

# Best Value Review Library Services, Arts & Cultural Strategy

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A Report by the Audit & Best  
Value Scrutiny Committee

Project Board:

Cllr J Birch (chair)  
Cllr R Martin  
Cllr R Stevens  
Cllr J Waite

May 2002



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Audit & Best Value Scrutiny Committee established this Best Value Review of Library Services, Arts, & Cultural Strategy on 30 July 2001. The Project Board comprises Councillor Jeremy Birch (Chairman), Councillor Roy Martin, Councillor Richard Stevens and Councillor Joy Waite. Scrutiny Lead Officer was Larry Mansbridge. Project Manager was John Hicks, consultant. Project Officer was Roland Kirby, consultant. Scrutiny support was provided by Sam White.

There are four separate reviews within the remit of the Project Board. They are the Public Library Service (part 1), Schools Library Service (part 2), Support for the Arts (part 3) and the Art & Museum Service for Schools (part 4). The first three of these comprise Library, Information & Arts within the Directorate of Legal & Community Services. The Art & Museum Service for Schools is part of the School Improvement Service in the Education Department.

The Project Initiation Document for the review is attached as appendix 1 and was approved by the Project Board on 23 October.

Each review has adhered to Best Value principles. They have challenged why and how the Council provides the services; compared its performance with others; consulted with users and the wider community; and tried to identify possible competitors. Each report is divided into those four areas setting out the results of the Board's investigations. Each report concludes with recommendations for improving the service and an action plan.

# Part 1

# Best Value Review

# The Public Library

# Service

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Project Board:

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## **PART 1**

### **BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE**

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## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 Surveys indicate that the public library service is a very popular County Council service. Unlike most services provided by Education and Social Services, use of the public library service is voluntary. Over 35% of residents regularly borrow books or other items. Surveys and spot checks indicate the reference and information services are additionally used by others who have not registered as borrowers. Taking these two groups together, the service is used, regularly or occasionally, by some 65% of the population. No other directly provided Council service has this level of face-to-face access between staff and the people of East Sussex.

### **1.2 We have found the public library service to be good at:**

- Setting objectives and targets linked to County Council and Government priorities
- Managing within budget provision
- Building partnerships with local groups and organisations
- Working in co-operation with outside agencies and other Local Authorities
- Raising income from external sources for local projects
- Achieving high satisfaction levels from users regarding staff helpfulness
- Achieving high satisfaction levels from users regarding staff knowledge
- Organising outreach and reader development activities
- Raising income through the library service
- Making ICT services available to the public
- Providing audio-visual services

### **1.3 We have found action is needed regarding:**

- A service specification and development strategy endorsed by Council
- Reviewing the roles of managers and levels of decision making
- The allocation of staff across the county
- Increasing the book stock
- Reviewing and improving opening hours
- Services to housebound and disabled people
- Marketing services
- Staff morale and internal communications
- Regular consultation with users, lapsed and non-users
- Management information
- Additional benchmarking of its services against those of other Local Authorities

### **1.4 These comments should be viewed in the context of:**

- Recent changes in the budget
- Frozen posts at senior level
- Low numbers of professionally qualified staff
- Small training budget
- Below standard opening hours of libraries



- Low book fund
- Need to replace some major buildings, particularly in Lewes and Hastings

## 1.5 CONCLUSION

- 1.5.1 The public library service faces significant challenges. The Government has set out the priorities for the service as being to support education, to provide information and to assist in implementing the modernising agenda. There are new standards for service provision and performance imposed by the Government. These have budget implications. In addition, it is clear there is a growing expectation amongst the public as to what the service will provide and when it will be available to them. To these issues must be added the increasing use of computer based systems which are changing and developing the way libraries operate.
- 1.5.2 The public library service in East Sussex has many strengths and achievements to its credit. It also has some weaknesses, some of which can be rectified more easily than others. Much is expected of it by the public, the Council and external bodies. The service is unable to meet all these expectations and as a result, whilst they remain dedicated to the service, staff at all levels in the organisation feel frustrated and undervalued. The extent to which the staff are cynical about the Council's intentions for the public library service is significant and contributes to its low morale.
- 1.5.3 There are many reasons for low morale. Staff perception of communications with management is one but other factors have made a major contribution, not least the lack of resources that the service has at its disposal. Of equal importance is the attitude and action of the Council that needs more effectively to demonstrate its commitment to public library service. This is not simply a matter of funding. A closer engagement by Councillors with the staff who deliver the service and the public who use it would be beneficial.
- 1.5.4 *The 2001/2002 Reconciling Policy and Resources initiative affecting the public library service combined 'cost savings and 'efficiency gains' to achieve a reduction of £385,000 in the Library Service budget of 5million. The 'efficiency gains' were made as part of the County Council's overall best value process. They were aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. The total amount set against the heading of 'efficiency gains', as opposed to 'cost savings' has been identified as £156,000. This means that through the Reconciling Policy and Resources initiative 3.1% best value efficiency gains have been made to the service for next year 2002/2003.*
- 1.5.5 *In light of this the project board has concentrated on improving managerial and service efficiency knowing that financial efficiency savings over and above the required 2% have been made.*

## **1.6 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL:**

### **1. Service specification:**

*A service specification covering all aspects of the public library service should be compiled by the Director of L & CS at the end of the process of reconciling policy and resources for 2003/2004. Following this, staffing levels and opening hours should be reviewed to ensure the most effective spread of resources and reported to Cabinet by April 2003. (Para. 2.1.)*

### **2. Capital development:**

*Means whereby Hastings Library can be replaced should be given a high priority and external and other funding sources pursued to allow its replacement. (Para. 2.6.1.)*

### **3. Budget:**

*The programme of investment in the book stock, begun in the budget for 2002/03, should be continued until such a time that allows the council to achieve the national library standard. (Para. 2.7.1.)*

### **4. Public Library Standards:**

The offer by the Chief Library Adviser at DCMS to meet a delegation from the Council to discuss how the Library Standards can be met should be accepted and a report on the outcome submitted to Council by December 2002. (Para. 2.7.1.)

### **5. Council structure:**

The case for the library service to continue to be in Legal & Community Services is not proven. There should be a more widespread review of the Council's structure before any long term decision is taken regarding the position of the public library service. (Para. 2.8.1.)

## **1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS TO MANAGEMENT:**

### **1. Range of objectives:**

As part of the revision of the Medium Term Action Plan and in view of its financial position, the library service should concentrate its efforts on fewer objectives. (Para.2.2.3)

### **2. Communication of objectives:**

Service managers must ensure that staff are aware of corporate and service objectives and must convey with greater emphasis the Council's vision of the service in the future. (Para 2.2.3.)

### **3. Telephone enquiry points:**

The service implement its earlier proposal to establish a centralised system for receiving telephone enquiries and for handling loan renewals by September 2002. (Para. 2.4.1.)

### **4. Intranet:**

Intranet content management should remain within the library service but there should be a clear separation from operational management of this and other ICT based systems. (Para. 2.4.3.)

### **5. Local studies:**

There should be a joint acquisition, conservation and storage policy agreed between the library service and the archives by December 2002. (Para. 2.4.4.)

### **6. Music:**

*An evaluation of the new arrangements for the Music service within Libraries should be carried out after six months and the findings acted upon. There should be public consultation regarding the music service to be offered from the new Library, (Para. 2.4.5.)*

### **7. Joint use of buildings:**

We recommend that the library service and the Education Department continue to review opportunities for joint school/public libraries and a joint report on the programme be proposed for COMT by December 2002. (Para. 2.6.1.)

**8. Services to the elderly and to the housebound:**

A review of the Equal Access Service to identify how it may more adequately meet the needs of the elderly and the housebound should be undertaken. This should include examination of its organisation and methods of service delivery, its resources and staffing needs. The findings of the review to be reported to COMT by April 2003. (Para. 2.6.3.)

**9. Galaxy IT system:**

The need for modifications and enhancements to the library service's IT system should be pursued urgently by both the library service and corporate IT. The specification for a replacement system should state the need for improved management information *Library services within the corporate framework*. (Para.2.6.4.)

**10. Service structure:**

*When the management arrangements of the Library service is restructured there should still be an identified "head of service".* The responsibilities of senior managers should be reviewed and that the roles of the Group Managers and levels of decision making should be examined. The function of Reader Development should be represented on the management team. (Para.2.8.2.)

**11. Communication:**

The Lead Cabinet Member for Community Services, together with the Director of Legal & Community Services and senior managers in the library service, jointly draw up a communications plan that will provide for more active engagement with the staff by Councillors and managers. The plan to be completed by August 2002. Staff views to be sought again within 12 months. (Para. 2.10.)

**12. Marketing and sponsorship:**

The marketing strategy currently being prepared by the library service should address the need for a more long term approach to sponsorship and to promotion and that the service adopts a more flamboyant style of publicity. (Para. 2.13)

**13. Benchmarking:**

Benchmarking services against those of similar Authorities should be pursued further and that an annual plan for benchmarking be drawn up, setting out which services are to be covered and with which Authorities they will be compared. (Para 3.2.)

**14. Management information:**

By August 2002, the strategic responsibility for management information should be vested in one senior manager and that an identified management information officer undertake the collection and dissemination of such data. By October 2002, the library service's existing management information plan be updated and incorporate both IT and manual sources. (Para 3.3.)

**15. Consultation with users and non-users:**

*More regular consultation with users and non-users of service should be undertaken. A report on consultation undertaken to be prepared for Cabinet by September 2002. (Para. 5.2.)*

**16. Customer comments:**

By August 2002, every library should have, either on a notice board or in a leaflet, a regular response setting out the comments received from users and the action proposed, or if no action is intended why this is so. (Para. 5.3.)

## **2. WHY AND HOW THE COUNCIL PROVIDES THE SERVICE**

### **2.1. Statutory position**

- 2.1.1 The provision of a “comprehensive and efficient” public library service is a statutory duty of the County Council under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act. The Best Value Inspectorate has commented that in carrying out the “challenge” element of a review, the Council needs to define what is meant by a “comprehensive and efficient” library service, examine whether this definition applies to its own service and explore alternative methods of service delivery.
- 2.1.2 The Council has defined its view of a comprehensive and efficient service in the objectives it has laid down in various corporate and service plans. These are listed in Paragraph 2.2.2. The definition of “comprehensive and efficient” was aided by the introduction of the Public Library Standards in April 2001. Councils responsible for public libraries have three years from that date in which to meet the 22 standards. East Sussex currently meets 9, fails 13 and has not yet assessed its position on 8 others. In part this is due to their having been not yet calibrated by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport. Amongst the most important standards that are not met are those relating to the book stock and to opening hours. Recent budget decisions, whilst beginning to improve the former, have worsened the position regarding the latter.
- 2.1.3 The last major review of the library service resulted in a report in 1997 entitled “Reading Ahead”. This report laid down the basis for the service as it exists today, including standards of service provision, proposals for changes to opening hours, development of an information strategy and the current management and organisational structure. It updates proposals from an earlier report in 1991 and highlights many issues that still remain valid. Much has happened since this report was written, not all of it envisaged in the report and some of it beyond the control of the library service. To ensure the best use of limited resources, we feel the time has come to look again at the type of service the Council is able to offer in each community. Such a definition would include how the service will be delivered (by branch, centre, mobile or other form of delivery), what will be offered and when it should be available. It should also refer to who will deliver the service: the Council, volunteers or an outside agency acting on the Council’s behalf.
- 2.1.4 As the end product we envisage a service specification that would be similar to the “Handbook of Lending Libraries Services” produced by the library service in 1993, but which would, in this case, address all services. We view this as a specification for the library service each community can expect to receive. It should be available to the public as well as to other interested parties who may wish to assist in offering enhanced services. This is of key importance for without it no one can judge whether the Council is meeting its own standards of service provision. We recommend the creation of a service specification be undertaken and that as part of this exercise there should be a review of staffing levels and opening hours to ensure best use of resources.

## **2.2. Objectives**

### **2.2.1. Links to Government Objectives**

The elements that form the Council's definition of a "comprehensive and efficient" service are set within the context of the priority areas for public libraries identified by the Government:

- Supporting education, both formal and informal.
- Ensuring access to services for all.
- Provision of services to develop social inclusion.
- Assisting with the modernisation programme for central and local government.

The Government intends to publish a Vision Statement for public libraries in Summer 2002. An additional element in this is expected to refer to the role of public libraries as a community focus and a provider of "public space".

### **2.2.2. Links to Corporate Objectives**

In addition to Government priorities, the County Council identified four corporate targets for 2002/03 relevant to the public library service. These are:

- Listen to and communicate with the public of East Sussex
- To be an effective service provider
- Promote economic, social and environmental well being for all.
- To modernise local political management structures

In more detail, the Council has set a series of broad objectives for the public library service. They are linked to corporate targets and to the following plans and strategies agreed by the County Council:

- Best Value Performance Plan
- Community Plan
- Lifelong Learning Plan
- Local Cultural Strategy
- Plans for Implementing Electronic Government
- Plans to Modernise Local Government
- Asset Management Plan
- Legal & Community Services Departmental Plan

### **2.2.3. Public Library Objectives**

2.2.3.1 To implement County Council and national priorities, the public library service has seven key objectives:

- To encourage enjoyment of reading through access to books
- To develop access for all the community to opportunities for lifelong learning and literacy

- To provide access to resources and services through the innovative use of ICT
- To be the hub of a county wide information service
- To provide relevant and up to date resources that meet the changing needs of the community
- To provide services through a trained and expert staff
- To provide opportunities to enrich the cultural provision within East Sussex.

2.2.3.2 These objectives flow into a Medium Term Action Plan that sets out anticipated action within the seven areas over a three year period. We are conscious that the extent of these objectives is broad and demanding. As part of the revision of the Medium Term Action Plan we think it would be better if the service, in view of its financial position, concentrated its efforts on fewer objectives. There is no doubt that there are expectations locally, regionally and nationally that the service will assist in, co-operate with or lead new initiatives. We do not doubt the service managers strive to meet requests for participation and support but we feel a tighter focus on fewer objectives may be timely.

2.2.3.3 Unusually for medium term plans drawn up by public library services, there has been an attempt to cost many of the proposals. This is to the credit of managers. However, some of the objectives carry only a reference to the cost being “staff time”. Since staff time is an expensive element, and one that is in demand in the public library service, we feel it would be better to cost such proposals in more detail when the Plan is re-assessed in the light of recent budget decisions.

2.2.3.4 We have found that the work of the public library service is closely linked to the objectives and strategies of the County Council. Each objective set out in the Annual Library Plan can be traced back to corporate and national priorities. We further noted that the objectives set out in the Annual Library Plan feed into the Legal & Community Services Departmental Plan which forms a part of the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). Monitoring of the BVPP is reported to the County Council quarterly.

2.2.3.5 Thus we believe the objectives of the public library service are clear, both in broad terms and in an annual context. We also believe there is an effective review process in place. We were concerned, however, to find that some staff with whom we consulted had scant knowledge of the planning process, and when they had more, often declared it to be unrealistic or a paper exercise. Few could accurately describe the Council’s or the service managers’ vision of the service. We are aware that the service managers have made efforts to combat this through presentations and newsletters but we feel they should repeat the exercise to ensure that staff are aware of corporate and service objectives.

## **2.3. Customers**

### **2.3.1. Identification**

The Best Value Inspectorate requires that the “challenge” process of a review should identify the customer base of the service and examine who is actually



using it. We have examined the membership records of the library service and considered the results of surveys, focus groups and public meetings. The library service had previously undertaken some work of this nature and we were able to utilise this. In our analysis of the customer base, and the identification of active users, we have also involved lapsed users and non-users as well.

### **2.3.2. Age profile**

2.3.2.1 The service managers have analysed the demographic nature of the population of East Sussex and have used this to target their services accordingly. The Annual Library Plan highlights issues such as the high proportion of people over pensionable age and in the very elderly age groups and the correspondingly low proportion of children and young adults. There is some variation across the county, with Rother, Eastbourne and Lewes areas having high proportions of elderly people whilst Hastings has a generally younger population, being the only district in the county above the national average for the proportion of children.

2.3.2.2 The age profile increases the need for disability access to services and for housebound services. Whilst the library service has a specialist unit, and is aware of the needs of this age group, we have found services to the housebound to warrant additional support and for there to be scope for improving access to services for disabled people. We will return to these issues later in the report.

### **2.3.3. Index of multiple deprivation (IMD)**

2.3.3.1 The IMD is based on domains that recognise income, health and disability, housing, employment, education, training and skills, and geographical access to services. Deprivation in East Sussex is concentrated along the coast and is at its peak in Hastings. The library service has used the information available from the IMD to bid for funding for SureStart and BookStart schemes and to secure Bill & Melinda Gates Millennium funding for Hollington Library.

2.3.3.2 The service has a good record of working in partnership with other agencies. It offers premises to Sussex Careers Service who provide tutors to run IT courses. The library service continues to offer concessions on fines and fees for people who are unemployed.

### **2.3.3. Literacy levels**

2.3.3.1 The Basic Skills Agency has estimated eighteen wards in East Sussex have proportions of people with low or very low literacy skills that exceed the national average of 15%. These are concentrated in Hastings but parts of Rye, Eastbourne, Bexhill, Seaford, Newhaven and Peacehaven are also included. Away from the coast, Lewes and Hailsham are represented too. The library service has used this data to support bids for external funding to support local projects for children and young adults and to support Family Learning programmes.

2.3.3.2 Many people use the library service to support their education needs. This applies equally to those in formal education and to those educating themselves.

The importance of the public library service to the latter group should not be underestimated.

#### **2.3.4. Special groups**

To be comprehensive the public library service must make its services available to groups with specific needs. These include the housebound, people in residential homes and sheltered housing, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, travellers, and prisoners. The public library service in East Sussex has targeted services to all these groups through specialist collections and outreach activities. Where appropriate it takes the service to the user either by mobile library or through the use of volunteers.

#### **2.4. Key services**

##### **2.4.1. Lending**

2.4.1.1 The public library service offers books, videos, DVDs and CDs for loan. Books, CD's and talking books are loaned for 3 weeks; the loan period for other audio-visual materials is one week, with the exception of language courses, which are available for 6 weeks. This meets the Public Library Standard. Items may be borrowed from one library and returned to any other in the county. Some users, including active retired people and those whose business took them across East Sussex, commented on the convenience of this.

2.4.1.2 The reservation service for items not immediately available has differential charges for items in stock in East Sussex and for those which have to be borrowed through the regional or national inter-lending service. We do not consider this practice, or the charges levied, to be unreasonable but we would comment that where a library service has not been able to purchase a full range of titles for some years it has to borrow proportionally more from other services. This means more users in East Sussex have to pay the higher rate than is generally the position elsewhere. As regards the speed of supply, the library service is above the Public Library Standard for reservations supplied within 7 days (55% against a target of 50%). However, it is below the standard for the number of reservations supplied within 15 days (61% against a target of 70%) and 30 days (67% against a target of 80%). The service managers have taken action with regard to internal systems to improve this position and they have set themselves targets above the standards. We commend this but they recognise, as we do, that much will depend on the stock available locally and the speed of supply of those items from other library services.

2.4.1.3 It is a statutory requirement that books can be borrowed without charge but other services may be, and in East Sussex are, subject to a fee. The maximum number of books that may be borrowed at one time is 20. In practice few people borrow this number. Surveys and circumstantial evidence from talking to users suggest that many of those who have the ability to carry, and the time to read, the maximum number do not do so because the choice of stock on the shelves is limited.

- 2.4.1.4 The book fund for the library service has declined since the 1980's to a point where acquisitions in East Sussex in 1998-1999 were 121 per 1000 population. In 1999-2000 this rose to 144 and has since risen again to 172 due both to a better acquisitions contract and a shift to buying more paperback and fewer hardback books. Proposals for the budget for 2002-2003 will hopefully maintain this improvement but the Public Library Standards require the number of items added annually per 1000 population to be 216. The shortfall in the number of books the service should have in stock is over 108,000. To meet the Public Library Standard it has been estimated the bookfund will require an additional £190,000 a year for the next three years. The service managers are aware that whilst buying more paperbacks increases the number of books available, and there is evidence that this increases the issues, the replacement rate is faster than for hardbacks. This is a difficult balance but we feel the service is handling it well.
- 2.4.1.5 The condition and range of the bookstock has been the subject of extensive comment from users, and in our surveys and public meetings was quoted by some lapsed and non-users as the reason they did not use the service. In the Public Library User Survey, 62% of respondents made negative comments about the book stock. The range and quantity of the stock is poor, particularly in Hastings, Lewes and the Rother area. New promotions and the circulation of stock has helped to improve the choice on the shelves but problems remain in terms of numbers of copies and the coverage of some subject areas. This particularly applies to subjects where books are expensive or are rapidly out of date. The project managers found that whilst popular titles were invariably in stock somewhere in the county, finding them available on the shelves was rare.
- 2.4.1.6 Issues of adult fiction have been declining for some years. In 2000/01 fiction issues fell by 2.1% against the previous year. Non-fiction declined by 3.2% but in contrast the issue of children's books rose by 6.6%. These figures are close to national trends and demonstrate the need for more closely matching users needs and expectations and for improved promotion. Through its reader development programme, we believe the library service in East Sussex is taking steps to achieve this
- 2.4.1.7 Children's stock is generally in better condition throughout the county because the percentage of the bookfund spent on this stock has been maintained, albeit at a cost to adult stock. There is a good proportion of picture and board books that have been bought to encourage use by early years children. The concentration on paperbacks is beginning to show although, as with adult paperbacks, whilst popular these have a higher replacement level than hardback material. Efforts have been made to make sure that books are available to support school work by introduction of "7 day loan" for popular topics.
- 2.4.1.8 We discussed with users, non-users and staff the reasons for providing audio-visual materials. The views that were put to us included: they add to the learning experience; some subjects are better explained than in book format; and they are helpful in encouraging children and young people to use libraries and to read, particularly those with learning difficulties. A user who is dyslectic spoke eloquently at a public meeting of the importance of the talking books service. Managers of the library service also commented that audio-visual materials

encourage a variety of customers that books alone would not and that they were a good source of income generation to help improve libraries through refurbishment and possibly to increase the bookfund. Most people felt audio-visual materials should be self financing, which is the case in East Sussex where the video loan service in particular has proved to be very successful, last year running at £15,000 above its income target.

