

NOTES of a Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee's Informal Member Group on the Libraries and Archives Unit Business Plan held on Monday, 19 November 2007.

PRESENT: Dr M R Eddy (Chairman) and Mr D S Daley.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services; Ms Cath Anley, Head of Libraries; and Mrs Diane Chilmaid, Business Support Manager, Libraries and Archives Unit.

OFFICER: Mr S C Ballard, Head of Democratic Services.

1. Libraries and Archives Unit Business Plan 2007/08

Terms of Reference

- (1) The Informal Member Group had been established by Cabinet Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 23 May 2007 to examine the Libraries and Archives Unit Business Plan for 2007/08.

Core Services and Forecast Activity Levels (pages 9-11 of Business Plan)

- Libraries

- (2) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley confirmed that, since the Business Plan had been written, two libraries had closed leaving a total of 104. There had been no change in – and there were no plans to change – the number of mobile libraries (11).
- (3) Mr Hill explained that it had not been possible to forecast any library closures at the time that the Business Plan had been written. It was true that some libraries had been causing concern at that time but no decisions had been taken on how to resolve those concerns. While closure was an option, there were also other options available such as revitalising the existing library, or making some alternative provision.

- Museums

- (4) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley said that KCC only directly operated the museums at Folkestone and Sevenoaks, although Folkestone was likely to be removed from the register and so visits to it no longer counted towards BVPI 170. The largest element of KCC's museum funding was grant aid to the Museum of Kent Life (MKL) and the continued high level of grant required was causing concern. Mr Daley declared a personal interest as a Trustee of MKL. Mr Hill and Ms Anley confirmed that discussions were taking place with MKL to look at ways of putting it on a more sustainable financial footing.
- (5) Ms Anley added that the Library and Archives Unit also had a role in providing advice to other museums in Kent and, as part of this, hosted the

Projects, Developments, Key Actions

- Modernising Library Premises (pages 1 and 12)
 - (6) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley explained that the list of libraries to be modernised was changing all the time to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. For example, Margate Library would re-open in January 2008 in new premises shared with Thanet District Council and a Gateway. At Tenterden, there was a new proposal to relocate the library in the existing Post Office building as a shared facility with the Post Office, Ashford Borough Council and a Gateway. At Snodland, there was the potential to swap premises with a nearby shop.
 - (7) Thirteen libraries were planned to be modernised before 2010 (in accordance with Towards 2010 Target 26), and 4 of these were expected to be completed during 2007/08, Ms Anley agreed to supply a full list to Dr Eddy and Mr Daley. **(Action: Cath Anley)**
- Kent History Centre Development (pages 5 and 15)
 - (8) In answer to questions from Dr Eddy and Mr Daley, Mr Hill agreed that it was vital to develop a new Kent History Centre within the next 5 years in order to avoid the loss of KCC's accreditation. He explained that negotiations were currently taking place with a number of developers to provide a new central library and Kent History Centre somewhere in Maidstone. The value of the existing library site at Springfield would be used as a contribution towards the cost and a bid was also being made for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Library Opening Hours (page 13)
 - (9) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley said that increased opening hours had proved popular with the public and, while there were no plans to cut them back, resources were not available to allow any further significant extension. However, the new opening hours were being reviewed and this might result in minor modifications to the opening hours of some libraries to better match public demand.
- Implementation of Revised Staffing Structure (page 14)
 - (10) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley confirmed that the revised staffing structure had taken effect on 1 September 2007. Within this structure, the three Strategic Managers each had a specific role (previously these posts had been generic), one on modernisation; one on innovation; and the other on projects (mainly relating to buildings and equipment). Mrs Chilmaid explained her role as Business Support Manager. Ms Anley said that there had been no customer feedback so far on the revised staffing structure but that was good news, because the changes were designed to

be unnoticed by customers. A review of the new structure to check how it was working was planned for 2008/09.

Income Generation (page 5)

- (11) Ms Anley explained that the bulk of external income shown in the Unit's budget (page 7) came from contracts with Medway Council (for the Open Access service) and the Home Office (for the Prison Library Service).
- (12) In answer to a question from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley said that the joint project with MLA South East to investigate new ways of generating income had now made its recommendations and these were being followed up. Mrs Chilmaid reported that the loan period had been extended and charges for DVD loans had been reduced because this was seen as a way of increasing income from this source overall. Merchandising was being increased, learning lessons from Brighton and Hove City Council, and the possibilities of selling copies of old maps, photos, etc held by Archives, and of marketing spoken word and classical music downloads, were being investigated.

Setting Priorities

- (13) In answer to questions from Dr Eddy, Ms Anley explained that most of the Unit's budget was taken up with relatively fixed costs, such as premises, staff, IS, etc, and so only a small proportion was available for alignment specifically with non-financial targets. Of this, the Book Fund was the biggest element and this was reviewed regularly.
- (14) Revitalising stock at newly-modernised libraries was seen as contributing to meeting Towards 2010 Target 26 ("Modernise the library service to act as a focal point for KCC services and widen access to Kent's rich culture"). However, this target was not exclusively about the library service and encouraged the Unit to work with partners – both internal and external – to contribute towards other Towards 2010 Targets such as those on health and the environment. In addition, the Unit had a part to play in contributing to targets in other documents, such as the Early Years target in the Local Area Agreement.
- (15) A senior management Improvement Planning Team looked at the possible contributions which the Unit could make to wider KCC targets (as well as the Unit's own targets) and the budget available, and made recommendations on priorities to the Management Team.

Performance Against Forecast/Targets/Performance Indicators (pages 9-11 and 26)

- (16) In answer to questions from Dr Eddy, Mrs Chilmaid said that the Unit's budget was on target to balance at the end of the year and that book and audio-visual material issues were on target. Physical visits to libraries were declining but, as from this year, virtual visits could also be included, and the figure for physical and virtual visits combined was up so far this year. Ms Anley agreed to provide half-yearly performance figures where these were available. **(Action: Cath Anley)**
- (17) On museums, Mrs Chilmaid explained that the 2007/08 targets had been altered after the Business Plan had been written. The target for BVPI 170(a) (number of

visits/use made per 1,000 population) was now 117 and the current forecast was for this target to be exceeded. The target for BVPI 170(b) (number of visits in person per 1,000 population) was now 99 and the current forecast was for this target to be exceeded. The target for BVPI 170(c) (number of pupils visiting in organised school groups) was now 9,400. The current forecast was slightly below target but it was still hoped to achieve the target by the year-end.

Conclusions

(18) The IMG:-

- (a) thanked Mr Hill, Ms Anley and Mrs Chilmaid for providing information about the Unit's progress against its Business Plan, and looked forward to receiving the half-yearly performance figures (where these were available) from Ms Anley in due course;
- (b) noted with pleasure the increase in book issues and the big increase in the percentage of users who found the book they wanted;
- (c) noted the action being taken to deal with the following problems:-
 - (i) need to develop a new Archives facility within the next 5 years;
 - (ii) financial sustainability of the Museum of Kent Life.