

**STUDY INTO THE USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SERVICES**

**Strategic Priorities**

Prosperous City

Healthy City

Learning City

Attractive and Inclusive City

**Corporate Improvement Priorities**

C101 – Delivering customer Focussed Services

C104 – Improving Partnership Working to Deliver ‘One City’

**1.0 WHY HAS THE REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?**

1.1 In February 2008 a report was presented to the Committee in response to their study into the ‘current levels of usage of public libraries in Sunderland’ during 2006. This report is to further update Members on issues raised in the recommendations made.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

2.1 The aims and objectives of the original study were to:

- Obtain an overview of national and local policy in relation to the library service
- Consider the current levels of usage and the Council’s performance against NI9: Use of Public Libraries and the MLA Library Benchmark voluntary improvement tool
- Consider the barriers to greater usage
- Consider potential means of improving usage among existing users
- Consider potential means of attracting lapsed or non users of the service
- Make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet based on the evidence received

**3.0 CURRENT POSITION**

3.1 Delivery of the library service in Sunderland

3.1.1 During 2007/2008 the library service:-

- Delivered 3,600 activities aimed at all ages with over 37,000 participants. This was an increase of 5,000 participants and 200 activities on the previous year
- Enabled over 150,000 hours of computer based activity to take place as well as delivering over 1,000 courses involving ICT. This was an increase of 20,000 hours of computer activity and 600 extra courses to the previous year
- Delivered 76,000 items to Schools across the city through the Schools Library Service
- The library service issued 1,250,188 books across the city. This was down on previous years from 1,262,922
- A total of 57,524 sound and vision items were issued. This was down from 60,004
- The service saw a 2% increase in visitors to 1,606,621, previously 1,571,349

- 14,233 new members were enrolled to the library service, an increase from the previous year of 13,353

### 3.2 Performance of the Service against National Benchmarks

- 3.2.1 A new national performance framework is being implemented in 2008/2009. This replaces the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework and Public Library Service Standards (PLSS). To support the new performance framework, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) have introduced the Library Benchmark. This is a sector led voluntary improvement tool to enable library managers to benchmark their performance against other authorities, themselves over time and the National position, in the key areas of: Satisfaction, Participation, Access, Resources, Quality and Efficiency.
- 3.2.2 2007/2008 saw improvements in a number of key performance areas including the annual items added through purchase (increase to 236 per 1,000 population from 222 in 2006/2007) with the extension of the Library Management System to all service points being reflected in improved request supply time. Increases were also seen in visitor numbers and the number of active borrowers reflecting the successful marketing and promotional campaigns that have been undertaken.
- 3.2.3 New performance frameworks are being evaluated and data collated for local, regional and national comparison, however, final results will not be available until Summer 2009. The library service is also seeking to collate data to show the impact libraries have on a number of the new outcome based indicators in Learning (*NI161: Increase the number of learners achieving level 1 qualification in literacy*), Health (*NI119: Self-reported measures of people's overall health and wellbeing*) and Attractive and Inclusive City (*NI4: Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality*).

## 4.0 MEASURES TO IMPROVE LIBRARY USAGE IN SUNDERLAND

- 4.1 The main barriers to developing and improving the use of libraries and the potential options for improvement remain the same, though some considerable work continues to be addressed to maintain and improve services. The themes are largely interrelated:
- Buildings
  - Service Delivery
  - Staffing Structure
  - Marketing
  - Use of Information Technology
  - Social Inclusion
  - Lifelong Learning
- 4.2 The library service is currently involved in improvements to public library buildings. The most recent development has seen a successful partnership at Ryhope between the Library Service, Customer Services and the Teaching Primary Care Trust (TPCT) that opened to the public in May 2008. The library has seen an increase in enquiries of 137% and membership by 421% in the first six months of opening when compared to the same period of the previous year.

A major refurbishment of Washington Town Centre Library will be completed in early Summer 2009 and will incorporate a customer service centre and links to the health centre.

