

Meeting: **Scrutiny Committee for Education and Libraries**
Date: **16 September 2004**
Title of Report: **Library and Information Services Peer Review**
Report By: **Director of Education and Libraries**
Purpose of report: **To inform the Scrutiny Committee of the progress of the Peer Review of Library Services.**

RECOMMENDATION – to note and comment on the Peer Review Update report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Members will recall that the Library Service was invited to be the first pilot in a Government funded initiative to assist libraries in the country develop their services in line with the national vision as detailed in *Framework for the Future*. The Service would be offered £70,000 to pay for the review and to fund the actions that would result from the recommendations.

1.2 The offer was accepted and a review was undertaken during 7th, 8th, 9th June 2004. A team from the IDeA (Improvement and Develop Agency) and MLA (the National Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) came down to East Sussex with three Senior Librarians from Nottingham, Newcastle and Essex, to talk to library staff, council staff, stakeholders, members, library users and friends of libraries. The Review took the form of workshops, one to ones, small group sessions. Libraries were visited. The Peer Reviewers had already read a wide range of library and County Council documents before their arrival and although they were not here very long, they were as thorough as time allowed.

1.3 The initial findings were reported back in a plenary session at the end of the 3 day visit and a draft report delivered during July. The final document will shortly be available.

2. Review Summary

2.1 In their conclusions, the Reviewers took an overall view of the current position for Libraries in East Sussex. They wrote:

“East Sussex County Council demonstrates a clear commitment to the development of its library service, which is seen as having a key role to play in improving the quality of life of local people. Significant investment has already been made and more is planned, including the creation of some new libraries and the refurbishment of others, an increase in opening hours, the provision of information technology for use by the general public and an increase in the book fund. The investments that have already been made have led to performance improvement in some areas.

The recent appointment of a new head of service and the switching last year of the library service to the education directorate have provided opportunities to build on the investment that has been made and fulfil the ambitions that exist for the service.

However, achieving the ambitions that exist for the service will require significant change in the way it operates. Engagement with the local community needs to improve, an external focus is required both in relation to customer focus and learning from other organisations and a clear vision for the future of the service needs to be communicated to all staff. A performance management culture needs to be brought about and a robust challenge of existing ways of working is required to maximise the use of existing resources. The successful implementation of the required changes and fulfilment of the ambitions for the service will have a large dependency on there being sufficient capacity within the senior management team “.

3. Key Issues

3.1 The Reviewers were interested in how the Library Service was performing in three key areas: Leadership, Community Engagement and Performance Management. Their conclusions are listed in Appendix A. The black bullet points identify the strengths, the white ones the challenges.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Having identified our strengths and weaknesses, the Reviewers recommended that:

- the library service ensure it maximises its use of wider directorate support;
- the library service develop a greater external focus;
- a clear vision for the library service be communicated as soon as possible to all library staff;
- the roles and responsibilities required of the senior management team going forward be identified and mapped against the skills base that currently exists, with any gaps being urgently addressed;
- the library service ensure it takes a proactive approach to alliance building and monitor carefully the outcomes from it;
- plans to maximise the synergy between the education and library services be quickly developed;
- the library service ensure it bases the transformation of the service on demographic information and outcomes from consultation with local people, including current, lapsed and non-users;
- the library service tap into existing consultation activities or networks both within and outside of East Sussex County Council wherever possible;
- a performance management culture be brought about quickly;
- SMART targets be developed to facilitate the delivery of strategic aims;
- more benchmarking activity be undertaken;
- a robust challenge of the existing ways of working be undertaken;
- key corporate processes be fully embedded.

5. Action Plan

5.1 As a result of the Peer Review, the Library Service is developing an action plan, based on the above 13 recommendations and concentrating on the issues of Leadership, Community Engagement (Consultation) and Performance Management. This will list detailed actions which will be undertaken over a six month period, supported by funding from the MLA.

5.2 The action plan will be brought to the November Scrutiny Committee meeting.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Library Service was pleased to have had the opportunity to have an outside view of the Service at this key time, given the recent move to the new Education and Libraries Directorate and also the appointment of a new Head of Service.

6.2 The conclusions in the report were well made and the Service agrees with them. The allocation of funding by the MLA is most welcome, as is the continued support of both the MLA and IDeA during the six month period when improvements will be made.

6.3 The Peer Review has formed the basis of a new Vision for the Library Service, which places it firmly at the heart of its Community, offers a conduit to Council Services, and makes it a shop window to promote Council priorities.

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KEY ISSUES

LEADERSHIP

- **There is clear political, corporate and directorate commitment to the service .**
- **The library service is recognised as pivotal for the success of the council's access and E-government strategies and investment is taking place that reflects this.**
- **Opportunities have been created for synergy across the directorate .**
- **The new head of service is well regarded and there are high expectations of her.**
- **There are enthusiastic and committed staff at all levels.**
- **A clear vision for the service needs to be articulated to all library staff as soon as possible.**
- **Delivering the vision will require enhanced senior management capacity.**
- **The library service must develop an external focus.**
- **The core service must be redefined.**
- **Innovation and creativity need to be encouraged.**
- **The service needs to fully utilise wider directorate support.**

DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **The opportunity exists to develop the role of libraries in supporting lifelong learning**
- **The library service must understand the needs of local people**
- **The service must be transformed in line with local people's needs**
- **Self-generating improvement needs to be brought about**

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

- **Investment in capacity to improve customer outcomes has been made – including in the stock and opening hours**
- **Some achievements have been secured around the Public Library Standards**
- **Evidence exists of the desire to improve performance management**
- **The creation of a performance management culture is vital for future success**
- **SMART planning needs to be developed to deliver strategic aims**
- **The quality of the service in future must be actively managed**
- **The service must ensure effective people management is in place**
- **A robust challenge of ways of working will deliver extra capacity**
- **Key corporate processes need to be embedded**
- **The need exists to deliver and evidence improved services**