Librarian and other senior staff as required.
- ❑ Informal approach to business.
- ❑ Initiate and participate in consultative activities e.g. surgeries, surveys and events.

LIBRARY USER PANEL MODEL

USER PANELS

To be established on an annual basis

Membership Profile

- ❑ Maximum of 12 people
- ❑ 1 County Councillor in consultative and facilitating role
- ❑ 1 District Council representative
- ❑ 1 Town/Parish Council representative
- ❑ 2 Officers
- ❑ 7/8 Users who will choose a convenor from amongst their members

APPENDIX 3

MEMBERSHIP PROFILES OF LUPS THAT STILL HOLD MEETINGS

AREA	COUNTY COUNCILLOR	DISTRICT COUNCILLOR	DISTRICT COUNCIL NOMINEE	PARISH COUNCILLOR	TOWN COUNCILLOR	YOUTH TOWN COUNCILLOR	BOROUGH COUNCILLOR	BOROUGH COUNCIL NOMINEE	LAY USER MEMBER
Berkhamsted	2	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	3
Borehamwood	7	-	-	1	1	-	2	-	5
Cheshunt	4	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	6
Harpenden	3	-	-	1	2	1 (awaiting new nomination)	-	-	5
Hatfield	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Hertford & Ware	3	3	1	-	1	1	-	-	11
Hoddesdon	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	7
Kings Langley	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	6
Sawbridgeworth	1	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	8
Welwyn Garden City	5	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	4

APPENDIX 4

ATTENDANCE PROFILES OF LUPS THAT STILL HOLD MEETINGS (FOR THE FINAL MEETINGS HELD IN 2003/04)

AREA	COUNTY COUNCILLOR	DISTRICT COUNCILLOR	DISTRICT COUNCIL NOMINEE	PARISH COUNCILLOR	TOWN COUNCILLOR	YOUTH TOWN COUNCILLOR	BOROUGH COUNCILLOR	BOROUGH COUNCIL NOMINEE	LAY USER MEMBER
Berkhamstead	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	1
Borehamwood	0	-	-	1	1	-	0	-	2
Cheshunt	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	4
Harpenden	2	-	-	1	0	0 (awaiting new nomination)	-	-	2
Hatfield	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Hertford & Ware	0	3	0	-	1	0	-	-	6
Hoddesdon	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	4
Kings Langley	1	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	4
Sawbridgeworth	1	1	-	-	0	-	-	-	6
Welwyn Garden City	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	4

APPENDIX 5

COST TO RUN 1 LIBRARY USER PANEL FOR 12 MONTHS:

Staff Time:

	£
Officer time (District Librarian) = 9 hours M2/M3	209.00
Administrative Team staff = 6 hours H2	162.00
Second officer = 9 hours average H8/H9	149.00

Total 520.00

Administrative Costs:-

Printing	
Postage	
Stationery	
Telephone Calls	
Total	128.00

Expenses:-

Mileage	48.00
Refreshments	15.00
Total	63.00

Guest Speakers and Presentations:-

[Assumes that one of the three meetings will have a guest speaker or a presentation]	Total 150.00
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Grand Total:- £861.00 P.A.