- 2.4.1.9 Being only a year old, the DVD loan service is at an early stage. National trends are indicating a surge in the ownership of DVD players and locally many users feel this is a service they want to see developed in East Sussex libraries. We have discussed the organisation and monitoring of the DVD service with appropriate managers and staff and feel it is well managed and has potential in due course to be as profitable as the video loan service.
- 2.4.1.10 The public library service managers are enthusiastic and imaginative about their ideas to utilise new technology to improve the service to the customer. In order to extend opening hours without additional staffing costs they are proposing to install six self-issue terminals in libraries by March 2004.
- 2.4.1.11 Our contact with users and non-users raised the issue of confusion as to when libraries would be open and frustration when they were found to be closed. This was particularly reflected when an individual wished to renew items on loan. We understand that the service has previously proposed the introduction of a single telephone number for all renewals but has been unable to introduce this facility because of budget restrictions. We feel that this would not only improve the service for the user but in dealing with renewals would also assist in reducing pressure on individual libraries and recommend it should again be given urgent consideration.

## **2.4.2. Information**

- 2.4.2.1 The library service offers reference books, ICT based information services, periodicals and on-line journals. Its specialist services include Local Studies, Business Information and Community Information. The major reference and information libraries are at Eastbourne, Bexhill and Hastings. All libraries offer study facilities, leaflets and have telephone or e-mail contact with the major collections.
- 2.4.2.2 Requests for information in person, by letter, telephone or e-mail, are growing and the service managers have introduced more sophisticated measuring systems to determine their nature and source. At a time when a key post in reference services was vacant through budget reductions, enquiries rose from 361,000 in 1999/00 to 371,300 by 2001/02. In this period the fastest increase was at Eastbourne, followed by Lewes and Hastings.
- 2.4.2.3 The Citizen's Panel Healthy Living Questionnaire noted that respondents identified three main sources for health information: doctors' surgeries, chemists and libraries.
- 2.4.2.4 Compared with its Family Group, in 1999/00 the service received 728 enquiries per 1000 population against an average of 953. This is partly explained by the

absence of a major reference library in Lewes. Our survey of lapsed users suggested a lack of stock also played a part. Non-users commented that they were unaware of the service and some would not have thought to turn to the public library to meet their information needs. This argues the need for improved marketing but also raises the question that were the service to be used by more people, would it be able to cope with the demand?

- 2.4.2.5 Whilst the work of the public library service in providing an information service for adults is obvious, a less well known feature is its work in information for children. In this field East Sussex has made strides ahead of other Authorities. An obvious example is in the Homework Centres and holiday activities designed to stimulate an enquiring mind and develop information skills.
- 2.4.2.6 At our public meetings and in focus groups, users seeking information found it irritating that if they had telephoned a library they could not tell in advance if it would have the resources to meet their needs. Whilst staff were almost always praised for their helpfulness, the user was sometimes faced with a second call or a promise that someone would return the call when another branch had been contacted. In the era of centralised enquiry lines, we feel the introduction of such a facility in the library service would improve the service available to users.

### **2.4.3. Computer based services**

- 2.4.3.1 The public library service is a key partner in establishing the People's Network. The Government has provided funding for much of the technology and staff training. When completed, every library in the county will have high-speed access to information on the Internet through a total of 220 terminals. The growth in on-line publishing and the increasing spread of digitisation makes this a necessity. More than this, however, the library will be able to offer ICT training and opportunities for video conferencing. It will offer a way to develop ICT skills easily, cheaply and informally as well as access to on-line training facilities such as LearnDirect. The People's Network will also play a major role in the development of e-Government and the opportunities for video conferencing will enable the public to speak directly to Councillors and Officers on issues of concern. Computer terminals adapted for those with poor vision or other disabilities will be available in every library.
- 2.4.3.2 Trained staff who can assist the public in learning how to use ICT will be available in all libraries. Much of this training, supported by grants from the Lottery based New Opportunities Fund, is already taking place. We found the programme for implementing the People's Network and for training the staff is well organised and running to schedule. However, a concern of the staff in libraries is that this is a complex activity that they have had to accept without financial recognition or additional staff. Whilst we found most staff enthusiastic, they were anxious to record that instructing and supporting new users is a complex and time consuming process which they undertake in addition to their existing work. This issue is not unique to East Sussex. The role that the People's Network will play in the provision of information and in enabling libraries to act as gateways for e-government and ICT training is as yet unquantified. Much is expected of it and much may be delivered as the Network becomes better known and more widely available, but its effect on the daily operations of

libraries and the precise use of the terminals provided in them, requires carefully monitoring.

2.4.3.3 The County Council has already recognised that the public library service has a significant role to play in terms of the modernisation of local and central government. Because of their position in each community and their experience in acting as information providers, libraries are being used as one-stop shops for information and ICT access although no additional funding has been allocated by the Council to sustain this development.. The Government agenda for e-government is extensive, with opportunities to contact elected representatives, forward enquiries about services, submit applications for licenses and file returns due to be available by the end of 2004. Whilst many members of the public now have computer terminals at home, many others do not, particularly amongst the older or less well off population. The public library service will play a major role in filling this omission.

2.4.3.4 The management of the Council's Intranet site is vested in the library service. As the Intranet is the home of a large bank of electronic information which draws on and also supplements printed sources held by the service, it is logical for the Head of Information Management to be responsible for it. However, the Intranet is growing rapidly and this work is estimated to absorb some 50% of the postholder's time. Whilst we endorse her involvement, we feel this is an excessive drain on the time of a key manager in the library service. We recommend that content management should remain within the library service but there should be a clear separation from operational management of the system.

#### **2.4.4. Local studies**

2.4.4.1 Interest in local studies and family history is a rapidly growing area of work for public libraries. The service holds large collections of resources in printed form and some original materials. All libraries hold stock relevant to their area. The major county wide collections are located at Hastings, Eastbourne, Lewes and Bexhill. Many enquiries are received by letter from correspondents outside of the county. A key problem for this area of work is that the service does not have a specific post of County Local Studies Librarian. In such an important area of work this is unusual in public library services. The brief currently sits with the Reference & Information Manager but due to restrictions on the staffing budget, this post has not been filled for some time. Recently, the service has been able to fill the post on a part time basis and some work on developing the Local Studies service has begun. This is clearly not a satisfactory arrangement in the long term.

2.4.4.2 By the nature of Local Studies material there can be an overlap or duplication of material held by the County Record Office. We recommend a joint acquisition, preservation and conservation policy be agreed between the library service and the archives. This would make it easier for the user to understand where different resources are located and would remove the need for unnecessary storage. In due course this could be extended, voluntarily, to other heritage organisations in East Sussex.

2.4.4.3 The County Record Office and the library service have already co-operated in an unsuccessful joint bid for external funding to make their resources available via on-line computer systems. This is an obvious area for joint working but we feel there may be further scope that the two services should investigate for the benefit of the user and for the enhancement of the service provided.

#### **2.4.5. Music**

2.4.5.1 The public library service has, until 31 March 2002, three separately staffed Music Libraries. These are in Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings. This is a unique service, providing lending and reference books on all aspects of music, scores, libretti, CD's and music videos. The staff provide a specialist information service that is much valued by users. As a result of the Council's decision regarding the budget for 2002/03, these specialist units are to close. The staff are to be made redundant or redeployed elsewhere if other vacancies exist. The stock will be transferred to the lending libraries in Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings. To achieve this the size of the collections is being reduced. In Lewes and Hastings even a reduced stock will create very crowded public areas; in Eastbourne the position is only marginally better.

2.4.5.2 There has been extensive reaction from users of the music libraries concerning these changes, as regards which there has been no previous public consultation. We are particularly concerned that scores, whilst they can be viewed at the library's service store, are not easily or locally available to users. We recommend that the library service consult with all interested parties with a view to improving the quality of the music library service it is able to offer after 1 April 2002. We additionally recommend that there should be public consultation on the music service that will be provided in the new Lewes Library. We will return to the issue of public consultation in Paragraph 5.2.

### **2.5 Key activities**

#### **2.5.1. Lifelong Learning**

2.5.1.1 The Government has asked Councils to demonstrate that they have taken account of the proposals in "Empowering the Learning Community" and to ensure the library service works in close co-operation with other agencies to provide a seamless access to learning resources. It expects the public library service to play a key role in Lifelong Learning, particularly in enhancing skills and employment opportunities and in raising standards and attainment. The service should be involved in work with students at every level, offering accessibility, resources in all formats and helpful staff, trained to support learners.

2.5.1.2 In East Sussex, public libraries offer opportunities for informal learning from the earliest age. "Bookstart" has been implemented for babies across the county, backed up by sessions on using books with young children. The library service is involved in "Surestart" areas, helping to achieve targets, particularly under Objective 3 - improving children's ability to learn, which has the particular target of increasing library use by parents with young children.

- 2.5.1.3 All schools are encouraged to bring classes to the library in order that children can be introduced to local staff and taught how to use library services to their best advantage, including books and ICT.
- 2.5.1.4 The public library service is working with the Council's Adult and Community Learning Service to encourage individual students and families of all ages to undertake learning experiences. Partnerships with other providers, for example Community Colleges, has meant that students of basic skills can use library premises out of hours. Partnership with Sussex Careers has seen more than 1000 people (many of them older learners) undertaking ICT courses in a library.
- 2.5.1.5 The Citizens Panel in East Sussex has noted that the library was the second most popular place to undertake learning. Access to on line services in Peacehaven and Uckfield, in particular, have attracted numbers of students, surpassing targets set for other institutions and emphasising libraries as a preferred place for learning. The library service records the numbers of people attending all events, taking ICT and LearnDirect courses on its premises.
- 2.5.1.6 There are Open Learning Centres at Peacehaven, Hastings and Uckfield. The latter also offers a LearnDirect access point.
- 2.5.1.7 Comment was made to us on several occasions to links with the Education Department have become less secure. We feel that the library service's important role in lifelong learning, and its capacity to reach out to all who will most benefit from such opportunities, should be recognised by both services meeting regularly at a senior level.

## **2.5.2. Social inclusion**

- 2.5.2.1 The Government has placed public libraries at the forefront of work to ensure social inclusion for all members of the community. It has asked Councils to show in their Annual Library Plans that they have taken into account the adoption of social inclusion policies, in particular those described in "Libraries, Museums, Galleries & Archives for ALL" and the six point plan in "Libraries for All".
- 2.5.2.2 The library service endeavours to provide equal access to all materials through large print books, spoken word material, subtitled videos and newspapers on tape. It works with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, has computer terminals for people with poor vision, is working to provide wheelchair access to branches and vehicles and has installed hearing loops in some libraries.
- 2.5.2.3 The library service offers free use of the Internet and ICT facilities and provides access to free IT courses with Careers Service. Funding from the voluntary sector has enabled the development of the East Sussex Community Information Service (ESCIS). This is available both through an on-line service and through leaflets and directories. ESCIS has details of 12,000 organisations; it excludes any involved in illegal activities or wholly commercial organisations.
- 2.5.2.4 For those unable to reach a library, there is the housebound service run from the Equal Access Centre, based in a community centre in Newhaven. There is also a service by mobile library to 4 residential homes and 24 sheltered housing



complexes that are not close to branch libraries. The impact on this activity of the recent reductions in the Mobile Library Service has yet to be properly assessed.

- 2.5.2.5 The public library service endeavours through its services to be open and accessible. It provides a range of concessions and exemptions from fines and fees and charges no fines for children. Surveys locally and nationally have indicated that children's fines are a significant deterrent to library use. The library service works with Social Services to assist Young Carers and to extend support to children in public care. The service has also undertaken work with the Traveller Education Service by assisting with holiday schemes for traveller children in Robertsbridge and homework support in Hailsham.
- 2.5.2.6 As part of its emphasis on social inclusion, the Government has encouraged library projects that address youth crime levels through the provision of alternative activities to promote inclusion for young people. The public library service has not taken part in any schemes of this nature.

### **2.5.3 Reader development**

- 2.5.3.1 The Government sees reader development as a key activity for public libraries and has urged Councils to ensure that there is sustained integration of reader development programmes. East Sussex is one of the first authorities to employ a reader development manager as such. The role is usually subsumed into the work of another manager and as a result often fails to make any significant impact. Having a positive reputation in this field, the library service benefited from inclusion from the national, and externally funded, reader development project "Branching Out". It has also been able to obtain funding from South East Arts to support the employment of a part time Literature Officer.
- 2.5.3.2 Reader development is about encouraging people to use libraries by discovering their needs and expectations and shaping the service, and particularly the stock, to meet them. We were informed that on average a visitor to a lending library takes five minutes to choose a book. In this time the library has to make an impression and to show what it can offer. For the first time visitor, or an uncertain one, this period is crucial. The library service has to ensure that staff are trained and the stock is right to encourage users and to improve their library experience. This relates to the Stock Policy, to which we return again in Paragraph 2.11.2.
- 2.5.3.3 The library service currently has over 50 stock promotions on tour across the county. It supports reading groups for adults as well as children and participates in local and national events such as the Bexhill Children's Festival, Lewes Live Literature Festival, the Hailsham Hash or Eastbourne Poetry Workshops.
- 2.5.3.4 We accept that marketing is important in reader development and that this will need resourcing. There is a need to change the public perception toward libraries which can be achieved by a targeted marketing campaign and by using advertising. Involving the media in all forms will help change this. The image and branding of libraries is poor and there is a need to market libraries more aggressively and to make them more relevant to the whole community.

2.5.3.5 We commend the work already undertaken by the public library service to encourage reader development.

## **2.6. How the service is delivered**

### **2.6.1. Buildings**

2.6.1.1 After the closure of four libraries as a result of the 2002/03 budget, there will be 26 libraries located across the county. In Hastings the Children's Library is separately located from the main central library. The buildings range from large central libraries, such as Eastbourne, to small part time branches such as Ore. Some libraries, for example Peacehaven or Uckfield, are modern and well laid out. Others are too small to offer a full range of services, in an inconvenient location and not unusually, in a dire condition. Lewes and Hastings Library are such. Plans are in hand to replace the library in Lewes. In view of the problems of the building in Hastings and the proposals to expand higher education provision in the town, we urge that the case for replacing this library also be given a high priority.

2.6.1.2 In highlighting the need for essential capital development, which extends beyond libraries, we draw attention to the advantages of co-location with other services. We considered the issue of the provision of joint school/public libraries and the concept of closer working between the public library and education services. The service managers are alert to opportunities for joint provision and a library of this nature already exists in Mayfield. Other sites have been investigated but for various reasons of location, space or security, have not come to fruition. In some communities joint school/public libraries will be a suitable way forward but such provision is very much dependent on local factors. There is an existing officer group examining opportunities for joint use and we recommend that the library and education services should continue to review such opportunities.

2.6.1.3 We are aware that the service managers endeavour to identify opportunities for shared premises, of which the forthcoming replacement of Rye Library is an example. Opportunities for capital development in the future could include joint provision with district and borough councils, providing accommodation for other County Council services, such as a Trading Standards information point or registry office, or even the development of an East Sussex Heritage Centre. The latter could incorporate not only a replacement Record Office for the county's archives, but the public library's local studies service and leased space for allied voluntary organisations in need of accommodation.

2.6.1.4 CIPFA statistics for 1999-2000 show that in East Sussex there is an average of 17,721 residents per service point. The Family Group average was 12,330. The East Sussex figure will have increased as a result of the recent budget decision to close four branches and reduce the number of mobile libraries.

2.6.1.5 The library service in East Sussex falls well below the Public Library Standard for Opening Hours. This requires Councils to offer 128 hours per week per 1000 population. Before recent budget reductions East Sussex offered 93 hours. This

figure will now decline further. To improve this position, as it must within a three year period, requires additional staffing.

2.6.1.6 The pattern of opening hours is based on past experience and on comments from users. The public library service operates a policy of consulting users on any proposal to change opening hours. However, our surveys and meetings indicate that opening hours remain a deterrent to greater use and in the recent Public Library User Survey, 86% of respondents felt that the opening hours of branch libraries was unsatisfactory. The service already offers 25% of its opening hours outside normal office hours, including 20 libraries that open all day on Saturdays but there is pressure for more evening and weekend opening, as well as for major libraries to be open on every weekday. Weekend opening primarily relates to opening on Sundays. The service managers have recognised this demand and plan to address it partially through a bid for a Public Service Agreement. Beyond this, we recommend that as part of the service specification to which we have made reference in Paragraph 2.1. there should be a review of opening hours in all libraries to ensure they best meet community needs.

2.6.1.7 The Disability Discrimination Act requires that the Council make reasonable efforts to provide the same level of service for disabled people as it does to others in the community. This may mean alterations to buildings or even providing the service in a different way. For example, at Lewes Library, where access for disabled people is limited to the lower ground floor, staff will bring items they seek to that level from elsewhere in the building. Thus disabled people do not have to opportunity to browse through the whole stock but the service would probably be deemed to have made a reasonable effort. Whilst newer libraries provide full access for disabled people, and others offer alternative forms of access, there remains work to be done in some branches. This is subject to bidding against a small corporate fund of £150,000 that must address the needs of all departments. Given the demands against this fund, there is no guarantee that bids from the library service will be successful. We record our concern regarding this situation.

## **2.6.2. Vehicles**

2.6.2.1 A Scrutiny Review Panel recently examined the mobile library service in depth. We were kept informed of the work and have therefore not repeated it.

2.6.2.2 Two out of four mobile libraries are being withdrawn from service. By the conclusion of our review it was too early to assess the effect of the changes on branch libraries in affected areas and on use of the remaining vehicles. We are aware that the service managers intend to monitor closely the effects of these changes, which is entirely appropriate.

2.6.2.1 All mobile libraries offer access for disabled people.

### **2.6.3. Other service points**

- 2.6.3.1 In small communities the public library service is available in village halls. These locations include such as Alfriston, Fairlight Cove and Northiam. Volunteers play a key role in assisting in the delivery of the service in these communities.
- 2.6.3.2 The public library service is responsible for the service provided within Lewes Prison. The cost of this is re-charged to the Prison Service.
- 2.6.3.3 The service has investigated the provision of services to patients in hospital. It has not extended its activities in this area because the Red Cross or St John Ambulance using their own books already provides hospital services.
- 2.6.3.4 The Equal Access Centre is based in a community centre in Newhaven. There is an additional collection of stock in the basement of Langney Library in Eastbourne. The service provides a talking book service to people with a visual impairment or who are unable to read printed materials. The centre also stocks a collection of videos with sub-titles for those with hearing difficulties and a collection of reminiscence materials for loan to homes or to tutors working in reminiscence therapy. The centre is available only one day a week or by special arrangement. For those further afield, materials will be sent to a local library where they will be collected by volunteers and delivered to an individual at home.
- 2.6.3.5 In Paragraph 2.3.2, we made reference to the age profile in East Sussex. Whilst the library service is aware of the higher numbers of elderly and housebound people – who will not always be the same – we consider that the resources available to support the needs of these groups to be inadequate. Direct comparison with the services offered in other Councils is difficult as methods of delivery vary and costs are not allocated in comparable ways. But experience of the work of other Councils leaves no doubt that East Sussex has a lower standard of provision to a group more represented in the population than elsewhere in the Audit Commission Family Group. We recommend a review of the Equal Access Service to identify how it may more adequately meet the needs of the elderly and the housebound. This should include examination of its organisation and methods of service delivery, its resources and staffing needs. In the context of the latter, we wish to record that placing the current responsibility on one member of staff, and the salary grade applied to it, is in our view unsatisfactory.

