

Cabinet

24 May 2007

7. IMPLEMENTING THE LIBRARIES REVIEW

Recommendation

1. The Director of Adult and Community Services recommends that the Cabinet:-

- (a) notes the contents of the Libraries Review and the implementation of the staffing re-structure; and**
- (b) approves consultation on the following recommendations from the Review:**
 - re-provisioning of certain libraries**
 - restructuring of mobile routes**
 - formation of neighbourhood consultation panels (linked in to Local Strategic Plan consultation mechanisms)**
 - consideration of charges for Internet use.**

Background Information

2. The Library and Information Service (Library Service) is part of Cultural Services and provides a facility to people across the County, through a combination of static libraries, mobile and prison libraries. The Library Service operates with a budget of £7.3 million which incorporates an initial assessment of potential cost reductions.

3. In 2005, Cultural Services moved from Corporate Services to form part of the new Adult and Community Services Directorate. This move brought significant opportunities for developing the Library Service's role in the community. To consider the best way to fulfil this role, an external review was commissioned from Kentwood Associates using invest-to-save funds and following the Council's procurement procedures. The consultants came with a background in Libraries and successful experience of transforming library services in Britain and internationally. They were set a challenging target of identifying service improvements as well as identifying a minimum of £250,000 of efficiencies.

4. It should be noted that the procurement of book stock and the Schools Library Service were deliberately excluded from the scope of this review because a separate project is underway to improve book stock procurement processes.

The Process of the Review

5. The Review commenced in November 2006 and was completed in February 2007. During the consultation stage, Kentwood Associates spoke to members of the public, 63% of the staff in the Library Service, Councillors, service managers in Cultural Services and external partner organisations.

6. Kentwood Associates found a library service in Worcestershire that fulfils the Government's objectives for public libraries and makes an important contribution to most of the Council's core objectives. However, Kentwood also found that the library service needed to change by focusing on key groups and being clear about its vision in order to meet the challenges it faces now and in the future.

7. The Report has been well received in Adult and Community Services. It proposes significant service improvements and manages to exceed the efficiencies target the consultants were set. The Report has been circulated to Cabinet members and copies are available in the Member Support Unit, on the Council's website and at County Hall Reception.

Main Recommendations of the Report

8. To deliver service improvements and achieve efficiencies, the Report makes the following principal recommendations:

Vision and Priorities

(a) The report sets out a vision of the future public library service. It recommends a service that:

- Exists to encourage reading and to support learning
- Provides access to information
- Offers a gateway to knowledge
- Enables the development of digital skills.

The report says that the Library service currently tries to be everything to everyone. It will gain best effect if it instead prioritises four key groups:

- People from disadvantaged groups
- Older people
- Children and their parents
- Young people.

Cohesive Structures

(b) A particular relationship is envisaged with the Council's Lifelong Learning Service. It is recommended that Libraries and Learning services are merged under a new Libraries and Learning Manager and that staffing structures are improved throughout the service and made less hierarchical. This will produce a more cohesive structure with a:

- reduction in layers of management throughout the service (reduction from 9 to 5 structural layers in staffing)
- reduction of administration within libraries
- conversion of some vacant librarian posts to library assistant posts
- staff savings following the introduction of self-service terminals (Following success at Malvern and Bromsgrove, the Report recommends that the Library Service should move away from traditional 'issue desks' and towards self-service terminals. The self-service terminals in Malvern have seen the highest usage of these machines anywhere in the country).

The total efficiencies from the staffing changes should be £256,000 per annum.

Community Engagement

(c) Libraries have a very positive role to play in their local communities. The Report recommends that the Service, where practicable and where opportunities arise, should co-locate with other services and voluntary agencies. The Report makes particular reference to the potential for re-provisioning of three libraries - Cofton Hackett, Catshill and Woodrow - and recommends that the Council works with local communities to identify alternative means of service provision. It is further recommended that a cost-benefit analysis is undertaken to assess the suitability of relocation opportunities in Warndon, particularly taking the Fairfield Centre into consideration.

