

POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW 2009/10: SCOPE

LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME: POLICY DEVELOPMENT & REVIEW

Report of the Chief Executive

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Prosperous City; P5: Attractive and Inclusive City

CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver 'One City'.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to put forward proposals and seek agreement from Members in relation to the forthcoming policy review of Local Studies.

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The Annual Scrutiny Conference was held at the Stadium of Light on 11th June 2009 and at the Sustainable Communities breakout session a number of viable policy review proposals were formulated for discussion by Members of the committee. At its meeting on 15th June 2009 the Committee discounted a review of Local Studies as the in-depth policy review for 2009-10, however it was decided that a smaller review should be undertaken by the Committee.
- 2.2 In Sunderland the Local Studies Centre is dedicated to the collection of local information, including local and family history. Its holdings cover the old County of Durham, i.e., the land between the Tyne and the Tees, with particular emphasis on Sunderland. It contains over 10,000 books as well as other printed material, such as journals, maps, photographs, newspapers and local records. Current information is also collected to ensure an up to date stock that is relevant to all aspects of the study of Sunderland, not solely its history.
- 2.3 The Local Studies Centre is situated on the first floor of the City Library and Arts Centre. There is also a smaller Centre in the new Library in Washington, known as the Heritage Area. Previous to the library refurbishment the Local Studies had been part of the Reference section of the original Washington town centre library.
- 2.4 National Context: -
- (a) There are no statutory requirements with regard to the provision of Local Studies, although the Public Libraries & Museums Act (1964) requires local Councils to provide a local library service which is comprehensive and efficient and that is available to all who wish to use it.
- (b) There are many differing models within local authority areas, these vary in size and delivery, and recently there has been a trend to merge Local Studies collections with Archives Services.

- (c) The CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) published national guidelines for the provision of Local Studies in the late 1990's. More recently CILIP published guidelines for Local Authorities, in which the provision of Local Studies featured prominently in what makes a good Library.
- (d) The BBC 1 programme 'Who do you think you are' is a genealogy documentary series in which celebrities go on a journey to trace their family tree. Seven series have now been broadcast and the show regularly attracts an audience of more than 6 million viewers. The popularity of this, and other similar television and radio programmes have led to an increase in public interest in researching family history.
- (e) Research suggests that customers researching their family history make up between 60-70% of the visitors and enquiries to Local Studies. Other aspects of research undertaken within Local Studies include local history, the history of a house or building, information about local businesses, planning related enquiries and school or college projects undertaken by students.
- (f) The Heritage Lottery Fund and the New Opportunities Fund offer funding for innovative projects in the area of Local Studies.
- (g) Projects undertaken within Local Studies' can encompass a wide remit in terms of community participation including themes such as Sense of Place, Community Identity and Social Inclusion.

Local Context:

- (a) The growth in the popularity of local and family history has seen an increase in the demand placed on the Local Studies Centre. In 2008/09 there were 62,000 visitors to Local Studies and 13,766 enquiries were made, either in person, electronically, or by letter, many enquiries were from residents of other countries.
- (b) Funding was awarded to the City by the Heritage Lottery Fund for the "Their Past; Your Future" project. There is another proposal, currently ongoing, proposing a scheme to digitise some of the photographs within Local Studies with a view to making them available to view via the internet.
- (c) Local Studies hold a number of historically significant collections including;
 - the Washington Armstrong Collection – black and white images from the early 1960's;
 - the Lilburne Collection – a unique resource of a collection of pamphlets and posters relating to Sunderland dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries;
 - the Corder manuscripts - a unique collection of 38 complete volumes relating to local topography and family history;
 - the Sunderland Yearbook from 1904 and;
 - shipbuilding collections

- (d) The Local Studies Centre(s) in Sunderland holds an estimated;
 - 50,000 index cards;
 - 16,000 photographic images;
 - 20,000 book volumes;
 - 20,000 maps and;
 - 3,000 microfilms
- (e) The increase in demand has meant that facilities within the current Local Studies Centre are becoming increasingly crowded and the potential for any development to meet the customer demand is very limited.
- (f) There is little opportunity to display and showcase materials depicting the heritage of the City or to archive and store effectively materials that are of historical importance to the City. Examples of these are a map of the River Wear dated 1737 and an original drawing of the Wearmouth for Robert Stephenson's repairs in 1858.
- (g) Temperature and humidity is sometimes a problem and needs to be controlled effectively to ensure the correct conditions for stock and also the comfort of staff and visitors.
- (h) The limited space means that currently it is not possible to hold class visits or other learning activities.
- (i) The lighting levels are not adjustable in different areas, this can be problematic depending on the format of the materials.

4. Overall Aim of the Local Studies Review

- 4.1 To review the current service provision for Local Studies in the City, considering how to further promote local history in a joined up way, and provide a clear strategy for development in the area.

5. Proposed Terms of Reference for the Local Studies Review

- 5.1 The following Terms of Reference for the policy review are proposed:-
 - (a) To provide a national and local context to the provision of Local Studies;
 - (b) To consider the current service provision for Local Studies in the City;
 - (c) To identify and highlight the issues that may affect effective service provision;
 - (d) To explore the possibilities of developing working arrangements with other local authorities in the region.

- (e) To consider examples of best practice and innovative provision from local authorities and other key stakeholders across the country in relation to Local Studies.

6. Potential Areas of Enquiry and Sources of Evidence

6.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee can request a range of evidential and comparative information throughout the Scrutiny review.

6.2 The Scrutiny Committee can invite a variety of people, key stakeholders and interested parties to attend in order that a balanced and focused range of recommendations can be formulated. A list of potential witnesses, though not exhaustive, is included for Members information:

(a) Principal Librarian

(b) Local Studies Librarians'

(c) Service Users

6.3 The Committee will look to undertake a number of visits to both Sunderland's and neighbouring authorities local studies centres to gain a better understanding of the environment and resources available to the general public in relation to local studies.

7. Proposed Timetable of the Local Studies Review

7.2 Detailed below is the proposed timetable for the policy review to be undertaken, which may be changed at any stage:-

15 December 2009	Setting the Scene for the Review
19 January 2009	Overview of Local Studies
January/February	Conduct site visits and focus groups
16 March 2010	Consideration of Draft Report

7.3 The evidence for the review can be obtained using a variety of techniques that could include the following;

- (a) Site Visits
- (b) Desktop Research
- (c) Focus Groups.

8. Scrutiny Budget

8.1 The Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee has a delegated budget of £10,000 which can assist Members in key aspects of their policy review work. The budget allows the Committee to go on site visits, conduct surveys, commission research, call expert witnesses and hold public events as part of the ongoing evidence gathering process of the policy review. Consideration will need to be given, throughout the policy review, to any potential funding implications required to aid Members in their enquiry.

9. Community Engagement / Diversity and Equality

9.1 Community engagement plays a crucial role in the Scrutiny process and paragraph 6.2 details who the Committee could involve. However, thought will need to be given to the structure in the way that the Committee wishes to encourage those views.

9.2 In addition, equality and diversity issues have been considered in the background research for this review under the Equality Standards for Local Government. As such the views of local diversity groups will be sought throughout the inquiry where felt appropriate and time allows.

10. Recommendation

10.1 Members are recommended to discuss and agree the scope of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee's local studies review for 2009/10 as outlined in the report.

Background Papers

- Local Heritage Strategy Project
- CILIP: What Makes a Good Library Service (October 2009)

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