

PUBLIC LIBRARY AUTHORITIES CONFERENCE 2008

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SERVICES

Strategic Priorities

Learning City: Improving the take-up of services and participation in reading and library activities to improve literacy levels

Corporate Improvement Objectives

C101: Delivering Customer Focused Services

1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE COMMITTEE?

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update regarding this years Public Library Authorities (PLA) Conference.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The PLA Conference is an annual event for both Members and Officers. This year's conference was held in Liverpool from 8 October 2008 - 10 October 2008.
- 2.2. The theme of the conference was 'Culture Connects', reflecting three broad themes - Inspiring Creativity, Changing Lives and Connecting People.

3.0 CONFERENCE CONTENT

3.1. Day One

The conference was welcomed to Liverpool during it's year as European Capital of Culture. The theme for the first day 'Inspiring Creativity' was explored through a number of presentations.

- 3.1.1. The first presentation 'The Local Authority Cultural Offer' discussed the positioning of Libraries and culture within the strategic aims and objectives of a local authority. It highlighted the period of change being faced by all local authority services and emphasised the need to promote and demonstrate the contribution that the services offered by libraries make to the wider local authority agenda.
- 3.1.2. The second presentation concentrated on the implementation of the commitments to young people set out in the 'Aiming High' initiative, a ten-year strategy for positive activities. The speaker emphasised the role of libraries in the development of opportunities for young people. The theme was then showcased by young people from Manchester and Liverpool who spoke about their experiences in working with librarians to develop the library services delivered to young people in their communities.

This is an area which Sunderland Public Libraries have already developed, holding consultation activities with young people to inform programme and stock development at Bunnyhill Library. A similar project with young people has recently

commenced in Washington to inform library service provision at the refurbished Washington Town Centre Library and Customer Service Centre.

- 3.1.3. The afternoon consisted of workshops exploring a variety of themes. Reading and Performance Management identified the challenges that the changes to the national performance framework have presented to library authorities. The workshop looked at the range of evidence libraries can provide to support chosen indicators and highlighted the need for libraries to demonstrate the contribution made to corporate strategic objectives. This was also highlighted in a second workshop facilitated by Nottingham City Council who delivered a practical session discussing community consultation and their experience of partnership working with local communities in order to develop service delivery at a local level.

Sunderland Public Libraries are also examining these areas seeking to support wider agendas and performance measures particularly through its learning, children and young people and health information programmes.

3.2. Day Two

The theme for the second day was 'Changing Lives'. This was explored through a range of presentations, a Ministerial Address and a selection of library visits. The morning session also included a celebration of National Poetry Day with a performance from Rosie Lugosi, a vampire poet which heralded the start of the Liverpool Poetry Marathon.

- 3.2.1. The first presentation highlighted private sector partnerships and the benefits they can bring to libraries including vibrancy, fresh thinking and new readers. This was demonstrated by the Reading Agency who have worked with a number of commercial partners with the aim of 'getting people to read more'. Leeds City Libraries gave an overview of some of the practical promotions they have delivered. These have included a 'Girls Night In', an International 'Eurocrime' event and partnership working with Yorkshire Bank and Borders, all of which have attracted new readers.
- 3.2.2. This was followed by a presentation from The Reader Organisation and Wirral Libraries. A partnership project between the Agency, libraries and the local Primary Care Trust has highlighted the power of literature to increase well-being through the development of 'Get into Reading Groups' for vulnerable individuals. Libraries offer community space, resources and trained staff to facilitate and support groups. The further role of reading groups in supporting individuals and communities was emphasised with short presentations from a member of an Asylum Seeker Group in Liverpool, a member of a Wirral 'Get into Reading Group' and two library staff who support and facilitate reading groups in their local communities.

Sunderland works in partnership with a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations to deliver a wide range of reading activities, which during National Year of Reading 2008 have included author and illustrator visits, the Sunderland Reading Festival and the Northern Children's Book Festival. Library staff also support a range of Reading and Study Support Groups who meet both in libraries and community venues.