(d) The Library Service should restructure the mobile service and aim to provide a more efficient service; reducing the fleet from five to four (or potentially three) vehicles. This move should have particular regard to community involvement (It should be noted that the mobile service is separate to the Readers at Home service for those with a long term illness or disability).

The total efficiencies from the mobile changes should be as much as £54,000 per annum.

(e) Similarly, opening hours of libraries should be based on community consultation to identify local needs and should not be subject to a standard pattern. This consultation should be carried out during branch by branch reviews of libraries, following the management restructure.

(f) To increase community commitment and involvement in libraries, the creation of neighbourhood consultation panels is recommended. Membership would be drawn from local community and voluntary groups by invitation, representing

the whole community and not just one group of users. It is recommended that the panels should reflect library catchment areas and cover the whole Library service across the County. The aim of the panels is to progress more active community involvement in local libraries. Kentwood recommend an initial pilot to test out the role that might be played by these panels, a role that would build on the existing focus groups and surveys/questionnaires used to establish satisfaction levels. The formation and role of these panels would need to be closely linked to the mechanisms within the Community Strategy and Local Strategic Plans and the role of Members within that process.

Other Factors

(g) Further savings should be made through reduction of the Miscellaneous budget and opportunities for increasing income should be considered, including the possibility of charging for Internet usage and borrowing of music sets. Consultation with communities will be an important part of progressing changes. Charging for Internet usage is increasingly common amongst library services nationally and takes the form of an initial free period (typically 30 minutes) followed by a chargeable period.

The total efficiencies from these changes should be up to £150,000 per annum.

(h) The Report includes further long-term recommendations, including development of a virtual library, maintaining the programme of library refurbishment, and consideration of new technologies for improving access to services, all with the customer at the core of the service.

9. With the recommendations above, Kentwood Associates were able to exceed their target and identify potential cost efficiencies and income improvements of up to £460,000 per annum together with significant improvements in service without recommending any branch closures.

10. The Recommendations made by Kentwood Associates set a clear, positive vision for the future direction of Libraries and Learning in Worcestershire. The recommendations separate into staffing changes and service delivery changes.

11. The Directorate is currently implementing the staffing structure changes through an internal Review Project Team who have briefed managers and Unison about the main findings. Staff briefings and a Member seminar, on the 17 May, will have been held by the time the Cabinet meets on 24 May. Ongoing communication with staff is planned via a monthly newsletter and electronic messaging system. The senior management levels will be in place by the end of June 2007, with further manager levels being implemented by October 2007 and a full branch by branch review

Next Steps

completed by December 2007. This will see efficiencies being released.

12. With the Cabinet's approval, the Directorate would wish to consult with the public and Councillors over the Summer months on the recommendations for changes to service delivery, and in order to deliver a library service fit to meet the challenges of now and the future:

- (a) Re-provisioning of certain libraries
- (b) Restructuring of mobile routes
- (c) Formation of neighbourhood consultation panels (linked in to Local Strategic Plan consultation mechanisms)
- (d) Consideration of charges for Internet use.

The results of the consultation will then be brought back to the Cabinet in Autumn 2007 for decisions to be taken.

Supporting Information

- Review of the Library Service by Kentwood Associates, February 2007 (Copies previously circulated to Cabinet members only and copies available in the Member Support Unit, on the Council's website and at County Hall Reception)
- Appendix – Illustrative Structure Option – proposed by Kentwood and under development within ACS, February 2007

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

Worcester (01905) 763763, Kidderminster (01562) 822511 or Minicom: Worcester (01905) 766399

Specific Contact Points

Jennie Bashforth, Director, Adult and Community Services
Email: jbashforth@worcestershire.gov.uk

Debbie Birch, Acting Head of Cultural Services
Email: dbirch@worcestershire.gov.uk

Michael Howard, Strategic Procurement Manager
Email: mhoward@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Adult and Community Services) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.