

# COMMUNITY SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 MARCH 2006

## ROCHESTER LIBRARY

Report from: Neil Davies, Director of Finance and Corporate Services

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To update the committee regarding progress with construction of the new Rochester Library and any effects on the other related moves.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. The committee is asked to consider the matter and comment as appropriate.

### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In summer last year work began at Rochester's Adult Education Centre to construct a new three-storey extension to replace obsolete outbuildings and provide a new library.
- 3.2. A predecessor committee, Environment & Front Line Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, considered details of the scheme in July last year. Members of the committee asked for an update in early 2006.
- 3.3. The provision of the new library is part of a wider programme of improvements to services in Rochester which include:
  - 3.3.1. **First Point of Contact at the Visitor Information Centre** – this will be the latest addition to a network of face to face contact points across Medway where local people to get help and information about a wide range of council services. The construction work is now largely completed and the new facility is due to open in the early part of next month.
  - 3.3.2. **The Dickens' rooms at the Guildhall Museum** – the new exhibition opened in time for the winter Dickens festival late last year. It comprises of the Dickens Discovery Room, which utilises the latest touch screen technology and is available in six different languages, together with an adjoining audio-visual theatre featuring a specially commissioned film about Charles Dickens' links with Medway. The attraction has proved very popular and the Museum's visitor numbers so far this year have increased by 20%.

- 3.3.3. **Relocation of the Register Office to the Corn Exchange** – the plans are being finalised and building works are due to commence as soon as the existing library is relocated.
- 3.4. It had been hoped the new extension to the Adult Education Centre would be completed in late spring this year enabling the new library to open in May. However, delays have occurred due to longer than anticipated archaeological investigations and poor ground conditions.
- 3.5. In particular following demolition works the site's ground conditions have transpired to be less than ideal. The stability of the sub-soil was such that it was necessary to change the piling method from continuous flight auger to hollow stem auger. This was to prevent the boreholes collapsing before the piles were cast. However, hollow stem piling is a much slower method and an unexpected temporary drain diversion caused a further delay. Also, as is sometimes the case, a small number of the piles failed their integrity test and had to be recast.
- 3.6. The combined effect of these difficulties is currently being assessed. Initial indications are that the programme will be delayed by between two to three months. This means the new library will open in late summer this year as opposed to the originally planned date of May 2006. Throughout the remainder of the construction period officers will work closely with the contractor to claw back time where this is practical and cost effective.
- 3.7. The principal effect upon the wider programme will be to delay the register office move by a similar length of time, since the conversion works at the Corn Exchange cannot commence until the library itself moves. This in turn will delay disposal of the existing register office.

#### **4. LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report.
- 4.2. The approved capital programme includes a sum of £2,055,000 for the programme of improvements to services in Rochester. A copy of the budget breakdown is attached at Appendix A.

#### **5. SUMMARY**

- 5.1. This report seeks member's views regarding progress with construction of the new Rochester Library and the impact on the related moves.

#### **6. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Rochester Library - report to Environment and Front Line Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 21 July 2005.

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