### **2.6.4. Circulation and stock control computer system**

- 2.6.4.1 The library service uses a system called Galaxy, supplied by DS Ltd. The market for public library computer systems is not large and few companies are willing to commit the level of investment needed to enter. DS Ltd has been a major player in this small world for many years and their selection is not surprising as the system is widely used by other public library services. The service managers have for some time sought software modifications to the system to enable it to produce more useful management information. There does not appear to have been significant progress, possibly because DS Ltd has had difficulty with their understanding of the modifications required or because they were unwilling to devote resources to changes that had not been sought by other services. For

whatever reason, we find this unsatisfactory. We recommend that the matter should be investigated again by both the library service and corporate IT.

- 2.6.4.2 The system is shortly due for replacement and will be subject to the Council's procurement policy. We refer again to this in Paragraph 2.12.2. We recommend that when the specification for the new system is written it should highlight the need for improved management information.

## **2.6.5. Digitisation**

- 2.6.5.1 The library service has imaginative plans for digitising some of its local studies materials to enable them to be accessed via computers in libraries or externally via the Internet. Unfortunately, the proposals require financial backing and bids to external funding bodies have not so far been successful. This is in part because some bids require matching funding to be identified and the service has not always had this capacity.

- 2.6.5.2 Previous unsuccessful bids include a joint project with West Sussex and Brighton & Hove Councils and another with the County Record Office to digitise local studies materials. We understand from the County Archivist that a subsequent bid by her service alone has been successful. The reasons for this are not clear. Some low cost preparatory work is in hand and the library service is now working on ideas for sponsorship and joint working with other services, particularly the County Record Office.

## **2.7. Budget**

### **2.7.1. Revenue**

- 2.7.1.1 We have found the budget for the public library service to be well managed.
- 2.7.1.2 The net budget for 2001/02 was £6,433,000. The largest element of this is staffing, which accounts for £3,307,000. The bookfund was £882,000. Income from fees and charges was estimated to total £382,000 in 2001/02. The majority of this is derived from fines for overdue items and charges from loans of audio-visual materials. The video loan service raised £170,000. In recent years the public library service in East Sussex has consistently achieved income levels above the average for its Family Group.
- 2.7.1.3 The public library service has recently reviewed its concessions policy regarding fines and fees. Despite budget pressures these continue for people who receive the job seekers allowance, income support, invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance and incapacity benefit. Exemptions also exist for those who are housebound and those who cannot make use of standard print books. Children are not charged for overdue books. Whilst an integral part of a policy to encourage use of libraries and to remove deterrents to children's reading, we noted that a diminishing number of Councils are maintaining this position.
- 2.7.1.4 Since the 1980's East Sussex has a history of low expenditure on stock. From an already low bookfund, in 2000/01 budget pressures elsewhere in the Council resulted in the removal of a further £100,000. The sum will be restored in the

budget for 2002/03, together with one-off funding of a further £100,000. Low expenditure on books over a long period has limited the range of stock in libraries, inhibited the number of copies of popular or much used titles and meant that the service has been unable to keep up with the replacement of worn out stock. We recommend that additional investment in the book stock should be continued in order to improve the service to the public as well as to meet the Government's Public Library Standards on stock.

- 2.7.1.5 During our interview with the Chief Library Adviser from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, we discussed the Council's position regarding the level of funding needed to for the library service to meet the Public Library Standards for book stock and opening hours. The Chief Library Adviser stressed that meeting the standards, and particularly these two, was not optional and that all library authorities would be expected to reach them within three years. However, he suggested to us that if the Council foresaw problems in doing so the Department would be willing to meet a delegation to discuss the subject. It would be prerequisite to such a meeting that the Council tabled a schedule showing how it would achieve the standards; such a meeting would not take place if the only intention were to seek exemption from the Standards.
- 2.7.1.6 Given the level of investment required to meet the Public Library Standards on the bookfund and opening hours, we recommend that such a meeting be sought with the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

## **2.7.2. Capital**

- 2.7.2.1 The need to replace or improve some libraries is self-evident. Apart from the urgent need to replace Lewes Library, the Directorate's Land & Buildings Strategy lists seven libraries as in need of replacement or major refurbishment. In alphabetical order these are: Bexhill, Hailsham, Hastings, Heathfield, Lewes, Rye and Seaford.
- 2.7.2.2 Proposals to replace Lewes Library are in hand, although there is a need for a sum of £500,000 to be raised externally, additional to the £550,000 to be contributed from Lottery sources. We have referred to the need to replace Hastings Library in Paragraph 2.6.1. Plans to relocate Rye Library and equip it through regeneration funding, in partnership with Rye Town Partnership and Rother District Council, are under discussion with a private developer.
- 2.7.2.3 The Land & Buildings Strategy identifies various areas of recent development as being in need of library facilities. The Strategy lists seven locations, including Sovereign Harbour in Eastbourne and Worsham Farm in Bexhill. It sets out the size that each library should be relative to the population to be served and provides a clear basis for discussions with developers and potential partners. Its principal findings are now included in the Local Structure Plan. The service has made an effort to involve the public in discussion of new or relocated libraries and there is evidence, for example at Lewes and at Rye, that it has used the results in planning these developments. This practice is noteworthy.

### **2.7.3. External funding**

- 2.7.3.1 The service managers have made significant efforts to attract external funding for capital developments or the refurbishment of libraries. The library service has attracted capital funding of £550,000 from the Lottery based Arts Capital Fund for the provision of a Regional Literature Centre in the new Lewes Library. This is the largest single sum awarded for this purpose and the service deserves praise for its achievement.
- 2.7.3.2 A sum of £60,000 of regeneration funding has been allocated to the equipping and fitting out of the new Rye Library.
- 2.7.3.3 The service has submitted a bid for a Public Service Agreement (PSA) which would enable extended use of libraries. The bid is centred on increasing public use of ICT facilities and will also improve access to stock through self-issue terminals. The bid is valued at £400,000.
- 2.7.3.4 The service was a major player in a bid to the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) with six other Councils in the south east. Known as Info4All, the project was aimed at linking local information databases, including the East Sussex Community Information Service (ESCIS). As a similar bid had been made by Essex County Council, NOF requested that the two bids be merged and following agreement by all participants, allocated £100,000 for Info4All.
- 2.7.3.5 The public library service was a partner in the Community Access to Lifelong Learning (CALL) bid for Hastings. Unfortunately, because of budget reductions, the service was unable to come up with its proportion of matched funding. However, it is still represented on the steering group of the project because other partners consider that libraries have a vital role to play, especially in the management of the mobile ICT facility

### **2.7.4. Sustainability of ICT projects**

A major issue both locally and nationally is the replacement of ICT equipment as it comes to the end of its useful life. The funding available from Government to start up many of the projects to which we have referred is only for the initial costs and no provision has yet been by Government for Councils to re-apply when replacement equipment is needed. In East Sussex this issue has been addressed by an agreement to replace worn out equipment in 4-5 years.

## **2.8. Staffing**

### **2.8.1. Structure**

- 2.8.1.1 The Head of Libraries, Information and Arts reports to the Director of Legal & Community Services. The post holder is a member of the directorate's management team and holds the largest budget within the directorate.
- 2.8.1.2 The library service, together with other public services such as Trading Standards, Archives & Records Management and the Registrars Service, form the Community Services wing of the directorate. They, and other units such as

Public Relations, represent the Council's public information services. Each has additional roles and statutory functions, but they are linked by this common theme.

- 2.8.1.3 However, from our investigations, we do not think that the case for the library service for inclusion in Legal & Community Services is proven, although there is no obvious alternative location in the present Council structure. In view of the ideas put to us about the synergies of various services, we feel there should be a more widespread review of the Council's structure before any decision is taken regarding the place of the public library service. The outcome of such a review should not inhibit any immediate changes that are necessary to support the management of the library service and to achieve the required budget savings.

## **2.8.2. Management**

- 2.8.2.1 The Services Management Team of Library, Information & Arts comprises the Head of LIA, the Head of Life Long Learning & Social Inclusion, the Customer Services Manager and the Head of Information Management. This team takes a strategic overview of libraries (school and public), arts and support services. The Library Management Team comprises the five Group Managers and is chaired by the Customer Services Manager. The Reader Development Manager and other senior staff attend when appropriate. This team concentrates on service development and on operational issues affecting the local groups. Comment was made to us that often decisions or requests for guidance had to be referred up from the Library Management Team to the Services Management Team. We feel there may be was scope for investigating further devolving decision making to the Group Managers.
- 2.8.2.2 The budget for 2002/03 requires savings of £71,000 to be found from the staff heading. £55,000 of this is to be achieved through a re-organisation of the management structure of the public library service. The view of many staff, at all levels of the organisation, is that it in addition to any reductions to an already slim management structure, it will mean the loss of further posts in the front line service. We tend to the view that there is scope within the Directorate of Legal & Community Services to provide some additional management support to the library service. If this opportunity is pursued and coupled with a review of the roles of senior and group managers and an examination of staffing levels at all service points, it may be possible to avoid the starkest scenario but we feel there is only limited scope for such action.
- 2.8.2.3 The present managerial structure of the public library service requires clarification and additional support. Since 1997, changes in managerial posts have resulted in the movement of responsibilities as the service has reduced the number of managers and staff "behind the scenes" in order to alleviate the effect of budget reductions on the front line service. The clear cumulative effects are now clear. The senior managers have to manage wide-ranging portfolios, spend time on corporate projects – notably the Intranet - and have insufficient staff to whom to delegate. We identified a number of areas where additional support is needed. In the public service these include the People's Network, the Intranet and other ICT developments, local studies, reference and information services, work with children and adult education projects. Behind the scenes we found a



need for support in areas such as management information, public consultation, staff communications and marketing.

2.8.2.4 We have no doubt that as services have developed and pressures have increased, the present structure is under strain. Without wishing to suggest an alternative structure, we would draw attention to the opportunity - providing additional support existed at the local level - to develop the role of Group Managers. Matrix management, whereby a manager has both a geographical responsibility and leads a county wide specialist service was in operation in East Sussex between 1992 and 1997. It ended because of reducing numbers of staff. Opinions vary as to its success and it may not be an appropriate answer today but revisiting this and other alternatives would be useful.

### **2.8.3. Professionally qualified librarians**

2.8.3.1 East Sussex has a low proportion of qualified librarians compared to other Authorities. In comparator Authorities the percentage of professionally qualified staff of all staff is 24%. In East Sussex the figure is 17%. This Authority has not yet answered Public Library Standard 19, which asks for the numbers of staff per 1,000 population with "appropriate management information qualifications". However, on the evidence of comparison with other Authorities, we consider it unlikely East Sussex will meet the national standard when it is in a position to respond.

2.8.3.2 The low number of professionally qualified staff prohibits the delivery of some objectives set out in the Annual Library Plan. Apart from the issue of the quality of the advice and assistance available to the public, the library service is unable to bid for external funding as much as it could do so. It is unable to develop use of ICT resources sufficiently and unable to staff initiatives to the level required. These include homework clubs in schools and teenage activities in youth clubs. Projects cannot be monitored closely and only limited development of increasingly popular services such as Local Studies can be pursued.

2.8.3.3 Professionally qualified librarians are appointed on Scale 5 of the salary rates, and rise to Scale 6 with suitable experience and achievement. Whilst not alone in appointing staff on these levels, compared to other library services this is not an attractive career structure. This would not be so important if there were frequent opportunities for promotion to higher graded posts. Unfortunately, whilst these are available within East Sussex from time to time, they are much fewer in number than elsewhere. Consequently, a number of librarians have been unable to develop their careers and feel their experience to be inadequately recognised. Whilst we have noted these views we are equally aware that there is no simple answer to this problem.

### **2.8.4. Support staff**

2.8.4.1 Comparison with other Authorities in the Family group does not suggest a significant shortfall in numbers of library assistants, supervisory staff or assistants-in-charge. In 1999/00 East Sussex was at the average for its group of 0.37 per 1000 population, although it has more recently dropped below. What does make a difference, however, is that more experienced support staff have to

undertake work which in other Authorities is done by qualified librarians. This stretches staffing levels across the service and is an important measure in the comparison of overall staffing levels:

- 2.8.4.2 The service is working on a staffing formula for libraries. We welcome this and urge that staffing numbers at each library be measured against it. From our observations and from staff comment, there are some service points where pressure on particular services calls for additional support. The reference and information libraries of Eastbourne and Hastings are such examples.
- 2.8.4.3 We also wish to draw attention to the low salary levels for both library assistants and assistants-in-charge. Staff turnover at these levels is becoming unacceptably high, particularly in those areas where alternative employment is easily available. Pay was not the only issue; staff were also concerned at the lack of opportunities that would tempt them to pursue a career in the library service. This need for a career structure, now common in other public library services, was raised at every staff meeting. This is an important factor in motivation and improving staff morale.

## **2.8.5. Volunteers**

- 2.8.5.1 We found that the library service has a clear policy on the use and role of volunteers.
- 2.8.5.2 Volunteers play a key role in services to the housebound. They help to staff the Equal Access Centre in Newhaven and to deliver books and other materials to housebound people across the county. Without volunteers this service would be impossible.
- 2.8.2.3 Volunteers run the Friends groups, participate in fund raising for libraries and in the running of publicity events. They assist in the cataloguing and dissemination of local studies materials and help tidy stock. At small libraries, such as Little Common and Wadhurst, they provide a second person on the premises so that the member of staff is not on their own. Some volunteers also undertake story times for children.

## **2.8.6. Training**

- 2.8.6.1 There is a comprehensive annual training plan for all members of staff in the library service. It links each proposed training activity to service objectives, and sets out for whom it is intended, how it will be done and the resources required.
- 2.8.6.2 In the year 2001/02 £24,700 was allocated for training. Additionally, the service was able to include £5,300 from an underspend in the previous year. The total of £30,000 represents 0.91% of the payroll budget. Even taking into account a further £40,000 from the New Opportunities Fund for ICT training, the percentage is only 2.12%. Adding in the training for managers which it is proposed to fund centrally, the total available is in the region of £76,000 against a payroll of £3,307,000. At 2.30% this is less than half the percentage recommended for training by professional and industry organisations.

2.8.6.3 The New Opportunities Fund has provided a further £146,000 over three years to help staff reach a basic level of ICT confidence in order to help the public with basic ICT skills. This funding will need to be sustained if the advantages accruing from it are to be maintained beyond the three year period.

2.8.6.4 In common with many public service organisations and the retail sector, the service introduced a regular training hour in most libraries in September 2000. As a result increasing numbers of staff have been trained in initiatives such as "Bookstart" or in enquiry techniques, first aid and health & safety. Some basic awareness of aspects of lifelong learning are included in the training hour in co-operation with the Adult and Community Education Service.

### **2.8.7. Appraisals**

Appraisals to examine performance and identify training needs are well embedded in the service for senior and professionally qualified staff. Here the system appears to be working well. Appraisal has more recently been extended to Assistants-in-Charge and we received comments that it needed improvement, primarily because the large number of targets which the individual could not achieve without action from elsewhere. We understand this is being examined to see how improvements can be introduced. Formal appraisals for library assistants will begin this year. Although all staff already receive at least a quarterly supervisory meeting with their line manager, hopefully this will provide an additional way for front line staff to express their views and to receive encouragement in their work.

### **2.9. Staff morale**

2.9.1 The morale of most staff in the public library service is low. The various meetings to seek the views of staff on the development of the service were dominated by this issue. There was some geographical variation in the depth of the comment but the issue was of concern everywhere. Staff raised issues on a number of fronts, some more local than others, but attention centred on the Council's attitude to the public library service and a lack of communication within it. We return to the second issue in Paragraph 2.10 of this report.

2.9.2 From the views expressed by staff at all levels during focus groups, in individual interviews and in written comments, the Council is held in low regard. This cannot be to anyone's benefit. There can be no doubt that recent budget decisions have played a major part in forming the immediate view. These have included redundancies, staff relocations, library closures and the reduction of mobile libraries, as well as outstanding savings of £71,000 from a re-organisation of the service. We have made previous reference to this in Paragraph 2.8.2. above. But the immediate budget issues should be seen more as the catalyst than as the cause.

2.9.3 It would be easy, but unwise, to dismiss poor morale as a temporary phase and to take the view that it will improve when the effects of budget decisions have been clarified and implemented. From the evidence presented to us we believe an important sector of the Council's workforce feels alienated. Many Assistants-in-Charge of libraries said they worked beyond their contractual hours in order to

prepare libraries for the next opening session or because they had insufficient time to complete outstanding tasks. This would not be unexceptional in more highly paid staff but librarians, assistants-in-charge at branches and library assistants do not fall into this category and their goodwill should not be squandered. The value of the library service is not just the stock on its shelves or the databases to which it provides access. The knowledge and the experience of the staff is of equal value.

- 2.9.4 We are very concerned at what has become apparent to us regarding the morale of library staff. We do not regard this as entirely a matter for the managers of the service. Remedial action must be taken quickly and, if they value the library service and the staff that provide it, Councillors, the chief officer and senior managers within the directorate should be willing to attend staff meetings to discuss the way forward.

## **2.10. Communications**

- 2.10.1 The library service has in place arrangements for briefing staff and for passing information from management to the “front line” of the service. This includes the provision of a monthly newsletter e-mailed from Headquarters, supplemented by a weekly group bulletin. There is also a newsletter for the Legal & Community Services Directorate entitled “Grapevine”. Staff at various meetings informed the project managers that they always read their group bulletin, usually read the newsletter from Headquarters but only occasionally read “Grapevine”.
- 2.10.2 Communication also takes place via structured meetings. There are two Service Days each year and attendance at one of these is expected of all staff. Members of the Services Management Team (SMT) attend meetings of librarians and assistants-in-charge in each group twice a year. The frequency of meetings for all staff in the group, led by the Group Manager, varies from weekly to occasional. Members of SMT have offered to attend such meetings but comment has previously been made that their presence would be intimidating and that if they did attend it should be only for a specific item. This is now current practice but some library assistants to whom we spoke believe this creates a gap between senior managers and front line staff. There was also a view expressed that when senior managers are present at meetings they tend to talk at, and not with, the staff.
- 2.10.3 A further avenue of communication exists through the Joint Staff Consultative meeting. Senior managers of the library service attend these but there have been difficulties in obtaining a quorum from the staff side and the most recent scheduled meeting was cancelled for this reason.
- 2.10.4 Staff at most of the local meetings attended by the project managers felt that the communications cascade could have been improved even before events surrounding the present budget round. The uncertainty surrounding proposed reductions has brought this to a head, further undermining staff confidence and creating a suspicion that they are not being told what is happening until events are beyond influence. We recommend that the Lead Cabinet Member for Community Services, the Director of Legal & Community Services and the library managers jointly address this issue and in so doing create fora in which staff can

share their concerns with, and express their opinions directly to, Councillors and senior managers. Whether there is really a gap in the communication system may be debatable. That the majority of staff perceive there to be a gap between them and the policymakers is indisputable.

## **2.11. Bibliographical Services**

### **2.11.1. Organisation**

The Bibliographical Services Unit is within the remit of the Reader Development Manager, who is responsible to the Head of Libraries, Information & Arts. It is responsible for the acquisition and cataloguing of stock. All items selected for the public library service are ordered through this unit, are delivered here, checked and dispatched to local libraries.

### **2.11.2. Stock policy**

- 2.11.2.1 The service has a comprehensive Stock Policy that is revised annually. It sets out selection criteria for adult and children's books, reference and information services, local studies, music and audio-visual items. It also covers the management, circulation, promotion, condition, withdrawal and disposal of resources.
- 2.11.2.2 The policy requires each geographical group within the public library service to prepare annual plans for stock purchase, editing, circulation and promotion. It requires there to be a stock profile available for every library, against which new acquisitions can be monitored. The policy sets out the terms under which items should be moved to another library, transferred to the county reserve stock, offered to regional or national collections, or as a last resort, sold. It also covers the reservation of specific items and inter-lending between East Sussex and other public library services.
- 2.11.2.3 The policy is clear and enables staff to make informed judgements on the books and other materials with which they work. We acknowledge the work that has gone into the formulation of the Stock Policy. Work on management information remains to be completed but in all other respects we have found it to be of a high standard.

### **2.11.3. Stock selection practice**

Stock budgets are devolved to local Group Managers and specialist service managers. Stock selection is the responsibility of professionally qualified staff in each geographical group and specialist service, who are advised of local needs by the Assistants-in-Charge. Most new stock is selected from published lists available on CD-ROM. To reduce the time taken to put them on the library shelves, new titles by the thirty most popular authors are automatically pre-ordered. This list is reviewed annually. New titles not ordered by any group or specialist service, but which the Reader Development Manager considers to be of importance, are purchased from a small central fund retained for this purpose. Such titles are then circulated between libraries.

#### **2.11.4. Outsourcing**

The Reader Development Manager has investigated outsourcing the Bibliographical Services Unit. This is a limited market with at present only one company willing to offer this service. In 2001, following the withdrawal of Brighton & Hove Council from the joint arrangements that had been in place since 1997, it became necessary to examine all options for the future delivery of Bibliographical Services. Outsourcing was amongst these but in the light of experience elsewhere it was not found to offer the most advantageous arrangements. Experience elsewhere has shown that outsourcing can cost more than providing the service in-house. Instead, the in-house unit was re-organised and the number of staff reduced by one third, from 15 to 10. With the extension of ICT, productivity in terms of the number of items handled in a specific period has risen by 2%. We doubt there is any more to be gained at the present time by attempting to outsource this Unit.