The redevelopment of Silksworth Library will be completed in April 2009 as a result of a partnership with Health, Housing and Adult Services and Housing 21.

- 4.3 Though there are a number of library refurbishments across the city, some library service points are operating from buildings that are substantially older but offer the same range and quality of services. In 2008 the Centenary of Sunderland's first Carnegie Library in Hendon was celebrated, highlighting a service point that has successfully served its local community for 100 years. 2009 will see the Centenary celebrations of both Kayll Road Library and Monkwearmouth Library.
- 4.4 The Committee previously recommended that books and information continue to be attractively displayed and regular training be provided to staff with appropriate monitoring and evaluation. Sunderland Libraries were key in facilitating 'Embervision', a regional training programme enabled through SCL NE (Society of Chief Librarians North East), that sets quality standards for presentation and behaviour with innovative ideas for design, display and management of space as well as marketing and street appeal. All library staff have undertaken the training and, as part of the commitment to the regional action plan, Sunderland are committed to rolling out the practice of Embervision across all service points, and advocating the practice to other shared Council services.
- 4.5 As a result of the implementation of the Library Management System across all libraries, a more consistent delivery of services has been enabled. Customers can now borrow and return stock at any service point, renew and reserve items on line, and have electronic access to information, marketing and promotions. Summer 2009 will see the launch of further services including SMS text messaging.
- 4.6 During the last year the requirement for proof of identity has been withdrawn completely. This was aimed at encouraging more people to join the library and removing barriers to those who would not necessarily hold the specific proof of identity previously requested. The campaign was marketed across the city and resulted in a 37% increase in new members. There has been no report of increased loss of stock as a result of non- return of items. A further campaign is currently being investigated to encourage children to join the library.
- 4.7 A comprehensive review of Sound and Vision is currently underway as there is a continuous decline in usage. The review explores the current marketplace, alternative methods of delivery and investigates potential developments including music downloading. However, this would not necessarily generate any income for the service.
- 4.8 The Committee previously suggested better access could be made to services when libraries are closed. This has been suggested to a number of partners and although there has been no take up so far, this will continue to be pursued during 2009.

A review of opening hours across all services is proposed for Spring 2009. This will include consultation with users and non-users and be aligned to a review of staffing.

As a result of customer consultation the opening hours over the Christmas period were reviewed for 2008. This review saw an increase in late night opening at City Library and Art Centre before Christmas and the closure of 15 service points during the Christmas and New Year holiday period. Marketing included offering alternative options to renew, return and reserve items. Library usage from the five libraries that opened over Christmas remained low.

- 4.9 A campaign to attract lapsed users was delivered in 2008 by mailing out to customers who had not used the service in the last two years to remind them of the service and current activities available.
- 4.10 The Books on Wheels Service delivered 24,147 items. The service is delivered by the WRVS on behalf of the library service. A review is currently underway to be completed by March 2009 which will make recommendations to improve the service delivery and take-up.
- 4.11 The 2008 National Year of Reading campaign saw Sunderland libraries endorse Sunderland as a 'Reading City' by promoting and raising the profile of the library service and bringing reading to the heart of every community. A steering group of key partners from across the city was established to link into the City Council's key actions for improvement by improving the take-up of services and participation in reading and learning. During the year over 2,500 activities were programmed with over 23,000 attendees. The campaign officially concluded at the end of March 2009 and a programme of continuity is currently being addressed based on several successes and recommendations.
- 4.12 Previously the Committee recommended that users continue to be consulted in selecting stock for new libraries. This process has continued at Ryhope with members of the community and staff visiting a local book supplier to select items. This has been repeated for both Silksworth and Washington Town Centre libraries involving a cross section of the community.
- 4.13 The BME community have selected stock from lists and catalogues, with Refugees and Asylum Seekers choosing stock in their own languages supported by professional librarians. Obtaining stock that is representative of the community and developing appropriate programme to support the development of individuals is reflective of a library's community responsibilities.
- 4.14 It is planned that 2009 will see the relaunch of BoP (Books on Prescription) with a new range of titles. This project is delivered in consultation with GP practices and it aims to provide people with greater access to self help resources for those living with stress related problems, including anxiety and depression, and also supporting those dealing with substance misuse.
- 4.15 In Sunderland all public libraries provide free internet access with over 215 public terminals available. It was evident during the Committee's last visit that computers are extremely popular and well used by all members of the community. The recent E-PLUS (Electronic Public Library User Survey) reveals that library computers are mainly utilised to access Email (51.4%), Information (44%), Education (24%), Job Hunting (22%) and Social Networking (10%). Library Staff offer support and advice to enable users to access and use PC's appropriately.

