

This report may be of interest to: All Members

LIBRARY SERVICE REVIEW

Accountable Officer: Vanessa Gwynn (Head of Community and Economic Development)

Authors: Vanessa Gwynn (Head of Community and Economic Development) - MK 253490

Bill Pearson (Chief Librarian)

1. Purpose

1.1 To present the findings of the consultation phase of the Library Service Review.

2. Summary

2.1 Since November, the Library Service has been undertaking a thorough-going review of service delivery.

2.2 Between November 1999 and January 2000 a series of public and staff meetings has been conducted and these are recorded in the supporting technical papers circulated with this agenda.

2.3 The overwhelming conclusion of this part of the Review is that the Council's service is extremely popular and well-used as currently delivered. This is borne out by the recent NOP survey, which recorded libraries as enjoying the second highest level of service satisfaction by the people of Milton Keynes.

2.4 Nonetheless, suggestions for continuous improvement have been made and these are documented at Item 8b, together with the current service position and proposals for responding.

2.5 A Member Seminar on "Libraries of the Future" was held on 22 March and the record of those discussions will be circulated separately (Item 8e).

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Committee is recommended to receive the issues arising from the conduct of the Review and indicate those which it would wish to have addressed as a priority.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 The Library Service transferred to the Council on re-organisation in April 1997. Since October 1998 it has been embedded in the structure of the Community and Economic Development Department, which is the Council's lead department for lifelong learning.
- 4.2 The Service is delivered under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, but levels of service are wholly discretionary. However, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport proposes to consult on the introduction of minimum standards during 2000.
- 4.3 Sixteen public meetings have been held in the branches, plus two staff meetings and an open meeting for umbrella groups and other interested parties; all Members were invited to these public meetings. CIPFA has conducted a survey of usage patterns and the activity records of all the branches have been analysed. Membership data has been mapped and a presentation made by the Chief Librarian to the Parish and Neighbourhood Consultative Assembly. A pro-forma was posted on the Council's e-mail system inviting individual or service responses (which had to be stated) and asking for Officers not on email to be alerted to the opportunity.
- 4.4 The Service currently comprises the Milton Keynes Central branch (with dedicated reference, business and family history libraries and an I.T. suite), seven further branches and a mobile service. 84(fte) staff are employed and the net budget for 2000/2001 is £2.6m after allowing for a projected income of £0.5m.

5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 A large number of individual points about service improvement have been made during the consultation (Item 8b refers), and those issues which have arisen most often are summarised below.

(a) Property-related (163 responses)

- 5.2 There is both a general and a specific aspect to this issue. On the one hand, people are concerned for the general ambience of their branch, ease of access arrangements etc. and on the other there are details around the specific location and tenure of branches. It is here that the dilemma of starting a programme of refurbishment meets the interest in providing better facilities in the flank areas, lease renewals (where Woburn Sands produced the only children's petition) and even, in Wolverton, straight relocation.

(b) Opening Hours (70 responses)

- 5.3 There is a desire to re-align the inherited pattern of opening to reflect current lifestyles. There is a particular dislike of the practice of closing for 2.5 days around the weekend. However, Members will need to look at each branch consultation record separately, as it is clear that access to the individual branch needs to sit within the community it services. So, for example, whilst there was little interest in Sunday opening in Bletchley and Stony; Newport

Pagnell, Olney and Woburn Sands seem against it; and yet everyone expected CMK branch to reflect trading hours around it.

(c) Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (41 responses)

- 5.4 This was almost entirely regarded as an irresistible force and probably one to be welcomed. Most people accepted that the Library Service was a key provider for the whole community and the only point of real contention was around the Committee's charging policy.

(d) Stock (55 responses)

- 5.5 This emerged mostly as an issue for the smaller branches and the mobile service, where people wanted greater rotation of materials. The possibility of moving reference material "on loan" as it were from CMK to the branches also surfaced several times. There was a general interest in how stock was chosen; how large purchases of stock were for school projects; and how purchases are timed alongside broadcasted programmes.

(e) Charges and Fines (21 responses)

- 5.6 Surprisingly, there was no consensual view on fees and charges, beyond a basic concern that the core library service (books) remains free.

