

At a meeting of the CULTURE AND LEISURE REVIEW COMMITTEE held in the CITY LIBRARY AND ARTS CENTRE on TUESDAY, 18TH JULY, 2006 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor J.B. Scott in the Chair

Councillors Bohill, Foster, P. Gibson, Mann, L. Walton and Wares

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Ambrose, Grey, Sidaway and P. Walker.

Minutes of the last meeting

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 20th June, 2006 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (Including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Library Management System Migration Project

The Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated Members on the Library Management System Migration Project.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jane Hall, Assistant Head of Culture and Tourism, welcomed the Committee to the City Library and Arts Centre and advised that members of staff would be available at the end of the meeting to show the Committee round the facilities should they require.

In addition to the report, Ms. Hall circulated a schedule detailing Sunderland's compliance with the Public Library Service Standards 2005-06 which would be the subject of a full report to the Committee at its September meeting.

Ms. Hall presented the report and informed Members that following an intense period of testing and training the new library management system was launched to the public at 11 service points on 14th February, 2006 and at the Bunny Hill Library upon its opening on 12th June, 2006. It was currently planned that the system would be added to all public service points by September 2006.

Ms. Hall then introduced Julie McCann, Principal Librarian, E Resources and Information Services, who provided Members with a presentation which demonstrated the versatility of the on line management system in searching the library catalogue and also the operation of a specimen user account.

Councillor Gibson referred to the ability to renew library books on line via a user account and asked if the service would still be available if someone had subsequently reserved a book in your possession. Ms. McCann advised that in such cases you would not be able to renew the book.

Councillor Mann welcomed the system as excellent and asked how it would tie in with the mobile libraries. Ms. McCann advised that the service could be provided off line using laptops in the mobile libraries. The information would then be downloaded from the laptops onto the on line system at Doxford Park Library. The Directorate was looking to provide the service on line from the mobiles, perhaps via wireless technology, and discussions were on going with the ICT Unit regarding this.

Councillor Bohill welcomed the glossary attached to the report which he had found extremely useful as a new Member of the Committee. He referred to the loan of CDs and asked if they could be renewed on line given that a charge was made to hire them. Ms. McCann replied that they could not be renewed on line given the charging arrangements, however they could be placed on hold until the charges had been paid.

Councillor Wares stated that the new system was to be applauded and would be a particular boon to disabled people. In this regard he enquired how an item reserved by a disabled person would be despatched? Ms. Hall replied that generally this would be done via the books on wheels service. Ideally the Directorate would like to provide a 24 hour delivery service and would need to investigate this in the future.

The Chairman referred to the schedule of Public Library Service standards and stated that the new management system should assist Sunderland in reaching its targets.

Councillor Wares stated that the Council often received criticism over its library opening hours however it was pleasing to note that Sunderland had exceeded the national standard in respect of aggregate opening hours.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Remit and Scope of Study Into the Usage of Public Libraries

The City Solicitor and Director of Community and Cultural Services submitted a joint report (copy circulated) which set out the remit and scope of the Review Committee's study into the usage of public libraries, sought to establish a draft programme and outlined the various techniques and methods of evidence gathering.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jim Diamond, Review Co-ordinator, presented the report highlighting the key objectives of the study, proposed methods of evidence gathering and likely participants.

Councillor Wares referred to the development of a new People First Centre in Ryhope which was to include a library. He believed such buildings should be classed as being for all occasions and not just seen as libraries. He suggested that the provision of small media centres could encourage young people to visit libraries and be used to promote the facilities on offer.

With regard to the methodology for the study, Councillor Gibson suggested that before the Committee began taking evidence from witnesses, it should go and see 'the good, the bad and the ugly' in terms of Sunderland's library service. He referred to Silksworth library having been established 30 years ago as a temporary structure and yet was still operational.

Councillor Mann suggested that the visit should include the City's latest library at the Bunny Hill Centre.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Bohill, Ms. Hall confirmed that library visits were arranged for schools. In addition there were also homework clubs, reading clubs and a whole range of outreach activities. There were 3 key areas underpinning library provision (services, staff and space). Public libraries should be seen as public places, community spaces. It was difficult to establish hard evidence as to why people didn't use libraries, however image was definitely a factor. It was important that the Committee's study did not focus only on issues of quantity, as quality was equally if not more important.

3. RESOLVED that the remit, objectives and methods of undertaking the study into the usage of public libraries, as detailed in the report with addition of Members' comments, be approved.

The Chairman then thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) J.B. SCOTT,
Chairman.