The library service works in partnership with UKOnline to deliver access and confidence building in community ICT and is actively working with the Digital

Challenge programme to support enhanced digital service delivery. The mobile LIAZe unit (Library & Information Access Zone) that ultimately supports customer service delivery takes the service to hard to reach groups in the heart of local communities.

- 4.16 A recent Government initiative, Boys into Books, has increased the library stock by 4,000 volumes. Sunderland Libraries are supporting this initiative by arranging class visits and encouraging visits with specific activities around reading and fitness. Programmes include Nintendo Wii sessions on Fitness, Sport and the Olympics promote linked book stock, healthy living and aim at encouraging more boys to read.
- 4.17 Libraries have also been involved in Adult Learners Week, Heritage Open Days, Houghton Literature Festival and Sunderland University Freshers Fayre to recruit new members, market and promote services and activities and provide information and support as requested.
- 4.18 The Community Health Officer (CHO) successfully secured funding through the BBC Headroom project to deliver a programme of appropriate activity to clients with mental health problems. The funding was time limited but the group continue to meet in Hendon library and are supported by library staff. The CHO also played an integral role in the Northern Way Worklessness programme, working with substance misuse clients.
- 4.19 Sunderland libraries have a contract to deliver Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to support people in choices of learning and work with 10 library staff currently qualified to deliver at different sites. A recent study by Museums, Libraries and Archives North East (MLA NE), found that libraries are the preferred place to provide IAG services to target groups as they offer a comfortable, non-threatening environment with knowledgeable staff. It is the intention to train more staff to become qualified to deliver IAG to ensure that the offer is available across the whole service, though this would be dependent on the availability of funding.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 Historically libraries were established to provide equality of access to books and information for self- improvement and to provide an area for social debate and activity. Today, the original aim remains the same but the mechanisms and resources through which people obtain information continue to develop. Programme is becoming increasingly important to ensure the requirements and expectations of a diverse audience are met and supported within an environment that they feel comfortable with.
- 5.2 The importance of books and reading is still vital today and is a core role of Public Libraries. There is a need to focus on a much wider range of library activity, respond to the needs of individuals, groups and community needs and the diversity of user groups.
- 5.3 The library service also has an increasing role to play in contributing to the broader objectives of the Council including social inclusion, lifelong learning and self improvement to support communities to become socially active and confident. The development of the library service needs to continue to be linked with these wider policy objectives.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report and receive further updates as seen appropriate.

## **7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 A range of statistical information was used to compile this report.

## **8.0 GLOSSARY**

MLA	-	Museums, Libraries and Archives
MLA NE	-	Museums, Libraries and Archives North East
CPA	-	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
PLSS	-	Public Library Service Standards
LAA	-	Local Area Agreements
TPCT	-	Teaching Primary Care Trust
SCL NE	-	Society of Chief Librarians North East
BME	-	Black and Minority Ethnic Persons
BoP	-	Books on Prescription
CHO	-	Community Health Officer
IAG	-	Information, Advice and Guidance
CIPFA	-	Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy

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Contact Officer: Chris Alexander, Head of Culture and Tourism,  
0191 5618420  
[Chris.Alexander@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:Chris.Alexander@sunderland.gov.uk)