3.2.3. The key speech of the day delivered by the Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport saw the launch of the DCMS (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) Library Service Modernisation Review. The review will seek to define the Government's vision for a modern, world-class public library service and set out some of the necessary steps to achieve this vision. It will build on both Framework for the Future and A Passion for Excellence to support local government with the improvement of cultural services.

Sunderland Public Libraries have been asked to engage with the modernisation review. Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism (Libraries, Heritage and Events), has been asked to participate in the 'Skilled and Responsive Workforce' work stream. Sunderland will also seek to respond to and share appropriate consultation.

3.2.4. The theme of reading in partnership was further developed in the next presentation with the Bristol Great Reading Adventure. This innovative project aimed at encouraging reading through a citywide title has seen over 100,000 people reading The Bristol Story in 2008. The project has developed over the past six years and continues to expand with support from other regions and now has a target of over 150,000 readers for 2009.

3.2.5. Acknowledging the role that technology now plays in reading the final presentation of the morning looked at the future of ebooks. Whilst ebooks have had a relatively small presence for a number of years the introduction to the UK of the Sony Reader and experience of the Amazon Kindle in the US suggests the arrival of the first significant general ebook market. These new markets offer both opportunities and challenges for publishers and library services.

3.2.6. During the lunch break a CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) briefing was held by Lyn Brown MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Libraries and Literacy. This saw the launch of an APPG Inquiry into the governance and leadership of public libraries in England.

3.2.7. The afternoon session offered a choice of visits to a range of libraries in Liverpool and Manchester, which included both traditional and newly developed services. The visits included:-

- i) North City and East City Libraries, Manchester
- ii) Liverpool Central Library
- iii) Parklands and Sefton Park Communities Libraries, Liverpool
- iv) Liverpool John Moores University Learning Resource Centre and the University of Liverpool Sydney Jones University Library.

3.3. Day Three

3.3.1. The final morning concentrated on looking forward through 'Connecting People'. The initial sessions including a speaker from Cisco looking at communication and collaboration and the challenges of meeting new demands from users. This was further developed with an insight into some of the new web accessible services being developed by Microsoft. The developing role technology plays in the lives of young people was highlighted in a presentation by a student from the Liverpool Blue Coat School who articulated both her positive and negative experiences of libraries.

3.3.2. The digital theme was further explored with presentations from the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) exploring the role of libraries in facilitating, signposting and connecting learners and East Renfrewshire Libraries highlighting their use of Facebook to promote services. The final presentation from MLA brought together the digital themes looking at potential digital projects relating to library connectivity and e-services. All speakers examined how digital developments could be used to support both traditional and new service delivery and their role in potentially attracting new audiences, but discussions also highlighted that these developments offer both opportunities and challenges to library services.

Sunderland Public Libraries are currently reviewing digital developments and seeking opportunities to enhance service delivery in libraries. To date this has included the introduction of online services including renewals and reservations and access to a range of free subscription web services supporting information provision, genealogy research and study support. Areas under investigation include e-books, the use of Web 2.0 technologies, the provision of Health Information Points and the potential of digital television. The latter two areas being examined in partnership with the Digital Challenge Programme.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1. The conference was both informative and thought provoking. It highlighted a wide range of current good practice and identified a number of the challenges which are currently faced by libraries and cultural services. Speakers and discussions looked at how these can be addressed by the use of innovation and partnership working, and how library services can learn from examples which have already been developed and delivered. In summary the key points which emerged were around:-

- Positioning the library service within the local authority, ensuring that colleagues and partners are fully briefed about the value the library service can bring to their services and targets.
- Partnership - how partnership working is now critical to the delivery of services but can bring rewards and funding to support innovative developments.
- Digital developments - how digital developments can and should be harnessed by libraries to support community engagement and future developments.
- Library Modernisation - the need for library services and local authorities to be engaged with and inform both the DCMS Library Service Modernisation Review and the APPG Inquiry into the governance and leadership of public libraries in England

4.2. Next year's conference will be held at the Thistle Hotel, Bristol from 7 October 2009 - 9 October 2009.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Members are requested to note the report for information.

6.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 No background papers used.