#### **2.12. Procurement**

##### **2.12.1. Stock Procurement**

East Sussex is a member of the Central Buying Consortium, a group of 18 public library authorities, co-ordinated by Buckinghamshire CC. Being part of this consortium enables the Council to obtain larger discounts from suppliers than would be available by purchasing on its own. Discounts between 10% and 20% depending on publisher and title are available. It also offers savings in staff time and the opportunity to benchmark acquisition and bibliographical procedures with others in the consortium.

##### **2.12.2. ICT procurement**

2.12.2.1 The expansion of the People's Network has led to the recent acquisition of over 200 terminals and other ICT equipment. The Government has provided £740,000 towards the cost of the project. The Council has contributed £121,000 over two years. In purchasing these items the public library service followed the Council's standard ICT procurement procedures.

2.12.2.2 The service's housekeeping system is called Galaxy, provided by DS Ltd. When this was acquired in 1998 it was by competitive tender against a specification drawn up by the library service. The Council's ICT Department was involved in the procurement exercise and advised on the competing bids made in response to the invitation to tender.

2.12.2.3 In matters of ICT procurement we are satisfied that the public library service operates according to the Council's procedures. We are confident that when the Galaxy system is due for replacement in 2003 that they will work in close liaison with the Head of Procurement and the IT division of the Corporate Resources Directorate.

## **2.13. Marketing and promotion**

- 2.13.1 Attracting people to the library service, informing them of the services available and making them feel welcome is a key part of increasing use. The library service undertakes these functions in a variety of ways. Guiding, leaflets, the appearance of buildings, specific promotions and staff attitudes are amongst the most important. On our visits to libraries, and on others where the project managers acted as “mystery shoppers”, we invariably found staff to be friendly and responsive. With this strength in place the library service is now seeking to co-ordinate other elements through the preparation of a marketing strategy. We commend this development.
- 2.13.2 There is no doubt that the public library service, nationally and locally, suffers from what might be called an image problem. This affects use by groups such as young people and those who find “institutions” threatening or inhibiting. This category includes those with learning difficulties or low literacy levels. Attempts to change the image of the library service are having more success in some places than others. The quality of the service and the way it is delivered are of key importance but so is its promotion. We were informed of the promotion of the service in some other Councils and were impressed by the originality and even flamboyance with which this was undertaken.
- 2.13.3 Compared to some other Councils, the library service has undertaken little consistent marketing and has not continuously engaged with the media or the business world. There have been some attractive short term campaigns and some successful publicity. The service is good at using the media when it needs to do so but does not appear to have built up a consistent relationship. The same could be said of links with business and industry in East Sussex. This makes significant sponsorship difficult to obtain because every approach is effectively a “one-off” and does not come in a context of extensive contact for other purposes. In contrast, regular sponsorship for children’s summer activities has been obtained from organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage. Given the competition for sponsorship, and in particular for larger projects, a relationship with potential supporters needs time to develop as it has in the case of children’s summer activities. We understand these aspects will be included in the forthcoming marketing strategy.
- 2.13.4 On our visits we were surprised to find that, although there was a wide range of other publicity material, the library service had run out of stocks of its introductory leaflet for those joining the service. The branch library at Ore produced its own leaflet, which we thought showed initiative and an awareness of the needs of local users. However, during the course of our review the library service initiated work to replace the countywide leaflet. Immediate publication was delayed pending the Council’s decision on which libraries were to close but we are satisfied this matter has now been resolved.

## **2.14. Co-operation and partnerships**

### **2.14.1. Within East Sussex**

- 2.14.1.1 The library service regularly works with other County Council services. Primarily these are Education, Social Services and the County Record Office. Joint working is most developed with Education, either through contributions to strategies and development plans, contact with advisers or steering groups, or through practical schemes such as Homework Centres, and adult learning initiatives. The Schools Library Service is managed by Libraries, Information & Arts on behalf of the Education Department. The library service works closely with Social Services to provide support for Children in Public Care and the Young Carers Group.
- 2.14.1.2 We were initially concerned that synergies with the Record Office had not been fully realised but this has more recently been rectified. We anticipate this will lead to a joint acquisitions, conservation and storage policy to cover both archives and local studies material and we welcome such a development.
- 2.14.1.3 The public library service was involved in the creation of the Council's Cultural Strategy, contributing to appropriate sections and helping develop the web access for consultation. The Head of Libraries, Information & Arts directly oversaw this process.
- 2.14.1.4 Outside of the County Council, the library service has a good record of working in partnership with various external organisations. We found evidence of successful working with voluntary agencies, trusts, district, town and parish councils and the private sector. The service is also closely linked with local colleges. Examples include Sussex Downs College, Eastbourne using several public libraries in the area to host basic skills courses and Sussex Downs College, Lewes providing a "cyber corner" at Peacehaven Library.

### **2.14.2. Regionally**

- 2.14.2.1 Traditionally, regional co-operation between library services has extended only as far as inter-lending of books. East Sussex was part of the London & South East Region (LASER) for many years. The library services involved covered the 32 London boroughs and surrounding counties as far as Essex, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. In September 2001 LASER ceased to act as the hub of the inter-lending system. This was as a result of changes in regional boundaries and a decision by the London authorities to work more closely together. Library services outside of London were left to find alternative arrangements and these are still emerging.
- 2.14.2.2 Sensing the demise of LASER the service managers in East Sussex moved to establish WEBSlink, a partnership formed with the library services of West Sussex, Brighton & Hove and Surrey. This provides on-line access to the stock records of each service and has enabled inter-lending to be maintained between these services. It is financially significant in that it saves the cost of applying to the national system to borrow items not in stock locally. WEBSlink also offers opportunities for joint reserve collections, for co-operation stock acquisition of



specialist or expensive titles, shared provision of reference materials and benchmarking. The Department for Culture, Media & Sport has acclaimed WEBSlink as a potential way forward for co-operation between neighbouring authorities.

### **3. COMPARISON**

#### **3.1 Audit Commission Family Group Comparisons**

- 3.1.1 We are confident that the service managers are aware of comparative data with other Authorities in their Family Group. It is used in Council reports and in the compilation of the Annual Library Plan. We also believe the service managers analyse the data available to them in order to examine their own service and deploy such conclusions to improve, where possible, the standard of the service in East Sussex.
- 3.1.2 In all matters relating to stock, East Sussex compares poorly to other Authorities. Total stock for loan, stock per 1000 population and annual acquisitions are significantly lower than elsewhere in the Family Group. For the last published year, 1999/00, expenditure on employees initially appears above average (at £6,270 to an average of £6,138 per 1000 population). However, at this time East Sussex was still employing staff to operate a joint ICT and bibliographical services unit with Brighton & Hove Council. This arrangement has now ceased as a result of the terms of Brighton & Hove's PFI agreement for its new central library. Actual staff numbers for the same period reveal a different picture. The number of professionally qualified staff is 31.5 against an average of 47.6; the number of other posts is 151.5 against 153.3. In each case these are full time equivalents.

#### **3.2 Benchmarking**

- 3.2.1 The Annual Library Plan says "Comparative work with other Library Authorities is undertaken, when appropriate" (p. 71). It quotes four examples: video provision with Buckinghamshire; DVD provision with Brighton & Hove; staffing levels and duties with Library Authorities in the South East and the CIPFA family group; and Schools Library Service with West Sussex. We noted in our report on the Schools Library Service that the latter exercise, which was led by West Sussex, was flawed because it had included incorrect data relating to provision in East Sussex.
- 3.2.2 We think that benchmarking services against those of similar Authorities could be pursued further. We suggest that an annual plan for benchmarking be drawn up, setting out which services are to be covered and with which Authorities they will be compared. This information would be useful to both the Council in identifying its priorities for expenditure and to managers in planning service delivery.

#### **3.3 How data is collected and used**

- 3.3.1 The library service was able to provide us with a detailed breakdown of its costs. Much of this data comes from the Council's financial systems but the service has further analysed the costs of each service point and its support costs. This

provides information on the cost per hour open at each library, cost per visitor, cost per item issued and cost per enquiry. We feel this information could usefully be used to compare costs and performance with other Authorities in the Family Group.

- 3.3.2 We have examined the issue of management information at length. As we have noted elsewhere, there are problems with the data that can be extracted from the service's Galaxy system. However, not all management information comes from computers. For example, surveys and "counts" also provide useful data. The library service has recently completed a detailed survey of management information needs and the service managers are currently overhauling their sources and procedures, particularly regarding reference and information services. This is good practice but the process has inevitably been slowed by a lack of experienced staff to undertake the work.
- 3.3.3 To ensure such activity is used in the planning process, and to take an overview of the whole range of management information available, we recommend that responsibility for management information be vested in one person at senior management level.

#### **4. COMPETITION**

##### **4.1. Alternative Service Provision**

- 4.1.1 Although the provision of a comprehensive and efficient public library service is a statutory duty of the County Council, it is not a statutory duty of the Council to provide the service themselves. It could draw up a specification, identify any local standards or other requirements it wished to impose in a contract, and invite bids from external providers. We have therefore looked at other options and tried to identify potential service providers.
- 4.1.2 We looked for alternative providers of the whole service in the private sector but to in effect they do not currently exist. A number of pilot projects were run by the Government in the mid-1990's, none of which identified a market. More recently Westminster City Council undertook a wide ranging market testing exercise and came to the conclusion that the position had not changed. Subsequently one or two facility management companies have indicated an interest in providing public library services but after investigation of the opportunities have withdrawn. A major problem in letting contracts in this area lies in the traditional co-operation and joint working between the library services of different Councils. This has been able to flourish – to mutual advantage – in the public sector; the extent to which other Council run services would co-operate with a privately run service is unknown. In addition, the scope for making money in public libraries is limited if their main, and statutory, purpose is to remain intact.
- 4.1.3 Amongst the pilot projects tested in the mid 1990's was one which segmented the public library service into different services and invited separate bids. The most successful of these – and "successful should be seen in relative terms – was for reference and information services. There is no doubt that a commercial market could grow in this area and in due course may offer a possible option if

the Council wished to pursue it. But we do not think that time has come. The service in East Sussex can really only be separately identified in Eastbourne and Hastings Libraries, although potentially Lewes and Bexhill might be included. In all other libraries the reference and information service is part of the daily work of the staff providing other services and cannot be separately disentangled without additional costs.

- 4.1.4 In reviewing alternative methods of providing the public library service, the project managers looked at the arrangements in Hounslow, where the library service is managed by a trust. It was noted, however, that this trust also included the borough's leisure centres and that cross funding between the leisure centres and libraries had facilitated a number of service improvements. There would seem to be little point, except perhaps for some minor tax advantages, in transferring the public library service in East Sussex to an independent trust. The Council does not provide any other public facilities that could be included to generate additional funding at the level necessary to meet the Public Library Standards.
- 4.1.5 Libri, a small charitable organisation, has indicated an interest in running small branch libraries in communities where the Council no longer has the resources to provide the service itself. As far as we can tell there are no libraries of this nature in the region and we have been unable to obtain details as to how the arrangement operates. Presumably a saving must be made through the use of volunteers but to remain a valid public library as expected by Government, the Council and the public, any such service point would need to have access to the wider network within which every library supports the others. East Sussex already makes extensive use of volunteers but this option may be worth further consideration when the Council has agreed its service specification (Paragraph 2.1.) and identified the level of service it wishes to offer in each community.
- 4.1.6 Behind the front line of the library service we examined the investigation of outsourcing Bibliographical Services (Para 2.11.4. refers) and the joint arrangements for the acquisition of stock (Para 2.12.1 refers). We have also looked at opportunities for collaboration with other Authorities and the potential for consortium working. As regards existing contracts subject to competitive tendering, we have ensured that there are procedures in place for these to be scrutinised independently of the library service when they are due for renewal.

## **4.2. Books**

- 4 It is often thought that since the demise of subscription libraries, public libraries have had no competition. That view is simplistic for a number of reasons. Firstly, no one is compelled to use the public library service and the service must therefore compete for users. Some people will not be interested in reading and use their leisure time in other ways. Some will choose to buy books, new or second hand, or exchange them amongst friends. National studies have suggested that the increase in book buying has in part come from individuals who would not have used the library anyway, but the trend does appear to have had some effect on borrowing, particularly for adult fiction. Both nationally and in East Sussex the decrease is noticeable. The library service needs to examine this trend and determine whether it is going to compete or to complement what is

available in bookshops. One basic difference is that libraries usually provide a wider selection, particularly of earlier or older titles by both popular and less fashionable writers.

### **4.3. Information**

Information is available in many forms and from many locations. One of the strengths of the library service, however, is that it has skilled staff who are able to find information from a variety of sources. The width of its service is far greater than almost any other source, albeit others may have specialist knowledge in depth. Even regular users are often surprised by what the library has to offer and the expertise of the staff in identifying appropriate source material. Our public meetings provided evidence of support for widening the role of the library service in information provision by including space for other agencies and advice centres within the same building. The Citizen's Advice Bureau, Tourist Information Centre (Newhaven) and district council information and advice centres were mentioned.

### **4.4. Audio visual services**

4.4.1 High street video shops offer a tangible form of competition to the video and DVD loan service. There were some comments from the public that they did not see this as a core service in libraries but most realised that it was an important generator of income. We asked users why they chose to borrow from the library when main chains offered a wider choice and more flexible hire arrangements. Amongst the reasons offered were that it was convenient, some less popular material would not be available in a video shop, and the cost was reasonable.

4.4.2 For borrowing CD's there is no significant competition. There are collections in 10 libraries. The service is popular and at present offers a good range. However, the closure of the service's three separate music libraries, and the consequent integration of the stock into lending libraries, will mean a reduction in the number of items on display. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on borrowing levels but the decision was the cause of extensive negative comment from users and staff.

### **4.5. Specialist services**

In many cases, there are no alternatives to the specialist services provided by the public library. The stock upon which the service to the housebound is based is a good example. Whilst delivered largely by volunteers, the resources which underpin the service are not available elsewhere. The Royal National Institute for the Blind provides a Talking Book service, to which East Sussex subscribes but this is increasingly being replaced by cassettes and CD recordings purchased by the public library itself. Problems in using, and in securing the return of RNIB equipment from users, is adding to this trend.

## **5. CONSULTATION**

### **5.1. Evidence Received**

- 5.1.1 The Project Board interviewed the Lead Cabinet Member on 25 September, the Head of Libraries, Information & Arts and the three other members of the Library, Information & Arts Management Team on 29 January, and the Director of Legal & Community Services on 8 February. They also interviewed on 29 January the Chief Library Adviser from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport and the Director of Education. The Reader Development Manager, who is not a member of the LIA Management Team, was interviewed on 8 February.
- 5.1.2 Within the County Council, the project managers interviewed the Chief Executive, the Director of Legal & Community Services, the Head of Resources for L&CS and the County Archivist. In Brighton & Hove Council they interviewed the Assistant Director of Education and the Head of Cultural Services. A telephone interview was conducted with the Head of Arts & Heritage Services in Eastbourne. They attended two Service Days for over 150 staff in Eastbourne and Bexhill and held four smaller staff meetings at Lewes, Uckfield, Hastings and Eastbourne for librarians and assistants-in-charge. They also conducted a focus group meeting for staff working in Bibliographical and ICT services at County Library Headquarters.
- 5.1.3 The project managers met with members of the Friends of Willingdon Library and surveyed the views of three other user groups: Seaford, Lewes, and Newhaven. A postal survey of 100 lapsed users of the public library service was undertaken. The resulting views, and those of users and non-users from the public meetings, have been fed into this report where appropriate and are available separately. The project managers informally spoke to users during their visits to libraries. They were in contact with the Head of Libraries, Information & Arts and senior members of the library staff throughout the review.
- 5.1.4 Public meetings were held in Lewes, Eastbourne, Hastings and Crowborough. The meetings at Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings became substitutes for consultation on the budget changes. This is understandable given that at the time it was taking place, it was difficult for the public to distinguish between consultation on the budget and that on Best Value. We were willing to listen to the views expressed but it confirmed to us that the Council's consultation process was inadequate.

### **5.2. Consultation with users and non-users by the Library Service**

- 5.2.1 Since 1999 the public library service has had in place a Consultation Strategy. To a large extent the service has implemented this as opportunity and finance have allowed. In particular we noted the following:
- 5.2.2 Surveys:
- Best Value Plan – User Satisfaction Survey
  - Citizens Panel – Healthy Living Questionnaire

- Public Library User Survey (PLUS)

Public Meetings and Focus Groups:

- New Lewes Library
- New Rye Library
- Changes to Mobile Library Routes
- Closure of Seaside Library, Eastbourne
- Changes in Opening Hours of Libraries
- Medium Term Strategy
- Public Library Standards

- 5.2.3 Until recently, as a matter of policy the library service consulted with users regarding proposed changes to opening hours and library closures. 11 such consultations have taken place since April 1998. The feedback from these consultations, and from other smaller or local surveys, has directly led to changes in service delivery. These include alterations in opening hours and mobile stops, increasing the number of books that could be borrowed at one time and painting white lines along the edges of the steps at Hastings Library.
- 5.2.4 The service's consultation with both users and non-users at the time of the closure of the library at Seaside, Eastbourne in 1998/9 has been cited as an example of good practice by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.
- 5.2.5 However, we noted that most consultations were related to specific events or proposals. We feel there should be more regular opportunities for both users and non-users to contribute to planning service development without the pressure of imminent changes in service delivery.
- 5.2.6 The service has helped to establish Friends groups for Lewes, Newhaven, Seaford and Willingdon. There is also a Battle Readers' Group. Whilst a representative of the service is usually present during meetings of the Friends groups, the groups themselves are run by their own committees and often take an independent line in formulating their views and deciding their priorities. The Friends of Lewes Library are leading the effort to raise £500,000 towards the cost of the new library; the Friends of Willingdon Library have an extensive programme of fund raising activities to improve facilities. Attempts to set up additional Friends groups are continuing.
- 5.2.7 The library service liaises with parish and town councils regarding mobile routes and services based in village centres. We feel there may be scope for closer liaison, and even co-location of services, with the district councils, some of whom were eager to exploit such opportunities.
- 5.2.8 The most significant of the surveys undertaken is the annual Public Library User Survey (PLUS). These began in May 1999 and one third of the libraries are included each year. 1,509 adults and 634 children were surveyed in the Wealden Group in 2001. Rother and Lewes groups were surveyed in 2000. The comments primarily centre on stock, premises, reference and information services, and

opening hours. The results are used by Group Managers to improve services locally and by the Management Team to inform the planning process.

- 5.2.9 Taken together these provide a wide and integrated range of opportunities for the public to convey their views to the Council and the managers of the public library service. However, most of them are directed towards existing users of the service. There have been attempts to engage people who no longer use the service or have never used it all, but these are irregular. This is because with limited time and resources the service directs its efforts in consultation to those with whom it is easiest to consult. This is understandable but if the service is to attract those who are not aware of its services and may most benefit from them, it must strive more actively to bridge the gap. We would also like to see consultation with specific target groups, such as young people, undertaken outside of libraries and in conjunction with the staff of appropriate services.
- 5.2.10 It was also said to us on a number of occasions that the staff of the library service would welcome Councillors visiting libraries to talk not only to them but also to the public. The Audit Commission is known to be concerned as to the amount of involvement elected representatives have with the users and non-users of public services. We would encourage all Councillors to visit their local library and discuss its services with staff and public.

### **5.3. Customer comments**

A Customer Comments and Complaints Policy is in place and quarterly returns are made. The highest numbers of complaints for 2000/01 were about the Bookfund (60), Buildings and Facilities (43), Procedures (31) and Opening Hours (18). The service managers respond to many comments in writing and where appropriate by telephoning the complainant. The library service does not, however, publish in libraries the action it proposes to take as a result of the comments received. We recommend that in every library there should be, either on a noticeboard or in a handout, a regular response setting out the comments received and the action proposed, or if no action is intended, why this is so.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The phrase “the dawn of a new era” is too often used with too little accuracy. In the case of the public library service, however, we think it can be used legitimately. For the first time since the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act, the Government has set standards which define the “comprehensive and efficient” service the County Council is required to ensure is provided. In addition to new standards, there are new policies and new initiatives. Later this year Government will issue its “Futures” paper setting out the priorities it thinks library services should pursue. Rarely, since they were first legally established in 1850, have public libraries been the centre of so much attention.
- 6.2 Unfortunately, this attention comes at a time when many public library services nationally, East Sussex among them, are not well funded. We welcome the Council’s first steps to improve the bookfund. We acknowledge that given the pressures on the County Council’s finances, this has not been an easy decision

but we think from our investigations that they will prove popular with many members of the public.