(f) Staffing Issues (17 responses)

- 5.7 There was considerable appreciation of the knowledge and friendliness of the library staff; many people commented how busy they are, but never so much so as to be unhelpful. Outside of CMK, there was concern that staff should not be required to work Sundays. Across the whole Service, there was a recognition that staff themselves needed training to assist the public with the new I.T. facilities.

(g) Community Use and Involvement (27 Responses)

- 5.8 A consistent theme to emerge both from local Councils and the public – was the library as Community Centre. Whether it was simply the organisation of more events in the branches ("Wine & Words" evenings or adult education classes, for example) or greater community involvement in running the local branch, there is clearly a community resource here to be tapped, especially in conjunction with marketing and publicity of the facilities on offer.

(h) Marketing and Promotion (10 responses)

- 5.9 It was often apparent at the public consultation meetings, that people were unaware of new service developments or events in the library (eg "do you still do the children's story times?" was asked repeatedly). The opening times of other branches didn't appear well known, especially the Sunday hours at Westcroft. A third point was usually about signage to the individual branches given the population movement in Milton Keynes.

(i) The Mobile Library (74 responses)

- 5.10 There were 39 questionnaires completed on this aspect of service delivery, most of which were very appreciative, especially from older people. It is

perhaps not surprising then that the most frequently raised points were either about stock turnover and large print materials, or the difficulty in remembering the fortnightly stopping schedule. Younger people also wanted more choice.

(j) Issues raised by other Council Services (5 responses)

5.11 The five responses received are at Item 8b.

(k) Issues raised by CIPFA Plus Service

5.12 The Survey which was carried out during October, questioned a set sample of users at all libraries over the spread of opening times. Some of the key data is referred to below. A further set of examples are shown in the graphs included at Item 8d attached to this report.

5.13 Borrowers are allowed to take up to ten items. In response to the question 'How the many books did you take home today' it is interesting to note that in every branch, the highest percentage of customers borrowed more than 5 books, or over half the quota allowed. This reflects the annual statistics which show that 75% of the annual issues are book loans. (See Annex C, Q2, for the full chart).

5.14 When questioned as to whether particular books being sought were found, 54.6% said 'yes' and 35.5% said 'no'. (See Annex C, Q3, for the full chart).

5.15 More generally, an average of 88% of customers who visited the library without having a particular book in mind to look for, found something to borrow. Although some comments included in the analysis sheets attached to this report at Item 8b raise concerns about the range of stock at some branches, or the frequency of stock renewal, the lowest success rate was still 83.9% at the Central library.

5.16 Similarly, when questioned as to whether customers found the information they were seeking, an average of 72.8% said 'yes' and another 15.6% were partially successful.

(l) Issues Raised by Service Data Monitoring

5.17 The main issues arising here are the performance by branch in terms costs per issue/square metre. See information pack.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The geographical location of the branches was mostly raised as an issue for the flank areas of the City/Woburn Sands. The physical environment of the branches was mentioned consistently in terms of their appearance and repair; and a desire to see better access arrangements for people with disabilities/small children.

6.2 Equalities

The survey results show that 62.9% of respondents were female and 37.1% male.

The sample analysis indicates that responses were received from all the ethnic groups which are recorded in standard data analysis, including that used to indicate the ethnic make-up of the Borough.

The relatively low level of male teenagers using the Service was noted several times during the consultation meetings and this is reflected in the low percentage (2.3%) recorded for the 15 - 19 age group in survey responses (see Item 8d, Q11 for the full chart).

The questionnaire survey on the library mobile was completed overwhelmingly by people describing themselves as "living alone" or "pensioners".

6.3 Financial

The net revenue budget for the Service in 1999/2000 is £2,697,722 and will be £2,666,230 in 2000/01. There is approximately £53,000 p.a. for ongoing maintenance provision, but no approved schemes for capital refurbishment.

6.4 Legal

Provision of a Library Service is a power under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. It is expected that the DCMS will introduce minimum service standard requirements during 2000.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

There are instances of poor morale in the Service relating to the introduction of Single Status both in terms of job evaluation outcomes and the withdrawal of weekend working enhancements for senior staff.

6.6 Staff are directly affected by the general desire to change branch opening hours.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The current round of public consultation on the Library Service is now completed. Many useful specific points have been raised through the process. The most often mentioned issues are summarised at paragraph 5.

Background Papers: Milton Keynes Library Service Public Library User Survey – combined authority and Service point analysis. CIPFA. 2000.