

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE INFORMATION & ACCESS COMMITTEE 18 JULY 2000

NOTE: Full copies of the report mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Information & Access Committee and other members who have requested it. Any queries on this report to Joan Blake, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Tel: 01992 555560).

PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) consultation paper entitled "Comprehensive and Efficient - Standards for Modern Public Libraries", contained a set of proposed standards to enable the government, local authorities, staff and users to be clear about what they can expect from library services.

The Public Library Standards (PLS), which are national and statutory, will come into force on 1 April 2001 and cover such areas of service as location, opening hours, user satisfaction, etc. They will be incorporated into the Annual Library Plan and monitored as part of that process. Authorities will have a 3 year lead-in period in which to bring their services up to standard. In the meantime the government does not intend to intervene unless significant reductions in existing service are proposed.

There are 23* Public Library Standards dealing with a range of issues and aspects of library services. Some areas of service have been dealt with in great detail e.g. the reservation service, (used by approximately 3% of users) and others are not included e.g. enquiries (2 million dealt with in Hertfordshire libraries in 1999/2000). The proposed Standards are somewhat disappointing and appear to be quite retrospective, despite purporting to be for a "modern" library service. In addition, there are too many standards; fewer key standards would be more effective.

Hertfordshire does not meet two of the proposed standards - PLS 4: Opening hours per 1000 head of population and PLS 19: Funding for books per 1000 head of population. If these standards were adopted in their present form, there would be financial implications to achieve the benchmark.

The committee have agreed a response to the DCMS outlining their disappointment in the proposed standards and, in particular, the lack of attention to information services and children's services.

The standards were drafted by representatives from the DCMS, the Library Association, the Society of Chief Librarians and the Local Government Association, and the committee have strongly objected to the LGA putting its name to a document which undervalues local political choices, uses inputs as targets and focuses too much on traditional methods of staffing and service delivery.

Derrick Ashley
Chairman
County Hall
Hertford

18 July 2000

[Since this item was reported to Committee in July, a further draft standard has been published on the DCMS website which had been accidentally omitted from the consultation document. PLS 24 measures the net floor space of library buildings to which the public have direct access and is the third draft standard which, if adopted, Hertfordshire would be unable to meet.]*