- 6.3 We would like to thank all those who have contributed to this review of the public library service. The main participants are listed in Paragraph 5.2. Our particular thanks are due to the members of the public who offered views in person, in writing or through surveys. The staff of the service shared their experiences and perceptions openly. The managers of the service were helpful and gave freely of their time and knowledge. As this report demonstrates, they have achieved much in what at times have been difficult circumstances. They are due credit for doing so.
- 6.4 Our aim, and the aim of any Best Value review, must be to improve the service to the public. It is in that context that we have made our recommendations.



**7. Action Plan – Part 1 – Recommendations for the Council**

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target  Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R1.	<i>A service specification covering all aspects of the public library service should be compiled by the Director of L &amp; CS at the end of the process of reconciling policy and resources for 2003/2004. Following this, staffing levels and opening hours should be reviewed to ensure the most effective spread of resources and reported to Cabinet by April 2003</i>							
R2	<i>Means whereby Hastings Library can be replaced should be given a high priority and external and other funding sources pursued to allow its replacement.</i>							
R3	<i>The programme of investment in the book stock, begun in the budget for 2002/03, should be continued until such a time that allows the council to achieve the national library standard.</i>							
R4	The offer by the Chief Library Adviser at DCMS to meet a delegation from the Council to discuss how the Library Standards can be met should be accepted and a report on the outcome submitted to Council by December 2002.							
R5	The case for the library service to continue to be in Legal & Community Services is not proven. There should be a more widespread review of the Council's structure before any long term decision is taken regarding the position of the public library service.							

### 7.1 Action Plan Part 1 Recommendations for management

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R1.	As part of the revision of the Medium Term Action Plan and in view of its financial position, the library service should concentrate its efforts on fewer objectives.							
R2	Service managers must ensure that staff are aware of corporate and service objectives and must convey with greater emphasis the Council's vision of the service in the future.							
R3	The service implement its earlier proposal to establish a centralised system for receiving telephone enquiries and for handling loan renewals by September 2002.							
R4	Intranet content management should remain within the library service but there should be a clear separation from operational management of this and other ICT based systems.							
R5	There should be a joint acquisition, conservation and storage policy agreed between the library service and the archives by December 2002.							

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R6	<i>An evaluation of the new arrangements for the Music service within Libraries should be carried out after six months and the findings acted upon. There should be public consultation regarding the music service to be offered from the new Library,</i>							
R7	We recommend that the library service and the Education Department continue to review opportunities for joint school/public libraries and a joint report on the programme be proposed for COMT by December 2002.							
R8	A review of the Equal Access Service to identify how it may more adequately meet the needs of the elderly and the housebound should be undertaken. This should include examination of its organisation and methods of service delivery, its resources and staffing needs. The findings of the review to be reported to COMT by April 2003.							
R9	The need for modifications and enhancements to the library service's IT system should be pursued urgently by both the library service and corporate IT. The specification for a replacement system should state the need for improved management information for <i>Library services within the corporate framework</i>							

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R10	<i>When the management arrangements of the Library service is restructured there should still be an identified “head of service”.</i> The responsibilities of senior managers should be reviewed and that the roles of the Group Managers and levels of decision making should be examined. The function of Reader Development should be represented on the management team.							
R11	The Lead Cabinet Member for Community Services, together with the Director of Legal & Community Services and senior managers in the library service, jointly draw up a communications plan that will provide for more active engagement with the staff by Councillors and managers. The plan to be completed by August 2002. Staff views to be sought again within 12 months.							
R12	The marketing strategy currently being prepared by the library service should address the need for a more long term approach to sponsorship and to promotion and that the service adopts a more flamboyant style of publicity.							
R13	Benchmarking services against those of similar Authorities should be pursued further and that an annual plan for benchmarking be drawn up, setting out which services are to be covered and with which Authorities they will be compared.							

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R14	By August 2002, the strategic responsibility for management information should be vested in one senior manager and that an identified management information officer undertake the collection and dissemination of such data. By October 2002, the library service's existing management information plan be updated and incorporate both IT and manual sources.							
R15	<i>More regular consultation with users and non-users of service should be undertaken. A report on consultation undertaken to be prepared for Cabinet by September 2002.</i>							
R16	By August 2002, every library should have, either on a notice board or in a leaflet, a regular response setting out the comments received from users and the action proposed, or if no action is intended why this is so.							



# Part 2

# Best Value Review

# Schools Library

# Service

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## A Report by the Audit & Best Value Scrutiny Committee

Project Board:  
Cllr J Birch (chair)  
Cllr R Martin  
Cllr R Stevens  
Cllr J Waite

May 2002







## **PART 2**

### **BEST VALUE REVIEW SCHOOLS LIBRARY SERVICE**

#### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 We believe that this is a well managed and well organised service that demonstrates consistency, energy and imagination. We commend the service manager and her staff.
- 1.2 The Schools Library Service (SLS) is funded by selling its services to schools in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove LEA's. As a self-funding service it must be alert to the cost of its activities and flexible as regards the needs of its customers: we are confident that this is the case. We have not found evidence of poor financial control and have not been able to identify cash savings. We have, however, made recommendations that we believe will further improve the management and administration of an already well run service.

#### **1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **1. Planning:**

The manager should have a more direct role in the preparation of the Education Development Plan and that the Education Department addresses this issue by September 2002. (para 2.2.1.)

##### **2. Customers:**

The SLS should again investigate whether a market exists to offer additional services to independent schools and report on progress to COMT in July 2002. (para 2.3.3.)

##### **3. Services:**

The SLS should consult regularly with schools to ensure that the concentration on books and no other media is acceptable to them. (para 2.4.3.)

##### **4. Service Agreements:**

Whilst three years would be a desirable objective, an initial transfer to two year agreements in East Sussex would improve planning, assist in staff recruitment, reduce the administration burden and increase the time available for marketing. (para 2.7.3.)

##### **5. Communication:**

As the relationship between the SLS and the County Council's Education Department is wider than a purely business one, the service manager should have regular contact at the level of Assistant Director. (para 2.8.2.)

**6. Marketing:**

The service manager and the Business Manager of Services to Schools should consider how they ensure that the relevant staff in schools are aware of services and prices. (para 2.8.5.)

**7. Outsourcing:**

Whilst the proposal to outsource Support for Schools does not include the Schools Library Service, none-the-less the potential impact on the SLS should be examined jointly by the service manager and the Education Department by June 2002. (para 2.8.6.)

**8. Comparison:**

SLS extend its benchmarking exercise to school library services in other counties in the region and in the Audit Commission family group. (para 3.4.1.)

**9. Quality Systems:**

SLS should develop by December 2002 additional indicators to measure its performance. (para 3.5.3)

**10. Competition:**

The future delivery of the service should be kept under review. Extended co-operation with neighbouring authorities should be investigated by April 2003. (para 4.2.2.)

**11. Consultation:**

Consultation with users and non-users should be more consistently developed and that user groups or a service review group be established by September 2002, together with regular surveys of user satisfaction. (para 5.4.1.)

## **2. WHY AND HOW THE COUNCIL PROVIDES THE SERVICE**

### **2.1. Statutory Position**

2.1.1. There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide a Schools Library Service. The service exists to offer schools “a cost effective means of access to quality books to support the curriculum and to encourage enjoyment of reading, as well an advisory service to support school improvement.” (Extract from the Pre-Review Position Statement).

2.1.2. Guidance from OFSTED published in August 2001 highlighted the importance of the school library. It requests OFSTED Inspectors to assess the impact of the school library on pupils’ learning and standards and to explore any apparent under-use of the library and its resources. In this context the important role of the Schools Library Service has been re-inforced.

### **2.2. Objectives**

2.2.1. The Schools Library Service has its own Business Plan. The objectives within the Plan reflect priorities identified in the Annual Library Plan of Library, Information & Arts and the Education Development Plan. We believe there is linkage between the aims and objectives of the SLS and those of the Council, expressed through the Annual Library Plan and the Education Development Plan. However, the manager of the SLS has no input to the formulation of the Education Development Plan and can only react to the priorities. We recommend that the manager should have a more active role and that the Education Department addresses this issue.

### **2.3. Customers**

2.3.1. The SLS is available to all schools, but primarily directs its attention to local education authority maintained primary, secondary and special schools in East Sussex and in Brighton & Hove. Currently, 70% of schools in East Sussex and 65% in Brighton & Hove have a full subscription or receive a package of services to meet their needs. The service additionally provides collections of books to residential children’s homes.

2.3.2. The service is also available to nursery schools and to playgroups. Three LEA nursery schools subscribe, as well as one independent nursery and the service supplies books to nursery classes in primary schools. Playgroups can obtain a free service from the public library and are, therefore, reluctant to subscribe to the Schools Library Service. The SLS is currently discussing with the Sure Start programme their requirements were they to subscribe to the service.

2.3.3. The SLS has previously marketed itself to independent schools in the county but received little take-up. At present no independent schools subscribe fully although a small number buy the current awareness service and an occasional topic loan collection. The SLS has also sold its current awareness service to an independent school in West Sussex. Whilst we recognise that the SLS is always alert to new opportunities, we feel the major marketing exercise was some time

ago and the time may be apposite to try again. We suggest this be initiated through providing training courses and current awareness days.

2.3.4. The SLS produces a regular newsletter that is sent to all LEA schools in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, whether or not they subscribe to the service. This is considered an important marketing tool and is additionally sent to purchasers of the current awareness service, including independent schools who subscribe solely for that purpose. It is also sent to chairs of governors and to public libraries. We would like to see the newsletter more widely available within the Education Department, particularly amongst the School Improvement Team.

## **2.4. Services**

2.4.1. The SLS provides project loans and bulk fiction collections. It has a stock of approximately 270,000 books which we found to be relevant to schools' needs and in good condition. The positive effect of regular stock editing is evident. The SLS is currently writing a stock policy. We welcome this step which we feel will aid consistency of selection, use and disposal.

2.4.2. A customised mobile library visits primary schools to exchange fiction stock. The service also uses a smaller transit van for deliveries and collections from schools. Both vehicles are leased. During holiday periods they are used for promotions and stock work in schools.

2.4.3. In other local authorities it is not unusual for the schools library service to offer additional services such as videos, audio material, software and CD-ROMs. The SLS in East Sussex has taken a decision to offer a quality service in one area rather than spread its resources thinly across a wider range of materials. Given there are often alternative suppliers for other media, we understand this position. However, we feel the SLS should consult regularly with schools to ensure this is acceptable to them.

2.4.4. The SLS offers advice and support in all aspects of library provision in schools. This includes talks to children and parents to encourage reading, training for teachers and school librarians, promotions and exhibitions. The service offers advice on the use of ICT in school libraries and itself uses ALICE, a library management system used by most secondary schools. Its training course "Computerising Your School Library" is run twice a year for up to 15 teachers and can be over-subscribed. Attendance at other courses, which are held in different areas, varies according to subject and location.

2.4.5. Until June 2001 the SLS operated from two bases, one in Hove and the other in Eastbourne. After a feasibility study it was decided in order to make economies to close the base at Hove. This has resulted in annual savings of £15,000 on premises. We raised the effect of this closure with schools and the Education Department in Brighton & Hove. There does not appear to be any serious concern. Whilst there was some expression that "it would be nice to have a local base", in effect the delivery of the service to the school, and the infrequency with which teachers were able to visit the Hove base, has meant that very few customers are disturbed by the change. The SLS is to be commended on its handling of this development.

## **2.5. Stock procurement**

- 2.5.1. The SLS acquires its stock from Approvals collections supplied by two specialist children's booksellers and from visits to the showrooms of major library suppliers to select stock from the shelves. In 2000/01, 45% of the stock budget was spent on purchases from Approvals collections and 55% on visits to showrooms and other booksellers. The Approvals collections are supplied on a "sale or return" basis from the same suppliers of children's stock for public libraries. The choice of these two suppliers was as the result of a competitive tendering exercise to determine the most advantageous arrangements for East Sussex as a member of the Central Buying Consortium.
- 2.5.2. Because of the nature of the market and the specialities of various suppliers, different suppliers are used for different categories of stock. We found that the service manager is aware of the advantages of each supplier and pays close attention to the volatility of the market. Two companies have gone into receivership in the past two years but because of the research undertaken before any contractual arrangements, this has not seriously impacted on the SLS. Existing arrangements are due to end in March 2005. The service manager is surveying remaining supply companies carefully and will work with the County Council's Head of Procurement to ensure the most beneficial arrangements are obtained.

## **2.6. Management structure**

- 2.6.1. The SLS is the responsibility of a service manager, working to the Head of Life Long Learning, who is a second tier officer within Libraries, Information & Arts which is part of the Directorate of Legal & Community Services. Of the 29 county authorities that responded to the most recent survey undertaken by the Library & Information Statistics Unit of Loughborough University, East Sussex SLS was amongst 22 within the remit of the head of the library service (which should be taken to mean public libraries), albeit some were separate business units. The most common alternative was placement within the Education Department.
- 2.6.2. The logic for the SLS being part of the remit of the Head of Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion is clear. In the present structure of Library, Information & Arts we do not feel there is a more appropriate position. The arrangement offers managerial and professional support in the wider area of library services to children and education. However, whilst the SLS works with the public library service where appropriate, they are not closely integrated and the reason for this is obvious: the SLS is a self-funding service orientated to schools. It offers discreet services to a specific client group and has neither the staff time nor resources to participate in regular cross sector activities.
- 2.6.3. The structure within the SLS is valid and meets the needs of the service. The division of work on the ground is never as clear as the usual description "management, professional and support" may suggest but we are satisfied that the service has addressed the necessary changes to the structure that resulted from its move to a self-funding basis. However, two aspects are of concern: the first is the overall number of posts, which is low but obviously related to the

available budget. The second is the grading of posts, which appear at the low end of the range compared to similar posts in other Authorities. This is, and will increasingly be, a major factor when recruiting professional staff.

## **2.7. Budget**

- 2.7.1. Currently, primary and secondary schools receive 85% of their budget as delegated funds (which can be used for any purpose) and 15% as devolved funding (within which are funds to be spent with the SLS). Secondary schools receive 100% delegated funds. In the present financial year the Schools Library Service has assured income of £15,000 from East Sussex CC and £12,400 from Brighton & Hove. All other funds are achieved by selling services to schools.
- 2.7.2. In common with most other SLS, East Sussex offers a variety of charging mechanisms to schools, including full and part subscriptions and "pay as you use". This year the SLS is scheduled to receive income of £476,000; in 2000/2001 income totalled £464,000. The main areas of expenditure are staffing (£274,000), bookfund (£71,000) and premises (£69,000). All costs of the service are borne by this budget, including a recharge to Corporate IT (£19,000). Additionally there are recharges to Legal & Community Services and to Library, Information & Arts.
- 2.7.3. The recharge to Library, Information & Arts totals £8,226 for 2001/02. It includes payments for property services (£1,000), to Corporate Resources for accountancy services (£1,836), a proportion of the ICT wide area network (£1,607), CSL for payroll, creditors and debtors' payments (£1,679), and the courier service (£716). The remainder is made up of a variety of smaller sums. All the larger charges are based on actual usage as is the recharge to Legal & Community Services. This is for £2,500 for personnel services (£600), strategic financial advice from the Head of Resources (£1,100) and financial support in putting the budget together, monitoring, some central payments and accounting adjustments (£800).
- 2.7.4. After an initial period of three-year agreements, since 2001 the length of service agreements with all schools in East Sussex has been changed to one year. This does not provide for a stable basis for the service and inhibits even medium term planning. Long term planning is impossible. From 2002 the SLS will have two year agreements with schools in Brighton and Hove; that authority is currently consulting with its schools on moving to three year contracts. Whilst a return to a three year agreement with ESCC schools would be desirable, an initial transfer to two year agreements would improve security, assist in staff recruitment, reduce the administration burden and increase the time available for marketing. We recommend that this issue should be pursued.

## **2.8. Links with the Education Department**

- 2.8.1. On a number of occasions whilst in discussion with SLS staff it was stressed to us that in relation to the Education Department the service is isolated, both geographically and, more significantly, in terms of communication. To deal with the less important issue first: whilst central to the county as a whole, the service base is some way from County Hall. Whilst the Director of Education and a

- former Assistant Director have visited the service, few other senior managers or advisors have done so.
- 2.8.2. Within the Education Department the service manager liaises with the Business Manager of the Services to Schools Unit. That this is a positive and supportive relationship there is no doubt. The Business Manager is an evangelist for the SLS, willing to market its services beyond the production of a brochure. We feel that the SLS service manager must indeed work closely with the manager of Services to Schools but the service manager also needs contact with someone at Assistant Director level. This person would be able to advise on changes in education policy, the construction of the Education Development Plan and impending mergers, closures or opening of schools. They would also be a voice for the SLS in the Education Department Management Team.
  - 2.8.3. We noted the successful arrangements operating between the SLS and the Education Department of Brighton & Hove at Assistant Director level. There is a formal twice yearly meeting and informal contact when necessary. In saying that we feel the County Council's Education Department should follow this example, we wish to add that this is no criticism of the current role of the Business Manager of Services to Schools. He will continue to play a significant part in marketing the SLS and in regular liaison with the service manager.
  - 2.8.4. We noted that the SLS has no input into the Education Development Plan. The SLS staff would welcome more involvement in Education Department planning, in INSET days, and in opportunities to publicise the service within the department.
  - 2.8.5. Initial contact with schools in East Sussex over SLS service agreements is through the Services to Schools unit within the Education Department. SLS staff reported that some schools do not appear to be aware of the packages and prices of services available. We do not doubt the efficiency of the Services to Schools unit in distributing their brochure within which these are contained. However, we feel some further check that the relevant staff in schools are aware of services and prices would be useful. We recommend that the service manager and the Business Manager of Services to Schools consider how this could be done.
  - 2.8.6. During the course of the review it was discovered that the Education Department was examining the future of the School Improvement Team with a view to possibly outsourcing its delivery. We understand that this proposal does not include the Schools Library Service. None-the-less, we believe the potential impact on the SLS should be examined.

### **3. COMPARISON**

#### **3.1. National comparisons**

3.1.1. As regards schools library services, there are few national comparators of like with like. Apparent comparisons fail to make clear the differences contained within them. Key amongst these is the degree to which full service costs have not been identified in some services. For example, hidden subsidies can occur if the manager is deemed an Education Advisor, as in West Sussex, and the salary for the post met from the centrally retained education budget. In Kent the head of the SLS is also head of children's services for the public library service. The post is thus funded jointly by both services, not from the SLS income alone. Further, whilst some services pay a commercial rent, others are based on premises owned by the public library service for which no recharge is made. We found the costs of the service in East Sussex to be fully identified and this must be borne in mind when comparing costs against other local authorities.

#### **3.2. Recent developments**

3.2.1. Faced with such variances in costing, the Association of School, Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) has recently produced draft performance indicators for school library services. Its proposals bring together existing performance indicators, principally the data collected by OFSTED, and proposes new ones. Those indicators developed in the past have primarily been quantitative measures of inputs and outputs. ASCEL has endeavoured to develop qualitative measures that will measure the impact of schools library services on schools and school libraries. Unfortunately, the pilot study only began in April 2001 and thus no results are yet available.

#### **3.3. Available data**

3.3.1. The main source of national comparator information at the moment is the annual survey of public and school library services undertaken by Library & Information Statistics Unit. We examined the most recently available data for the year 1999-2000 for school library services provided by English county councils. Bearing in mind that they do not always represent a comparison of like with like, we noted the following:

- In 1999/2000 East Sussex SLS received 77% of its funding from schools; of those services funded in this way, only 6 of 39 achieved a higher percentage.
- 73% of primary schools in East Sussex bought the full service and 8% a part service. This compared with a national average of 83% and 4% respectively for 1999/2000.
- 50% of secondary schools bought the full service and 39% a part service. This compared with the national average of 64% and 14% respectively.



- 78% of special schools bought the full service (none bought a part service), which was the same as the national average.
- In 1999/2000 in East Sussex SLS stock per pupil was 4.3; the national average was 3.39. *This figure will reduce as a result of a stock audit in 2001 carried out to remove “dead” stock.*
- 46.9% of East Sussex SLS stock was on loan to schools on 31 March 2000; the national average was 62.2%. *This figure will have improved following the stock audit; in addition, unlike some other services, the East Sussex SLS does not count stock held by schools on “permanent loan”.*
- Additions of stock per pupil were 0.27 in East Sussex against a national average of 0.34.
- In East Sussex 54% of SLS expenditure was on staff, 19% on materials and 27% on other headings; this compares with the national average of 44% on staff, 38% on materials and 18% on other headings. *This figure predates the closure of the Hove base, the cost of which distorts the “other” category. The necessity to hold posts vacant to remain within budget will also reduce the percentage spent on staffing.*
- The issue of books per head in East Sussex schools is 3.6; the national average is 2.8. *In West Sussex the figure is 2.3.*

3.3.2. We noted that the service manager was aware of these statistics and used them in planning the service. We are confident that national and regional comparisons are regularly used by the SLS to assess its performance.

### **3.4. Benchmarking**

3.4.1. We also examined a benchmarking exercise undertaken by the Schools Library Service in West Sussex in 2000 in which it compared its services and costs against those of East Sussex. Whilst the report is flawed through the inclusion of incorrect data relating to the East Sussex service and the conclusions which it draws from these, it none-the-less offers some interesting contrasts and alternative methods of service provision. We think this type of exercise could be extended to school library services in other counties in the region and in the Audit Commission family group.

