

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2004 AT 10.00A.M.

SCHOOLS LIBRARY SERVICE – SCOPING REPORT

Report of the Head of Scrutiny

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1. Introduction

This report considers the issues currently affecting the Schools Library Service and the options the Committees could take to scrutinise this service.

2. Background Information

Fair Funding

2.1 The legislation of 2000 required all authorities to delegate funding for SLS provision to Secondary schools. Funding to Primary schools could be delegated (as in Hertfordshire) or devolved and ear-marked for SLS purchase only. The evidence we have from schools is that because of difficult budgets they have had to use the SLS delegated budget to offset staffing costs. Lack of funding is the most significant reason given for non-use of the Schools Library Service.

2.2 The Schools Library Service (SLS) is therefore a Traded Service within HCC (CI Libraries) and relies on buy-back from schools on a subscription basis to remain viable as a business unit. The following information provides details of the service as at the 31 July 2004.

2.3 The following table shows patterns of buyback over the past three years:

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Primaries on Development contracts	77	46	47
Primaries on Core Contracts	155	155	157
Primaries buying smaller packages	78	47	62
Secondary contracts	41	27	38

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2.4 The sharp decline in subscriptions in 2003/04 was attributed by schools to their difficult budget situations and not to a concern about the quality of the service itself. In order to manage the deficit, SLS restructured and deleted 4.67 posts. Despite concerns about school budgets in 2004/05, SLS has seen a growth in buyback this year. SLS continually evaluates its services to ensure economies of scale and value for money for schools.

2.5 SLS and the Public Library Service

- Strategically managed by one Library Service Development Manager
- Shared agenda to support the needs of children, parents/carers, teachers
- Public Library funded to support the needs of individual users
- SLS funded to provide long-term loans, project and information materials for schools

2.6 The Public Library can not support the needs of schools – SLS has been set up to do this. Adverse budgetary settlements for schools impact upon SLS provision, not on that of public libraries.

2.7 Best Value Review of Traded Services 2000

This review included:-

- i) A NOP survey of Users and Non-users which included questions on school improvement and the raising of attainment. The responses to these questions are still relevant and informative.
- ii) In-depth interviews with Headteachers from subscribing and non-subscribing schools. The findings concluded that while the service was well regarded by users, many schools simply could not afford the service. Cost was identified as the second most significant factor affecting purchasing decisions.
- iii) A comparison with SLSs in other LEAs. This concluded that "it would appear that HCC's service has adopted the most comprehensive approach to service quality and development amongst the services responding to the questionnaire". The difference in operational scale was a factor which inhibited the progress of discussions about co-operation with some smaller or less well-developed SLSs.

2.8 The Review reported in July 2000 and the recommendations for SLS were:

- i. To review the way services were packaged e.g. a smaller range of core services and more promotion of Pay as you Use Services. This was implemented from April 2001.
- ii. To develop more Strategic links with SIAS. This has been done through regular meetings with key Advisers and information exchanges through each other's email lists.

- iii. To provide the service in partnership with another LEA. The Head of Schools Library Service instigated informal discussions with Heads of SLSs in four authorities who seemed likely to be interested in a joint approach, however, none of them wished to pursue a partnership.

3. Scrutiny Options

- 3.1 To note the growth in buyback this year and to request an update report be circulated to Members of both Committees in 12 months time so that Members have the option of adding it to the work programme of either or both committees at that time.
- 3.2 To establish a Topic Group (either jointly or by one of the 2 committees) to review: -
 - the factors that increased buyback
 - the options for encouraging other schools to do the same
 - whether there is any impact on educational achievement in those schools that do not buyback a service
 - the potential for partnership with another LEA.
- 3.3 To establish a joint hearing by both committees at which a more detailed report could be considered and evidence taken from Head Teachers whose schools buyback or do not buyback a Schools Library Service.
- 3.4 There are resource implications connected with all three options and Members may wish to consider how best they can add value to this service. Alternatively Members could agree there is no need for any further scrutiny.