### 3.5. Quality systems

- 3.5.1. As regards its project collections, the SLS relies heavily on feedback received from schools through evaluation forms enclosed with the collection. These tend to confirm informal verbal and written comments from schools in indicating a high level of satisfaction. Returns for the Summer Term 2001 were typical: 77% of primary, 76% of secondary and 68% of special schools rated the collections they received as being “very well” suited to their needs. However, these figures must be seen in the context of the number of collections issued and the number of evaluation forms returned. For the same term the figures were:

Schools	Collections issued	Evaluation forms
Primary	1,400	344 (23%)
Secondary	167	17 (10%)
Special	134	31 (23%)

Based on these figures, we suggest the level of returned evaluation forms is too low to be a reliable guide to the success of the topic collections. Even though they follow the same trend as most verbal and written comments, we believe the SLS should take additional steps to assess its performance and to use that feedback to identify weaknesses and to aid continuing improvement.

- 3.5.2. Similar evaluation arrangements to monitor reactions to INSET and other training activities are in place. The project managers examined a selection of INSET evaluation reports from teachers and school librarians who attended courses run by the SLS in 2001. The percentage returned is higher than for topic collections but could not be said to be fully representative. However, a low return of evaluation forms is a familiar experience to anyone who has organised a training course and in itself this is not an area for concern. As regards the INSET evaluation forms that we examined, the marks allocated to the course as a whole, to the organisation of the course and to the relevance of the course to the attendee’s job were consistently high: usually 3 or 4 out of 4. Additional comments were positive and praising of the staff involved. The only area which received lower than 3 out of 4 was the catering arrangements but even this occurred on only two forms and both were on the same course.
- 3.5.3. Evaluation was extended to the performance of advisory services and mobile library visits in September 2001. As a result of comments on evaluation forms, librarians often contact schools to determine how improvements could be made in the future but as in the case of topic evaluation, this is essentially a passive system reliant on the customer completing form. The service also notes comments expressed directly to visiting librarians or received in telephone calls or correspondence.

- 3.5.3. Whilst all such feedback is important in providing both a general background as to how the service is perceived by schools, and a specific measure of the success of the project collections, it is not a suitable measure to be used methodically to ensure continuous service improvement. We feel the service should develop qualitative indicators to provide a balance to its present systems. Individual opinion is always important but it is always subjective and the SLS needs to be able to demonstrate its success through more impartial measurement.

## **4. COMPETITION**

### **4.1. Service in neighbouring authorities**

- 4.1.1. There are schools library services in West Sussex and Kent; there is no similar service in Surrey. Throughout England there is a voluntary agreement between services not to market themselves to schools outside the geographical boundaries of their parents authority. This agreement is observed between East Sussex and the neighbouring authorities.
- 4.1.2. The SLS in West Sussex offers a similar range of services to schools as the East Sussex SLS, albeit offers bulk collections of non-fiction but not fiction. In East Sussex the position is reversed. Both services undertake INSET and other training, systems support and advisory work. Kent offers a consultancy service, pre-packed topic loan collections and a large video loan service.

### **4.2. Possible future arrangements**

- 4.2.1. In the wake of the Government's intention that local education authorities should move towards being strategic rather than provider bodies, the future of services such as the SLS is under review at a number of levels. These include government as well as professional bodies. In addition, budget pressures call for greater co-operation between services at neighbouring or regional level to achieve economies of scale. This could range from joint purchasing arrangements to specific projects to a formal, more enduring, agreement regarding service provision.
- 4.2.2. Such considerations are at an early stage and are hindered by an in-built determination in many local authorities to provide the service themselves. In the longer term, this cannot be in the best interest of the customer. Whilst some examples of joint provision of school library services exists in London, and has also emerged amongst new unitary councils, neither in the case of trusts nor in the private sector is there yet evidence that there is a real alternative to the present position. However, we recommend that the future delivery of the service should be kept under review and that co-operation with neighbouring authorities should be investigated.

## 5. CONSULTATION

### 5.1. Evidence received

5.1.1. The Project Board met on 25 September to consider the Pre-Review Position Statement of the Service Manager and to receive evidence from the lead Cabinet member. The Project Board interviewed the Service Manager on 23 October, after which members of the Board visited the service base at Hammonds Drive, Eastbourne and attended a staff meeting. The Project Board interviewed the Director of Education on 29 January 2002.

5.1.2. The project managers interviewed a senior advisor from the Education Department, the Business Manager of the Services to Schools Unit and the Assistant Director of Education for Brighton & Hove City Council. They met with the service manager on a number of occasions and liaised with key members of her staff throughout the review.

### 5.2. Survey of users

5.2.1. We had hoped to arrange meetings of schools using, and not using, the Service. As a result of the timing of the review in the period leading to Christmas and of the problems for schools in sending representatives even to late afternoon or evening meetings, this proposal was abandoned. Instead, the project managers studied the results of a survey of schools recently undertaken by the Education Department that contained comments on the Schools Library Service. Overall the SLS proved to be valued and appreciated for being flexible in matching a service package to the funds available.

Of those who commented on the Schools Library service:

- 26 rated the service “very good”
- 36 rated the service “good”
- 11 rated the service “average”
- 0 rated the service “poor” or “very poor”.

5.2.2. Additional comments from schools included:

*“Very supportive, making a significant contribution to improving our school” (Jarvis Brook)*

*“couldn’t do without them ” (Priory School, Lewes)*

*“always quick and very efficient” (Robertsbridge CC)*

*“probably have to cut this year because of budget restraints. Sorry, because we like this service.” (Holy Cross Cof E Primary School)*

A small minority of the comments about the SLS was critical, including:

*"Book stock quite tatty"* (Peacehaven Infants)

*"Not had a lot of support – maybe half termly contact to Literacy coordinator to check on needs."* (Sedlescombe )

*"Range of books very limited to what I had at previous school."*  
(Elphinstone)

- 5.2.3 Additionally, the project managers received written comments from a random selection of schools and spoke on the telephone to several others. The project managers also spoke to four primary schools and two secondary schools that do not use the Schools Library Service to ascertain their reasons for not doing so. These were primarily financial or, in the case of the secondary schools, because they employed their own librarian and perceived no need to use the Service.

### **5.3. Other comments**

- 5.3.1. The SLS receives unsolicited letters of praise throughout the year. These have recently included:

*"many thanks for your excellent choice of books"* (St Peter's Infants, Portslade-by-Sea)

*"in common with other schools, our experience of the effect of increased delegation this year, has been that the costs to us of "buying back in" under the services to schools package has increased, in some cases significantly. We have therefore had to decide what we can and can't afford under these financial constraints. Our decision should not be interpreted as dissatisfaction with your service."* (Five Ashes CofE Primary School, Mayfield)

### **5.4. Contact with schools**

- 5.4.1. We are aware that the SLS staff seek the views of schools on service developments when visiting or working with them. However regular, this is inevitably a somewhat informal arrangement. Currently, the SLS does not hold formal user groups, there is no service review group and regular surveys of user satisfaction are not undertaken. The survey by the Education Department of all services sold to schools, whilst useful, is a broad study and limited in the areas it covers. Whilst we recognise the difficulties schools have in sending representatives to meetings, and that past efforts by the SLS have foundered for this reason, we are of the view that consultation with users and non-users should be more consistently developed and recommend that this issue be addressed.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1. Our conclusions and recommendations regarding the improvement of this service are contained within the body of the report.
  
- 6.2. The Project Board would like to thank all those who contributed to this review. In particular it is grateful to the service manager and her staff who responded positively, provided information freely and often made their time available at short notice. The Board is also grateful to the schools and representatives of the Education Departments both in the County Council and in Brighton & Hove City Council, who contributed their experience and opinions freely and openly. The willingness of all concerned to participate in the review and to consider options for further improvement in the service is to be commended.

7. Action Plan – Part 2 – Schools Library Service

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R1.	The manager should have a more direct role in the preparation of the Education Development Plan and that the Education Department addresses this issue by September 2002.							
R2	The SLS should again investigate whether a market exists to offer additional services to independent schools and report on progress to COMT in July 2002.							
R3	The SLS should consult regularly with schools to ensure that the concentration on books and no other media is acceptable to them.							
R4	Whilst three years would be a desirable objective, an initial transfer to two year agreements in East Sussex would improve planning, assist in staff recruitment, reduce the administration burden and increase the time available for marketing.							
R5	As the relationship between the SLS and the County Council's Education Department is wider than a purely business one, the service manager should have regular contact at the level of Assistant Director.							
R6	The service manager and the Business Manager of Services to Schools should consider how they ensure that the relevant staff in schools are aware of services and							

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R7	Whilst the proposal to outsource Support for Schools does not include the Schools Library Service, none-the-less the potential impact on the SLS should be examined jointly by the service manager and the Education Department by June 2002.							
R8	SLS extend its benchmarking exercise to school library services in other counties in the region and in the Audit Commission family group.							
R9	SLS should develop by December 2002 additional indicators to measure its performance.							
R10	The future delivery of the service should be kept under review. Extended co-operation with neighbouring authorities should be investigated by April 2003.							
R11	Consultation with users and non-users should be more consistently developed and that user groups or a service review group be established by September 2002, together with regular surveys of user satisfaction.							





# Part 3

## Best Value Review

### Support for the Arts

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## A Report by the Audit & Best Value Scrutiny Committee

Project Board:

Cllr J Birch (chair)  
Cllr R Martin  
Cllr R Stevens  
Cllr J Waite

May 2002



## **PART 3**

### **SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS**

#### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 We believe that this is a responsive and well organised service and we commend the Arts Officer. The services provided are much appreciated both within the local arts community and further afield. Whether comments came from arts organisations or from other local authorities, they were positive and supportive.
- 1.2 We noted that the County Council's role in supporting the arts had changed in recent years from funding and managing projects to a more strategic and enabling role. This change is continuing as the budget for arts grants diminishes and the importance of the statutory Cultural Strategy grows. We do not believe the significant role the arts play in economic regeneration has previously been fully recognised and we propose this should be rectified.
- 1.3 Within the arts budget, we have not found evidence of waste and have not been able to identify cash savings. We have, however, made recommendations that may further improve the management and administration of the service.

#### **1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Cultural Strategy:**

A standing officer group should be formed by June 2002 to monitor the progress of the Cultural Strategy. The group should be chaired by a Chief Officer. (Para 4.2.)

2. **Economic development:**

Support for the Arts should be transferred to the Economic Development Unit by June 2002. (Para 6.2.2.)

3. **Arts grants criteria:**

Whilst we are satisfied that the criteria for arts grants are valid, we recommend these should be reviewed annually to ensure that such budget as exists for this purpose is effectively targeted to meet the objectives of the Council. (Para 6.3.1.)

4. **Arts grants activity reports:**

It should be a requirement for those in receipt of grant aid to send a report of their activity to the Arts Officer. This be implemented for grants made in 2002/3. (Para 6.3.2.)

**5. Training:**

Support for the Arts should build on their existing practice by undertaking a wider survey to identify the training needs of the arts community in East Sussex and drawing up a strategy to meet them by September 2002. This would include identifying external sources of funding. (Para 6.4.)

## **2. WHY AND HOW THE COUNCIL PROVIDES THE SERVICE**

### **2.1. Statutory position**

2.1.1 There is no statutory requirement for the Council to support the Arts. However, there is a requirement by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport for the Council to develop a Cultural Strategy and for this to be in place by 2002. The Cabinet approved the County Council's Draft Cultural Strategy on 20 November 2001.

### **2.2. Customers**

2.2.1 The natural "customers" of Support for the Arts are those working in the arts, professional and amateur, and those in the cultural and creative industries based in East Sussex. Support for the Arts works with companies, individuals, professional groups, local arts organisations (including village halls), the regional arts body, other departments of the County Council, the borough and district councils in East Sussex, other County Councils across the region and appropriate national bodies.

### **2.3. Services**

2.3.1. The work undertaken by Support for the Arts is of key importance in the economic regeneration of East Sussex through the creative industries, cultural tourism and environmental enhancement. Through its activities it adds to the quality of life for residents and adds value for visitors. It achieves this through the following areas of activity.

2.3.2. Firstly, drawing together and maintaining the Council's Cultural Strategy. This is wider than the usual concept of the arts, additionally encompassing museums, the built heritage, archives, libraries, festivals, leisure pursuits, sport, countryside recreation and wildlife habitats. The development of the strategy, which requires extensive consultation within and outside the Council, is key to securing external funding to support additional jobs in the cultural sector.

2.3.3. Secondly, advice on applications for lottery funding which are referred to the County Council by the regional body, South East Arts. Lottery funding is a prime source for both capital and revenue funding for arts and heritage projects. Support for the Arts works in partnership with the district arts officers to add support to projects such as the re-development of the De La Warr Pavilion. On the revenue side, it is part of a consortium of councils which has successfully bid for Lottery funding for a two year Youth Dance Project. In 2000/01 the Arts Officer was involved in 53 arts and 2 heritage bids, which attracted £4.26 million in funding with a further £2.5 million allocated for 2001/02 through the Arts Capital Programme. The same fund will be providing £550,000 for the proposed Regional Literature Centre in the new Lewes Library, a significant contribution to a project costing £3 millions.

2.3.4. Thirdly, the annual processing of applications for arts grants from professional arts groups, local organisations and others who meet the published criteria. In

2000/01 72 applications were received and 36 grants awarded. The Arts Officer ensures the validity of the application and considers it in the light of comments from regional, county and district colleagues. This process was previously supervised by Councillors through the Arts Panel.

- 2.3.5. Fourthly, the provision of advice and training to arts organisers. An average of 25 letters and telephone calls are received each week seeking advice on funding, venues and programmes. These requests derive both from those within the county and from promoters and groups intending to visit. In the past year there have been three training days for organisers of local festivals; a fourth organised in conjunction with West Sussex Arts is being planned.
- 2.3.6. Lastly, although it is somewhat intangible, a key element of the work of Support for the Arts is acting as a bridge between the various disparate strands of the arts. Making connections takes time and requires extensive knowledge. We found the Arts Officer has little of the first but much of the second. From our surveys and in meetings with others in the arts community, we found the work of the Arts Officer as a focal point for enquiries and acting as a contact maker was highly valued. We noted that this role is often performed voluntarily and out of work hours. This level of commitment is deserving of recognition.

## **2.4. Objectives**

- 2.4.1 The Arts Officer works directly to the Head of Libraries, Information & Arts (HOLIA). Individual targets are set and monitored by the HOLIA. These are loosely linked to the wider targets for Library, Information & Arts.

## **2.5. Organisation**

- 2.5.1. Support for the Arts is a section within Libraries, Information & Arts, part of the Directorate of Legal & Community Affairs. A part time post for an Arts Officer, within the library service, was established in 1987. The role of the Arts Officer has evolved since then and continues to change. The post became full time in 1989 and a part time assistant was appointed in 1992.
- 2.5.2. Although Support for the Arts is within Libraries, Information & Arts, it is operationally separate. The Arts Officer is not a member of the LIA management team and has limited contact with the remainder of the services with which the unit is placed. There is liaison regarding Literature projects, and particularly over the proposed Regional Literature Centre in the new Lewes Library, but no more than would be the case were Arts to be the responsibility of another department.

## **2.6. Budget**

- 2.6.1. The budget is contained within that allocated to Library, Information & Arts. In 2000/01 total provision was £121,000. Staff costs accounted for £41,000. The subscription to the regional arts board was £20,000. The remaining £60,000 would have been available as grant aid to local organisations but £24,000 was held back towards the savings required of Libraries, Information & Arts. In contrast, the total arts budget in West Sussex is £221,000.

- 2.6.2. Comment was made to the Project Board that arts funding was scattered over different headings in various departments and was therefore greater than was apparent. The project managers investigated this claim and believe it to be based on a misapprehension. It is true that during the two years that a Corporate Bidding Fund existed, significant expenditure was allocated to arts projects, but this fund no longer exists. Within the Education Department there exists the Art & Museum Service for Schools, the Music Trust and the Escape Project. The latter enables children in the county to experience professional arts activities.
- 2.6.3. Neither the Art & Museum Service for Schools nor the Music Trust are available to the public or offer support for cultural activities beyond their immediate remit. The former is geared towards the curriculum needs of schools and the latter towards music for children at school. The Escape Project also works through schools, although the Arts Officer has been involved in its planning. Providing there is close co-operation and any duplication of activity is eliminated, we see no problem in such projects being funded and managed from within an appropriate service department.
- 2.6.4. There is no arts expenditure in any other department save that channeled through economic development projects to which there is reference elsewhere in Paragraph 2.7.2.
- 2.6.5. In considering the financial aspects of the Arts, it is worth drawing attention again to the considerable sums of external funding which is attracted into East Sussex as a result of Lottery bids, with which the Arts Officer is closely involved. (Paragraph 2.3.3. refers). Apart from its success with bids for capital funding, this year the Arts Officer has assisted local organisations to obtain £597,000 in revenue funding from South East Arts.

## **2.7. Links with other departments**

- 2.7.1. The Arts Officer works with other departments that have an interest in the arts in East Sussex, primarily Education. She attends the regular meetings each term between SE Arts and the Education Department, although recently contact with both the Education and Social Services departments has slowed. We regard this as worrying, particularly in the context of the Cultural Strategy.
- 2.7.2. As part of the work to create this, however, the Arts Officer has worked with the Sports Development Officer and has spoken directly with a number of schools on the community aspects of their bids for specialist status. Most significantly, the Arts Officer has recently worked with the Economic Development Unit to secure funding from SE Arts for a study to identify the extent of the cultural industries in the East Sussex coastal towns and their contribution to the local economy.

### **3. COMPARISON**

#### **3.1. National comparisons**

3.1.1 Any national comparison of expenditure on the arts is subject to inconsistencies and it is impossible to work on a “like-for-like” basis. Even staffing costs and the budget for grant aid can be difficult to compare directly as not all Authorities identify the budgets of individual services as precisely as East Sussex. We have attempted to compare budget provision and service responsibilities with other County Councils in the Audit Commission Family Group, supported by other comparitors where available.

#### **3.2. Expenditure in family group**

3.2.1. Of the 12 County Councils surveyed, only three (Derbyshire, Devon and Gloucestershire) spend less on staffing. These three employ one person; East Sussex employs one full time and one part time. In cash terms the difference is not significant. Kent and Bedfordshire each employ five staff, while Dorset employs four.

3.2.2. The budget for grant aid to local and regional organisations varies greatly. Devon has a budget of £350,000, Somerset £209,000, Gloucestershire £161,000 and West Sussex £134,000. Only one Council, Bedfordshire, had a budget for arts grants smaller than that in East Sussex.

3.2.3. Of the twelve Councils surveyed, four, including East Sussex, had no budget available to initiate their own promotions or to fund specific projects. In the other eight Councils the budget for this varied from £90,000 in Kent to £10,000 in Derbyshire. In West Sussex the budget for development and promotion is £86,500. This includes £8,000 for partnership initiatives, £8.500 for Youth Arts and £10,000 for Arts & Disabilities.

3.2.4. In contrast to its own budget provision for the arts, East Sussex was fourth highest for the amount of revenue funding the arts had attracted from the Lottery or regional arts board. Only Kent with £5 million, Devon, who estimated their income to be around £1.1 million but admitted this was not calculated “by a sound method”, and Gloucestershire were higher. As shown in paragraph 2.6.5, organisations in East Sussex received £597,000 in revenue funding. This compares favourably with Councils who have additional staff to support the bidding process.

#### **3.3. Cultural Strategy**

3.3.1. We were interested to compare how the twelve County Councils had approached the preparation of their Cultural Strategy. In nine Councils, including East Sussex, the project was led by Arts or Cultural Services Officers. In Somerset an Assistant Chief Executive co-ordinated a cross-departmental working team and in Devon a Policy Development Officer within the Environment Directorate led the preparation.



- 3.3.2. The position regarding the funding of the work necessary to create the Cultural Strategy is varied. Only two – East Sussex and Devon – had not allocated any funding for the work and had expected it to be undertaken within existing resources. In Derbyshire a consortium of the County and district councils produced a budget of £27,000. Similar arrangements in Gloucestershire made £15,000 available (£5,000 coming from the County Council), £20,000 in Warwickshire (£5,000 from the County Council) and £18,000 in Somerset (£6,000 from the County Council). West Sussex engaged external consultants to produce the Cultural Strategy with a budget of £15,000. Worcestershire allocated £25,000.
- 3.3.3. In the light of the funding provided by other Councils to enable the preparation of the Cultural Strategy to proceed, the achievement of the Arts Officer in East Sussex is all the more notable. Whilst a cross-departmental group existed in East Sussex, there was no significant input from other departments apart from information gathering by the Economic Development Unit.

## **4. COMPETITION**

### **4.1. Who else?**

- 4.1.1 At one level we concluded there is no competition to the work of the Support for the Arts. The County Council is in a unique position to co-ordinate developments and to respond to regional initiatives or requests for a county wide overview. At another level, there are a number of different elements that could be viewed as competitors operating over the same ground. Taking the work of Support for the Arts as set out in paragraph 2.3, as a basis the prime competitors could be considered to be as follows.

### **4.2. Cultural Strategy**

- 4.2.1 Now that it has been drafted, the work of monitoring and developing the Cultural Strategy could be delegated to another department or another officer or even to external consultants. It does not have to be undertaken by the Arts Officer, although given her knowledge and experience of a majority of the areas it covers, this is a logical place for the responsibility to rest. The work should be developed through a cross-departmental working group and to ensure it has sufficient authority, we suggest a Chief Officer should chair the group.

### **4.3. Advice on Lottery bids**

- 4.3.1 We noted that the Arts Officer can be involved both in the writing of the bid and in commenting on it for South East Arts or other Lottery funding bodies. The Arts Officers of the District Councils are often, but not always, involved in the first process and will ask Support for the Arts for assistance. The amount of time consumed in the preparation of bids is extensive and we do not think the role played by the Arts Officer could easily be replaced in the first stage, and not at all in the second stage of assessing the county wide impact of bids.

#### **4.4. Arts grants**

4.4.1 This is probably the area that is thought to be the main preoccupation of Support for the Arts. In reality, over a number of years the diminishing budget – together with further reductions proposed for 2002/03 – have much reduced the work. Indeed, if this were not so, new tasks such as the Cultural Strategy would not have been possible. Arts grants are available from a wide range of bodies. Our survey of arts organisations noted 18 bodies to whom applications are made. These vary from the local district councils to the Arts Council, from the Rye Partnership to the European Union. 10 of the 24 organisations that participated in the survey said that the County Council's initial grant aid, even small sums, had been important or very important in enabling them to obtain matching or additional funding from elsewhere.

#### **4.5. Advice and training**

4.5.1 Advice is freely available from a variety of sources. The quality of that advice is equally varied. Our survey indicated that the advice available from Support for the Arts was rated by 18 out of 24 as good or very good, and 16 judged it to be better than advice available from South East Arts. 16 also thought the advice as appropriate as anything they received elsewhere and all but two felt the speed with which their enquiry was handled to be superior to other bodies. This is clearly held to be a valuable service with enquiries coming from professional arts groups, promoters, creative industries, local organisations, councillors and other departments in the County Council.

#### **4.6. Contacts and bridge building**

4.6.1 As with advice, contacts can be made in many ways but it can take a long time to find who can be of most assistance or what funding opportunities are available. In the "bidding culture" which now pervades both local government and the arts, fast access to accurate knowledge and to someone who can provide a bridge to people and budgets is a key for survival. Support for the Arts is in a pivotal position and everyone to whom we spoke, from South East Arts to the district councils, from the creative industries to arts organisations stressed the importance of this role. No one was suggested, and none claimed to be, an alternative source.

### **5. CONSULTATION**

#### **5.1. Evidence received**

5.1.1. The Project Board interviewed the Arts Officer on 23 October 2001. The Board interviewed Debra Reay, the Director of Strategy & External Affairs and Neil Debnam, Strategy Officer, on 23 November; a meeting with district arts officers was held on the same day.

5.1.2. The project managers conducted a survey of 37 arts organisations in East Sussex, 22 of whom replied in writing and 2 verbally. The range included organisations that had been unsuccessful in applying for grant aid as well as

some that the Council has supported in the past. The comments received have been fed into this report where relevant. The projects managers interviewed the County Council's Chief Executive, the Director of Legal & Community Services, the Head of Libraries, Information & Arts and the Senior Economic Development Officer on various occasions and worked both formally and informally with the Arts Officer throughout the review.

## **5.2. Arts Development Officers**

- 5.2.1. We were concerned to ensure that there was no overlap or duplication in the work carried out by the Arts Officer for the County Council and that undertaken by the Arts Development Officers employed by the district and borough councils. Officers from only two of the five councils attended a meeting, although one of the Councils was represented by 3 officers whose responsibilities covered both arts and economic development. Telephone and written contact was undertaken with two other district councils. The fifth had no officer in post at the time.
- 5.2.2. The arts development officers with whom we spoke had a more operational role than the County Council's Arts Officer. As a result of these consultations we do not see any overlap in the role of the County and District Arts Officers. Indeed, the latter are dependent on the former co-ordinating cross county initiatives, providing advice and information and in making contacts. There is regular communication between the Arts Officer and colleagues in the district and borough councils, although as time has become more compressed, regular meetings are no longer held unless a specific issue requires it.

## **5.3. Consultation with users/non-users by the service**

- 5.3.1. The Arts Officer has an impressive range of contacts amongst those who are her direct "clients", as well as the wider arts community in the county and beyond. Comments from various organisations received in the survey indicated that contact is regular, reliable and appreciated.
- 5.3.2. Our survey of local organisations indicated that whilst users and non users of the services offered by Support for the Arts rated highly the quality of the officers they met, they felt the County Council as a whole failed to appreciate the role the arts played in the local economy. Asked to judge the importance of the arts to the Council on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was important and 5 was not important, 21 out of 24 thought the Council marked their view as 4 or 5.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

### **6.1. The future role of Support for the Arts**

- 6.1.1. As we remarked at the beginning of this report, Support for the Arts has changed much since in the past few years and continues to evolve due to budget changes and additional statutory requirements. It no longer initiates or significantly funds events and instead has adopted a role as an enabler and facilitator. It acts as an important clearing house for information, contacts and guidance. In addition,

allocating responsibility for the Council's Cultural Strategy has significantly altered the focus of the Arts Officer.

- 6.1.2. Many of our correspondents were pressing for additional arts funding. We recognise that however desirable this may be, the likelihood of the Council identifying an increased budget for the arts is highly unlikely. Instead, we believe that the Council can make, and should make, a contribution to the arts by assisting others to obtain funding from other sources, and through strategic planning in the context of economic development. This is a direction in which the Arts Officer has already made a major step.
- 6.1.3. We regard as a matter of concern that the trend in recent years to reduce the budget for Support for the Arts has made planning in the medium and long term impossible. Recent fluctuations have made even planning for the current year difficult. Unfortunately, the importance of the arts to the local economy is only now being surveyed. Because this has not been previously established the arts in East Sussex have not been seen as anything other than promoting leisure activities. This is significantly apart from the position in neighbouring County Councils such as Kent and West Sussex. Both Councils are making important investment in the arts in order to support the local economy, a recent example in Kent being the new Turner Centre in Margate, seen as a focal point in the regeneration of a declining coastal resort.

## **6.2. Links with the Economic Development Unit**

- 6.2.1. Throughout this report we have drawn attention to the role played by the arts and the creative industries in the broadest context in supporting the local economy and the part they can play in regeneration. Comments received as part of our survey included:

*"Events brought many additional people to the town who also spent money in local shops"*

*"A thriving arts festival equals more tourists which equals more revenue for shops, hotels and restaurants. This, in turn, leads to more visitors to other local attractions – more revenue and more employment."*

*"The creative industries are of essential value to our economy and to our quality of life."*

*"Cultural and social regeneration are inseparable."*

*"In a service economy the arts provide employment and contribute to the local economy."*

- 6.2.2. Communication between Support for the Arts and the Council's Economic Development Unit is already frequent. However, our examination of this issue has led us to the conclusion that only by transferring Support for the Arts to the Economic Development Unit can the importance of the arts and creative industries to the local economy be fully supported and developed. Such a move would not be unusual in County Councils, or even within district councils in East

Sussex. In making this recommendation we acknowledge that whilst much arts activity is of primary economic importance, it is none-the-less important to encourage and support artistic expression as an activity in its own right.

### **6.3. Arts Grants**

- 6.3.1. Whilst we are satisfied that the criteria for arts grants are valid, we recommend these should be reviewed annually to ensure that such budget as exists for this purpose is effectively targeted to meet the objectives of the Council.
- 6.3.2. With only one and a half posts working on the arts, time constraints make it difficult to introduce extensive quality checks regarding the use of arts grants. A copy of the applicant's publicity material is requested as a matter of course. In addition, the Arts Officer usually attends events that have been financially supported by the Council and is thus able to check at the time whether publicity advertises that support and carries the Council's logo. Almost all recipients now send a report of their activity, albeit this may on occasions be only a copy of a report prepared for a larger funding body. We think this should be a requirement rather than an option for those in receipt of grant aid and recommend this be implemented for grants made in 2002/3.

### **6.4. Training**

- 6.4.1 The need for more targeted training was reflected in our survey of arts organisations where only 4 of 24 replies came from groups who had been on a training course run by Support for the Arts. At present Support for the Arts identifies training needs through consultation. Courses are then funded by South East Arts and managed by Sussex Arts Marketing. We suggest that Support for the Arts should build on their existing practice by undertaking a wider survey to identify the training needs of the arts community in East Sussex and drawing up a strategy to meet them. This would include identifying external sources of funding.

### 7. Action Plan – Part 3 –Support for the Arts

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R1.	A standing officer group should be formed by June 2002 to monitor the progress of the Cultural Strategy and the group should be chaired by a Chief Officer.							
R2	Support for the Arts should be transferred to the Economic Development Unit by June 2002.							
R3	Arts grants should be reviewed annually to ensure that the budget is effectively targeted to meet the objectives of the Council.							
R4	Those in receipt of grant aid should send a report of their activity to the Arts Officer To be implemented for grants made in 2002/3.							
R5	Support for the Arts should build on their existing practice by undertaking a wider survey to identify the training needs of the arts community in East Sussex and drawing up a strategy to meet them by September 2002. This would include identifying external sources of funding.							

# Part 4

## Art & Museum Service

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### A Report by the Audit & Best Value Scrutiny Committee

Project Board:

Cllr J Birch (chair)  
Cllr R Martin  
Cllr R Stevens  
Cllr J Waite

May 2002



## **PART 4 BEST VALUE REVIEW ART & MUSEUM SERVICE FOR SCHOOLS**

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 We have found the Art & Museum Service plays a significant part in supporting the National Curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 in Art & Design, in History and in Geography. It is valued by schools and provided by staff with knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment. It is difficult to calculate precisely what contribution the service makes to examination results but the “awe and wonder” factor in handling artifacts undoubtedly has a major impact on children. We commend the service manager and her staff who have continued to provide a good service in increasingly difficult circumstances.
- 1.2 As a service provided to schools by the LEA, the Art & Museum Service is required to become self-funding. Despite the service having reduced its staffing levels and attempted to increase income, we do not think this is possible and we have concluded that this service will not survive in its present form. A key issue for the Council, therefore, is whether it wishes the Art & Museums Service to survive and if so, how that can be achieved.
- 1.3 We do not feel that the present investigation of outsourcing the service as an optional part of the School Improvement Service will offer any long-term security. We were surprised to find that no other options were being seriously considered at this time. We do not think outsourcing as part of the SIS should be regarded as the only solution and believe that if the Service is to continue, other options should be considered urgently.

### **1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. Future of the service:**

If the Council wishes to continue to provide the Service, all options for its future organisation and delivery should be considered urgently. (Para 6.1.)

#### **2. Role of service manager:**

The dual role of the service manager as both manager of the artifact loan service and as Consultant for Art & Design should be reviewed by June 2002. (Para 6.2.)

#### **3. Expanding the customer base:**

The service manager should be given time to undertake a marketing initiative. Including opportunities to promote the service to independent schools. (Para 6.3.)



**4. Customer liaison:**

During 2002, the Art & Museum Service should establish a user group with whom to consult on services. (Para 6.4.)

**5. Disposal policy:**

The Art & Museum Service should formulate a Disposals Policy by September 2002. (Para 6.5.)

**6. Operating procedures and practices:**

By October 2002, the service manager should review all existing operational procedures and administrative practices in order to ensure that they are relevant to the service both in its current form and support its future development. (Para 6.6.)

**7. Inkjet cartridges:**

Whilst we understand the reasons for embarking on this activity, we do not view this as part of the core business of the Art & Museum Service. The supplying of inkjet cartridges to schools should be stopped. (Para 6.7.)

**8. Communication:**

We recommend the Education Department take action to improve communication with the managers responsible for the Art & Museum Service to facilitate the process of determining its future and the long-term position of its staff. (Para 6.8.)

## **2. WHY AND HOW THE COUNCIL PROVIDES THE SERVICE**

### **2.1. Statutory position**

- 2.1.1 There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide this service. However, Art & Design is a Foundation subject in the National Curriculum and is therefore a requirement at Key Stages 1 and 2.

### **2.2. Customers**

- 2.2.2 In 2001/02, 114 primary schools and 10 special schools have used the service. No secondary schools are currently using the artifact loan service but they do use the collection of art reproductions and participate in training courses. Items have been loaned to independent schools by special arrangement but the finite resources of the A&MS have made expansion into this market difficult as it could lead to LEA schools failing to receive the items they have requested.
- 2.2.3 Until recent years the A&MS was used by 90% of the schools in both East Sussex and Brighton & Hove LEAs. In 2000/2001 the percentage dropped to 85%, and dropped again in 2001/02 to 74%. Recent figures suggest this is now closer to 67% with a faster rate of drop out amongst schools in Brighton & Hove. A number of schools have said their failure to subscribe to the service is due only to financial constraints.

### **2.3. Objectives**

- 2.3.1 The mission statement of the Art & Museum Service says:

*“Our aim is to support teachers in providing the very best educational experiences for pupils through professional support for Art and Design and resource based support for many other areas of the curriculum.”*

- 2.3.2 The overall objective of the service is to support the National Curriculum programmes of study for Art & Design, History and Geography at Key Stages 1 and 2. At a local level, the County Council’s Education Development Plan for 2001-2 refers to raising attainment for gifted and talented pupils through the provision of art master classes and through promoting and developing out of school hours learning activities. The A&MS is actively engaged in both of these activities.
- 2.3.3 The A&MS has an annual business plan, the objectives within it being linked to the Education Development Plan. However, the overall objective in the current plan could be summarised as “survival” as it primarily sets out a number of new and continuing activities to generate income. Not all of these activities are related to the core business of the A&MS. We address this issue later in Section 6.

## **2.4. Services**

- 2.4.1 The A&MS offers two main services. The first is a loan service of artefacts and art reproductions designed to support schools in the delivery of the primary curriculum. Its collection comprises over 5,500 objects, 16 large travelling displays and 1,600 art reproductions. Its second main service is the provision of art and design courses, conferences and INSET, as well as specialist art classes and summer schools.
- 2.4.2 Artefacts for the loan service are acquired from specialist suppliers and from occasional donations. Some are repaired or restored by the service; all are kept in specially made cases to prevent damage in transit. As well as single exhibits, small collections of items are available: for example fossils, Roman metalwork, tomb objects from ancient China or African bronze sculpture. The large travelling displays on topics such as "Amazon Indians" or "The Victorian Emporium" re-create the environment in which the items would have been found. The surroundings for these large displays are made by A&MS staff. As with the specially made cases for the artefacts, the workmanship is of a high quality.
- 2.4.3 The service produces a catalogue each year that is circulated to schools. For the loan service schools can submit a request for artefacts each term. The service aims to meet at least nine out of ten requests it receives for the term specified. However, this is dependent on resources being available. Usually the number of requests for artefacts runs between 100 and 150 per term. Requests for art reproductions number between 15 and 45. Where there are only a limited number of items in stock it is a major problem if several schools are studying the same topic at the same time. Because of the funding difficulties now facing the service, no money was earmarked at the beginning of the year for the purchase of new artefacts or art reproductions.
- 2.4.4 The A&MS has created a small website showing a "virtual" museum collection which provides supporting information about the artefacts being used in the classroom. The service also offers website design courses. It organises exhibitions, publishes a newsletter that is distributed to schools and produces other occasional publications. To increase its income the A&MS has initiated a new business in selling inkjet cartridges to schools.

## **2.5. Organisation**

- 2.5.1 The A&MS is part of the Education Department's School Improvement Service. The service manager divides her time between managing the A&MS and acting as the Consultant for Art & Design in the School Development Team. She also contributes to the Assessment Team to fulfil the County Council's statutory audit and monitoring responsibility.
- 2.5.2 The service manager works to the School Development Adviser (Design Technology and Art & Design) in the School Improvement Service.
- 2.5.3 Because of changes in its funding, the A&MS was restructured in 2001 to reduce from eight to a full time equivalent of 5.1 staff. These comprise four full time and two part time posts. One full time post is that of the service manager who,

because she is also the Consultant for Art & Design, is not available to work for the service on a full time basis. Bearing in mind that a service of this nature is staff intensive and requires extensive support for work on the collections, we feel that the roles of the remaining staff are properly balanced between the professional, administrative and technical roles.

## **2.6. Budget**

- 2.6.1 The budget for 2000/01 was £204,400, of which £142,900 was provided from centrally held Education funds. Income from schools was £36,800. A number of smaller headings provided the most of the remainder but the budget was overspent by £8,000. Towards the end of 2000 the then Chief Advisor required the A&MS significantly to increase its levels of income for the coming year with a view to becoming self-funding from April 2001. Later it was agreed that a lead in period of four months was unrealistic and the target date for self-funding was extended by a further year.
- 2.6.2 To prepare for self-funding the 2001/02 budget was reduced to £186,500. Of this £75,300 came from centrally held funds and the projection for income from schools raised to £90,400. £64,000 of this was expected to come from subscriptions to the loan service. The remainder was to be found income from parents for pupil courses and other sources of external funding.
- 2.6.3 To take account of the new income target, subscriptions were raised by 400%. As we approach the end of the 2001/02 financial year income from subscriptions is £58,000. It is anticipated the service will overspend by between £22-£26,000. In view of the potential outsourcing of the School Improvement Service, the expectation for the A&MS to be self-funding has been postponed. Instead, the budget for 2002/03 has been constructed on the basis of that for 2001/02 with half the budget coming from central funding.
- 2.6.4 The A&MS has explored a number of other avenues to obtain income. These include specialist courses for teachers and for gifted pupils, Education Action Zone projects, summer schools, lecturing at Brighton University and website design. In all cases these relate to work undertaken by the service manager or a technician. It could be argued, therefore, that this work, whilst vital in securing income, is detracting from time needed to manage and market the service itself.

## **2.7. Harvard Consulting Services**

- 2.7.1 In 2001 Harvard Consulting Services of Lewes were engaged to suggest how the A&MS could develop its activities in order to raise its income levels. They considered eight measures. Six of these were considered impossible or impractical: making more staff redundant; further increasing subscriptions; making the collection into a museum; offering services to private sector companies; obtaining revenue funding from external sources; and encouraging schools to use another "supplier", presumably as a result of closing the A&MS.
- 2.7.2 The report was hesitant regarding two other potential sources: increasing the customer base and generating additional revenue. In the case of the latter, however, the report did go on to suggest a new "virtual" collection available by

subscription on the Internet. Whilst most of the conclusions drawn by Harvard Consulting Services are likely to be proved correct, we do not agree with their analysis in all cases. We return to this in Section 6.

### **3. COMPARISON**

- 3.1 Loan services of this type are usually offered by a major museum, such as that provided to schools in Berkshire by Reading Museum. Many Councils, such as in Hampshire offer no, or only a very small, collection of items for loan and instead offer education programmes in museums or at sites of historic interest. East Sussex offers an art and artifact loan service to largely primary schools from a stand alone facility undertaking its own acquisition, storage, interpretation and delivery service.
- 3.2 As we believe the provision of this type of service in this form is unique, it is impossible to compare this service directly with that provided by any other Council.

### **4. COMPETITION**

- 4.1 Given that this service cannot be compared directly with any others, we considered the question as to whether schools would seek this type of service elsewhere and who might provide alternative museum education services. The report from Harvard Consulting Services concluded that there was no direct competition. We endorse this view as self-evidently no one else provides an art and artifact loan service of this size in this form. However, if a loan service for art reproductions and museum artifacts were not available schools would be likely to turn to one or more of the following for museum education services in a different format:

#### **4.2. Brighton & Hove Museum Education Service**

- 4.2.1 Brighton & Hove Museums Education Service offers a variety of educational opportunities to schools in Brighton and Hove, East and West Sussex and across the region. We were informed that a growing number of schools from East Sussex LEA use the services available from Brighton & Hove Museums. There are a variety of services on offer, all of which are curriculum focussed, located at Brighton Museum, Booth Natural History Museum, Preston Manor, the Royal Pavilion, Hove Museum & Foredown Tower. These range from museum teacher led object handling workshops, gallery talks, guided tours, role playing activities and practical workshops.
- 4.2.2 All sessions are collections related and, in the case of the museums, gallery talks and workshops, support the permanent and temporary exhibition programmes. All services are based on schools visiting museums, except for object handling sessions which are offered as an outreach service: museum teachers take the handling objects to schools and work with classes there. There is also a loan service available at the Booth Museum of Natural History.

- 4.2.3 All schools pay a small fee for museum teacher led educational services. At buildings where there is an admission charge, this is free for Brighton & Hove schools but payable by schools from other areas. Outreach services are fee paying on a half or full day rate. There are four permanent staff plus a team of casual staff used for school visits.
- 4.2.4 Teacher resources supporting the services on offer are mainly free. There are new Local History CD-ROMs that will be on sale in museum shops in May and two Art & Craft CD-ROMs will be on sale later this year. These are focussed on the museum collections and are designed to be used in the classroom and to support visits to the museums.
- 4.2.5 There is only occasional contact between the service in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, primarily on an "as and when" basis.
- 4.2.6 As regards the future of the A&MS, the idea of Brighton & Hove running the service may be a possibility but costs of operating a large loan service are high because the service is staff intensive. This would be a problem in view of the City's policy of its services being self-funding.

#### **4.3. Eastbourne Borough Council**

- 4.3.1 In Eastbourne a major review has taken place and the Council has recently approved a Museums and Heritage Strategy. This envisages developing the embryonic services to schools currently available from the Towner Art Gallery & Local History Museum and from the military collections housed in the Redoubt Fortress. Whilst services, other than talks, visits and a small number of items for loan are currently low key, an extension of this work is anticipated. The Museums and Heritage Strategy envisages not only developing the education work of the collections within the control of the Eastbourne Borough Council but encouraging and enabling it to be developed in independent museums and galleries as well. These would include the Eastbourne Heritage Centre run by the Eastbourne Society; the Museum of Shops; Museum of Puppets; and the RNLI Museum.

#### **4.4. Other sources**

- 4.4.1 There are already many visits by schools to sites of interest and it is now usual for parents to be asked to pay for these. Most large historical sites offer their own education services. Fishbourne Palace is a popular location for schools studying the Roman period, as is Battle for those studying the Normans. Most museums and galleries in the county welcome school visits and some will send staff to give talks in schools.
- 4.4.2 One of the most active independent organisations is the Sussex Archaeological Trust. In East Sussex its prime sites include Lewes Castle and Ann of Cleves House but there are a number of others which school parties may visit. In addition, the Trust offers artifact handling sessions in schools. These may include dressing up in contemporary costume and story telling appropriate to the period being studied. The Trust charges schools for such visits by its education staff.

#### **4.5. Virtual museums on the Internet**

- 4.5.1 In order to extend access to their collections, many galleries and museums are now creating virtual collections on the Internet. These range from national institutions such as the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, to smaller, specialised collections. With funds available from various bodies for digitisation projects, this type of provision is expanding rapidly.
- 4.5.2 The A&MS is represented on the County Council's website. This offers password access to Infolink which aims to address a requirement in the National Curriculum for History Key Stage 2, in which children are to be taught to use a range of resources, including ICT based material. Infolink provides additional information on artifacts to which children may have access in the classroom, as well as links to other related educational websites. Whilst approximately two thirds of schools who responded to a recent survey by Services to Schools said they had found this site useful, few appeared to have utilised the links that extend from it to other related sites.
- 4.5.3 The report by Harvard Consulting Services has proposed a major extension of the A&MS website. It suggests that the collections should be digitised and images of them made available on the Internet as a "virtual" loan service. This would make the collections available nationally on payment of a subscription. A bid for a budget for this work has been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund and to a charitable foundation.

### **5. CONSULTATION**

#### **5.1. Evidence received by the Project Board**

- 5.1.1 The Project Board interviewed the service manager on 23 November and the Director of Education on 29 January.
- 5.1.2 Within the County Council, the project managers interviewed Ian Punter, School Development Adviser (Design Technology and Art & Design); Peter Davidson, Business Manager of Services to Schools; and John Lace, a Senior Advisor in the Education Department. In Brighton & Hove Council they interviewed Ged Rowney, Assistant Director of Education, Jessica Rutherford, Head of Cultural Services in Brighton & Hove and Janice Lane, the Museums Education Officer. In Eastbourne they interviewed Janet Mein, Head of Arts & Heritage Services. They discussed museum education with Margaret Ann, the Museums Education Officer for the south east, based at Worthing Museum and with Deborah Spears, Education Officer for the Sussex Archaeological Trust. They held a meeting with the staff of the Art & Museum Service and were in contact with the service manager throughout the review.

#### **5.2. Consultation with users/non-users by the service**

- 5.2.1 The project managers had hoped to arrange a meeting with schools that used the A&MS and with some that did not do so. In the event arranging a meeting

proved impossible as schools were unable to send representatives during the day and many teachers were unwilling to travel to a meeting after hours. Instead the project managers spoke by telephone to six schools who used the service and two who did not. They also analysed the satisfaction survey undertaken by Services to Schools in the Education Department.

5.2.2 Verbal comment suggested that the A&MS is viewed as helpful and providing a useful service for specific elements of the National Curriculum. One school commented that it did not know sufficiently far in advance that it would not be able to borrow the items it requested. This complaint has already been addressed by the Service following other comments in the Service's own survey of customers.

5.2.3 90 schools responded to the Education Department's satisfaction survey regarding the A&MS. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents very poor and 5 excellent, the results were:

1 = 0 replies; 2 = 1 reply; 3 = 16 replies; 4 = 36 replies; 5 = 15 replies.

5.2.4 22 schools did not award a mark although some of these did offer comments on the service.

5.2.5 The survey posed four specific questions to schools:

a) Was the virtual collection on the website useful?

61 schools replied yes, 1 replied "maybe" and 4 replied no. The remainder did not answer.

b) How many classes used INFOLINK?

2 schools answered this (1 and 2 classes respectively). 59 schools said they did not use INFOLINK and the remainder did not answer.

c) Does the school use the Inkjet supply service?

19 schools replied yes; 47 replied no, of whom 13 said they would like to try this service. The remainder did not comment.

d) Would you like an information pack about the service?

7 replied yes and 8 replied no. Of the latter, two were using the service but the other six were not.

5.2.6 21 schools supplied additional comments. They included:

*"Currently use PAYU, which seems to work. Excellent workshop session earlier this year."* (All Saints CofE Jnr, Hastings)

*"Very valuable, enhances children's learning. Always endeavour to provide a selection from our order"*. (Catsfield CofE Primary)



*“Always prompt, always helpful. Very good value for money. Should be supported.”* (Nutley CofE Primary)

*“Very helpful, efficient service. Amenable and adaptable for schools’ individual needs.”* (Ticehurst CofE)

- 5.2.7 Whilst four schools were critical of the quality or speed of the inkjet supply service, there was only one negative comment regarding the A&MS itself:

*“What you require is rarely available due to limited stocks”.* (Cradle Hill)

Given the nature of any artifact and art loan service this is at times an inevitable problem.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. The future of the Art & Museum Service for Schools**

- 6.1.1 In its present form the future for the A&MS looks bleak. Even in its reduced form, the service is unlikely to become self-funding. During the course of the review we were informed that an investigation was underway to establish whether it was possible to outsource the School Improvement Service, of which the A&MS is a part. However, the inclusion of the A&MS is only an option and it is possible that no external provider will wish to include the service within its bid.

- 6.1.2 From our surveys of others active in the museum education field in the south east, we did not find anyone who would be willing to take over the A&MS in its present form. If the service were to close altogether, there can be no doubt opportunities for schools to visit museums and to handle artifacts will continue to exist. In places they may even increase as others move to fill the gap, but the type of loan service, both of art reproductions and museum artifacts, that currently exists would disappear.

- 6.1.3 The County Council, through the Education Department, must consider this matter in some depth. As far as we could determine there is no alternative proposal for the future of the service. Whilst all to whom we spoke were passionate in their wish to see the service survive, we believe there is a danger of it closing by default. We do not feel that this position is satisfactory and recommend that urgent action be taken to examine all options for the future.

### **6.2. Dual role of service manager**

- 6.2.1 We feel there should be a separation of the role of the manager of the loan service and the role of the manager as an education advisor. Given that there has to be some change in the present arrangements, the continuation of these two functions in one person is likely to be impossible. The dual function restricts the manager’s time and prevents major issues surrounding the service, particular marketing and liaison with schools from being addressed. In addition, the income earned by the service manager in her capacity as Consultant for Art &

Design is offset against the cost of the loan service that makes the true cost of the loan service opaque. We recommend this issue should be addressed as quickly as possible in order to end the uncertainty that surrounds the service manager even more than others in the School Improvement Service.

### **6.3. Expanding the customer base**

6.3.1 The report by Harvard Consulting Services was hesitant about opportunities to expand the customer base. We accept that significant expansion at this time is difficult but were the service manager to be able to spend more time with the service there would be additional opportunities. Specifically, we are concerned that the loan service is not used by secondary schools and feel that a marketing initiative in this area could be beneficial. We also think there may be opportunities to promote the service to independent schools and even to private companies who may be interested in borrowing artifacts not being used by schools.

### **6.4. Customer liaison**

6.4.1 The A&MS has no formal arrangements by which it consults its users and potential users and feeds the results of that contact into its planning process. The service conducts customer surveys, the most recent being in November 2000. It also supplies evaluation forms to schools with loan collections and to teachers attending courses. It also receives written and verbal comments. We feel some form of user group should supplement these, open to actual as well as potential users and that this should be chaired independently of the A&MS.

### **6.5. Disposals policy**

6.5.1 At present the A&MS had no written policy for the disposal of artifacts for which it has no further use. There is no advantage to the service in storing items no longer in demand by schools and which could be loaned to other museums, donated to other institutions or even sold. We recommend that such a policy be formulated following consultation with schools and other interested parties.

### **6.6. Practices and procedures**

6.6.1 The A&MS has been established for 40 years. Over that period of time any organisation accumulates administrative procedures which may no longer be relevant or necessary. Some of these can survive change or re-organisation with ease. We are not pre-judging the position in the A&MS but it would be unusual if there were not practices and procedures that need overhauling. In the context of the upheaval the service now faces, we recommend a review of such activities.

### **6.7. Supply of inkjet cartridges**

6.7.1 The reason for the A&MS introducing a service to supply inkjet cartridges for printers is understandable. Having been pushed to increase its income, it could be said to show remarkable initiative in identifying a gap in the market. We intend no criticism of the action that was taken. However, this service cannot be considered as part of the core business of the A&MS and for a service pressed

for time, as well as income, we question whether this should continue. Of the schools responding to the recent survey by the Education Department, 19 said they did purchase cartridges and 47 said they did not (although 13 might do so). Four schools added specific criticisms: the quality was poor or the cost higher than could be obtained elsewhere. This in itself is not overwhelming evidence to abandon the supply service but coupled with the fact that income is below target for this activity, we recommend that the service manager and the Education Department review the viability of selling inkjet cartridges.

## **6.8. Communication**

- 6.8.1 Throughout our contact with the service manager and the staff of the A&MS we noticed that there appears to be a lack of communication with the senior management of the Education Department. Whether this was exemplified in the initial lack of assistance in preparations to be self-funding or in the lack of information given to staff about the potential impact of the outsourcing investigation, the problem appeared to be the same. The A&MS is physically remote which adds to the feeling of exclusion. The appointment of a Schools Development Adviser to a line management role has signally improved the position more recently but none-the-less, we recommend the Education Department review communications with the A&MS.

## 7. Action Plan – Part 4 – Art & Museum Service for Schools

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R1.	If the Council wishes to continue to provide the Service, all options for its future organisation and delivery should be considered urgently.							
R2	The dual role of the service manager as both manager of the artifact loan service and as Consultant for Art & Design should be reviewed by June 2002.							
R3	The service manager should be given time to undertake a marketing initiative. Including opportunities to promote the service to independent schools.							
R4	During 2002, the Art & Museum Service should establish a user group with whom to consult on services.							
R5	The Art & Museum Service should formulate a Disposals Policy by September 2002.							
R6	By October 2002, the service manager should review all existing operational procedures and administrative practices in order to ensure that they are relevant to the service both in its current form and support its future development.							
Cont:								

Number	Action to be taken	Person responsible	Start date	End date	Resources	Success criteria/target Performance measure	Monitoring of progress – by whom & when, how	Evaluation of effectiveness of action by
R7	Whilst we understand the reasons for embarking on this activity, we do not view this as part of the core business of the Art & Museum Service. The supplying of inkjet cartridges to schools should be stopped.							
R8	We recommend the Education Department take action to improve communication with the managers responsible for the Art & Museum Service to facilitate the process of determining its future and the long-term position of its staff.							

# Appendix 1

## Best Value Review of Library Services, Arts & Cultural Strategy

### Project Initiation Document

#### 1. Background and Critical Commentary on the Pre-review Position Statements

##### 1.1. Public Library Service

- 1.1.1 The provision by the County Council of a “comprehensive and efficient” public library service is a requirement of the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act. The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) requires library authorities to submit an Annual Library Plan so that it may be aware of proposals to develop and improve the service. For the first time this year, this process is being supplemented by the Public Library Standards that must be met by all library authorities within three years. At present East Sussex meets 8 and fails 13 of these.
- 1.1.2 As regards the Public Library Standards, the most vital areas where improvement will be required are in opening hours and bookfund. Each carries a significant requirement for additional funding that must be seen against the background of the County Council’s financial position. In this context, it will be necessary to review the number of service points and their running costs, together with an examination of the structure and management of the service. It will also be necessary to review the range of services provided.
- 1.1.3 The review will need to be cognisant of the work of the Scrutiny Review of Mobile Libraries, which is already underway. Recommendations from that Project Board regarding changes to the number of vehicles, a rearrangement of routes or frequency of visits may have an impact on the branch library network.
- 1.1.4 The public library service has a pivotal role to play in the delivery of the County Council’s priorities. The DCMS has made clear, and is expected shortly to emphasise again, that public libraries should be at the forefront of issues such as lifelong learning, literacy and reader development, public access to information and communications technology, modernising government (including e-government) and social inclusion. This is a significant agenda and with the service in financial difficulties there is a danger that it may not be able to address the County Council’s vision and strategy. The review will look at what must be done to ameliorate this problem.
- 1.4.5. In 2001/02 the budget for the public library service was £6,443,000. The service is already seeking to identify possible reductions in budget of 10%. The expectation of a Best Value Review is the identification of a further 2%, although this could refer to efficiency gains and not a cash reduction as such.

##### 1.2 Schools Library Service (SLS)

- 1.2.1 The SLS is part of Libraries, Information & Arts, which is a division of Legal & Community Services. There is no statutory requirement to provide a Schools Library Service and use of it is optional. However, the service is popular with schools and well used. It is affected by the delegation of funds to schools which leaves its budget vulnerable to annual fluctuations. The service, which is available to schools in East Sussex and in Brighton & Hove, has recently closed its base in Hove and is now operating only from Eastbourne.
- 1.2.2 There are no obvious commercial competitors to the Schools Library Service but alternative options of working in partnership with others could be explored. Consultation with users appears to be by evaluation reports for loan collections and through support group meetings and training sessions. This area warrants greater consideration.
- 1.2.3 In 2001/02 the SLS has assured income of £15,000 from East Sussex CC and £12,400 from Brighton & Hove. The remaining budget of £448,600 is received directly from schools buying into the services available.

### **1.3 Art & Museum Service (A&MS)**

- 1.3.1 The Art & Museum Service, which is available to schools in both East Sussex and Brighton & Hove, is part of the County Council's Education Department's School Improvement Service. There is no statutory requirement to provide this service in this form but Art & Design is a Foundation subject in the National Curriculum and is therefore a statutory requirement at Key Stages 1 and 2.
- 1.3.2 The service is undergoing a major change in its financial position. All Local Education Authority funding will be withdrawn from April 2002 with the intention that the service should be self financing thereafter. To facilitate this the service is being restructured with the loss of two posts. The service is endeavouring to attract additional income from new activities. The extent to which these are likely to ameliorate the budget position requires examination.
- 1.3.3 In addition to managing the A&MS, the service manager undertakes the role of Consultant for Art & Design, working with the School Development Team and contributing to the work of the Assessment Team. Whether it is possible, and fair to expect, that the service manager can undertake these roles and manage a self-funding service could usefully be examined.
- 1.3.4 The links between A&MS and museums in the area needs to be explored in some depth, particularly as some schools in Brighton & Hove appear to be using service available within the City Museums, albeit these services are not comparable to the work of the A&MS. The A&MS has recently initiated a website for schools, which has been well received.
- 1.3.5 In 2001/02 the A&MS has a budget of £186,520. Of this, £75,370 is from centrally held Local Education Authority funding and the remainder from selling

services to schools, provision of courses or consultancy work. As indicated in paragraph 1.3.2 above, all LEA central funding will be withdrawn in April 2002.

## **1.4 Support for the Arts**

- 1.4.1 This service operates within Libraries, Information & Arts. Support for the Arts is not a statutory function, although the development of the County Council's Cultural Strategy, which is being undertaken by the Arts Officer, is a government requirement and must be place by 2002.
- 1.4.2 The service has three main activities: providing grant aid, training and guidance for arts organisations in East Sussex; assessing bids for Lottery funding for arts projects in East Sussex; and developing the Cultural Strategy.
- 1.4.3 It is important to ensure funds are well spent. The number of applications each year for repeat funding needs to be examined, as well as the criteria against which such applications are judged. The County Council's role within the regional arts board and the funding made available it through membership is also a significant aspect. The role of the Arts Officer vis-à-vis the Arts Development Officers in the district and borough councils is pertinent to the review.
- 1.4.4 In 2001/02 the budget for this service is £124,000. Of this, £34,500 has been allocated in grants to arts organisations in East Sussex. The subscription to South East Arts was £20,000 and the remainder represents staffing, training and administration costs. It also includes a "planned" saving of £24,000 required to provide support elsewhere within the Library, Information & Arts budget.

## **2 Quality Requirements**

- 2.1 This review will be carried out in accordance with project management principles, using the PRINCE 2 methodology adopted by the County Council. It will also follow the guidance set out in *Driving Continuous Improvement Through Best Value*, the County Council's Best Value Handbook, December 1999.

## **3 Aims and Objectives**

- 3.1 The aims and objectives of each review are:
- To evaluate the delivery of each service, examining why and for whom it is provided.
  - To assess if the services are meeting the needs of the community and the expectations of the Council.
  - To examine access to, and methods of, service delivery.



- Using national performance indicators, to compare the performance of each service against those provided by similar local authorities.
- To study co-operation with other local authorities and identify how they are approaching the issue of reaching the public library standards.
- To consider if there are more effective, efficient and economic forms of delivering each service.
- To gather evidence from service users, and where appropriate lapsed users and non-users, to inform planning and future performance.
- To examine the Council's arrangements for securing continuous improvement in these services, where appropriate by way of anticipated efficiency gains.
- To consider opportunities for securing additional funding for the services within the scope of the review.

#### **4 Deliverables**

- 4.1 Monthly reports will be presented to the Project Board.
- 4.2 Progress reports will be presented to each meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Community Services.
- 4.3 A detailed report to the Project Board and the Scrutiny Committee setting out the findings of the four reviews. This report will also make appropriate recommendations as to the future delivery and organisation of these services.

#### **5 Scope**

- 5.1 Each review will examine the key activities managed within each service and consider issues related to:
  - Service objectives
  - Service delivery methods
  - Budget and management of resources
  - Future development of the service
  - Links with users and relevant external bodies
  - Links within the Council

## **6. Risk**

6.1. The major risks are:

- Insufficient resources to complete the reviews within the designated timescale.
- External factors beyond the remit of the reviews, e.g. budget changes, alterations in statutory position, unavoidable absence of project manager.

## **7. Cost and Resourcing**

7.1. The resources and associated opportunity costs required are currently estimated to be as follows:

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Total
8 days	15 days	20 days	4 days	3 days	50 days

Total estimated cost @ £250 per day = £12,500

## **8. Reporting Arrangements**

8.1. The Project Board will comprise the following members:

- Councillor Jeremy Birch (Chair)
- Councillor Roy Martin
- Councillor Richard Stevens
- Councillor Joy Waite

8.2. The Project Manager will be John Hicks (Consultant) and the Project Officer will be Roland Kirby (Consultant).

## **9. Timescale**

9.1. This review is included in the Best Value 2000/01 timetable of reviews.

9.2. It is anticipated that this review will begin immediately and be concluded by April 2001.

## **10. Stages of the Project**

10.1 The reviews will commence in the order of:

- Schools Library Service
- Art & Museum Service for Schools
- Support for the Arts
- Public Library Service, including Bibliographical Services

The review of the Public Library Service will be undertaken with regard to the Mobile Libraries Scrutiny Review and in the light of its recommendations.

10.2. Whilst starting separately, in order to meet the review timetable elements of each review will run concurrently. The key stages of each review are thus:

Stage 1 – compilation of detailed planning document, including identification of information requirements, timescales and associated resource needs.

Stage 2 – consultation with stakeholders affected by the review, including Councillors, service managers, staff and users.

Stage 3 – evidence gathering and analysis, including interviews with expert witnesses; identification of benchmarks and comparative analysis of costs, quality measures and performance indicators.

Stage 4 – preparation of final report, including any proposals for improvements in the service.

Stage 5 – submission of final report to Project Board and the Scrutiny Committee.

## **11. Comments from recognised Staff Groups**

11.1. Comments on this draft project brief have been formally requested. Trade Unions will be formally consulted at Stage 3 of the process.

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