

DRAFT

# *Review of Medway's Library Service*



December 2003  
Environment and Front Line Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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## **SECTION ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1. Background**

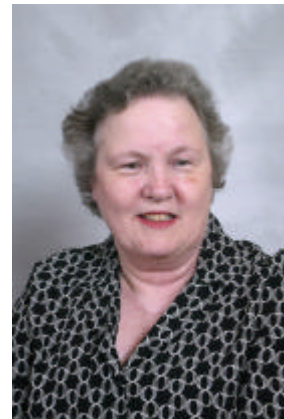
At a meeting of the Environment and Front Line Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 June 2003 a review team was set up to look at modernising the library service. The following members were appointed as the review team:



Councillor Kearney



Councillor Maisey



Councillor Shaw

#### **2. Programme**

The full programme of witnesses and details of the external visit are set out below:

<b>1 October 2003</b>	<b>Evidence from Gill Woodhams, Libraries, Information and Museums Manager</b>
<b>22 October 2003</b>	<b>Evidence from Ralph Tebbutt, Pensioners Forum and Harry Harrison, Manager – Children and Families</b>
<b>19 November 2003</b>	<b>External visit to Worcester Park and Carshalton Libraries, Sutton</b>



## SECTION TWO

### FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW

#### 1. MEDWAY LIBRARY SERVICE

- 1.1 Until this year plans for Medway's library service were contained in the Annual Library Plan, which formed part of the Council's policy framework and was submitted to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) after approval by full Council on an annual basis. The plan reviewed the achievements of the last financial year and laid out the forward plan for the following year. It also set the context in which the service operated. Primarily the plan is an expression of the authority's commitment to the development of the library service.
- 1.2. This year, however, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport required only a position statement. The statement is intended as a far more concise document than the Annual Library Plan targeting strategies for service development and improvement and showing the links between the library service and the delivery of the identified priorities of the Council.
- 1.3. The statement addresses the strategic priorities raised by the DCMS in its February 2003 publication 'Framework for the Future' and follows detailed guidance on content, style and structure laid down by the DCMS. Library services are asked to concentrate on the performance of the service, on plans for improvement and to quote examples of evidence of the implementation of their policies and practice. 'Framework for the Future' identifies 3 key areas for the development of library services:
  - Books, reading and learning – recognising that reading is becoming a more important skill than ever. People cannot be active or informed citizens unless they can read and public libraries must promote the skills and the appetite for reading.
  - Digital citizenship – the People's Network enables access to e-government, new links to local services, online information services and the creation of content.
  - Community and civic values – libraries give life to the idea of community and must extend their services beyond the confines of the building and act as neighbourhood anchors.
- 1.4. The Department for Media, Culture and Studies has issued libraries with clear guidelines about how to respond to the inclusion agenda and generate change. One of the clear statements in the foreword to the guidelines is:

*“A regenerated and pro-active library sector can help both individuals and communities to develop skills and confidence, and help improve social networking. The Government wants libraries to be at the very heart of the communities they serve.”*

- 1.5. The review team were aware of the need to modernize Medway’s libraries to encourage wider usage particularly bearing in mind the need to increase footfall (number of people visiting) in libraries identified in the 2002 Best Value Performance Plan. This was originally brought to the attention of the former Regeneration and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.6. In their discussions with the Libraries, Information and Museums Manager the review team were informed of the actions being taken to address the issue of falling attendance at libraries and were pleased to note ways in which the library staff had been engaged in putting forward their own ideas and suggestions as to how Medway’s libraries could be improved and modernized. In addition to the suggestions put forward by staff the review group suggested a number of ideas, which are included in the recommendations.

**Recommendations:**

**That the Libraries, Information and Museums Manager be requested to report back to the committee on 13 April 2004 on the feasibility and costings of the following suggestions:**

- 1(A) The provision of themed days in libraries, particularly to coincide with local events/curriculum issues using special interest groups and authors – displaying the relevant books for the events and engaging with the media to ensure good publicity from the events**
- 1(B) Develop partnerships to identify a method of supporting IT taster sessions in libraries with the provision of adult education vouchers as an incentive;**

**2. WHAT IS HAPPENING ELSEWHERE**

- 2.1. Consideration was given to work being undertaken by other local authorities around library modernisation and the group looked at research from libraries, which had achieved beacon status including Wirral and Stockton-on-Tees. They also looked at the Audit Commission report “Building Better Library Services” which identified some key issues about customer perceptions of the library service generally and ways of delivering improvements in services
- 2.2. The review group as part of their evidence gathering visited two libraries in Sutton, Worcester Park and Carshalton libraries. Illustrated below in a series

of photographs are some examples of what has been achieved at Carshalton, with the refurbishment by the library staff of the children's section and in the third picture what has been achieved by involving friends of the library – a garden used for many events throughout the year.



Left – a library in Medway



Right: young person's library - at Carshalton



Above – garden at Carshalton library hosting a musical event  
Organised by the Friends of the Library

- 2.2. The review group were impressed with the imagination used by staff at the libraries in Sutton to engage the community in the library both in the décor and refurbishment of the libraries and the very active involvement of the 'Friends of the Library' scheme. They also noted that Sutton has a rolling investment programme of improvements to libraries and felt that this had been a key element to allow them to continually modernise and improve the library service. The recommendations below set out the ideas of the group following the visits to Sutton and include a number of ideas for income generation already used by Sutton.

- 2.3. The group also looked at an article in a magazine called 'Young People Now' entitled 'Much more than books' which explained ways in which Merton's youth worker and library co-ordinator had set about making libraries more attractive to young people. According to the article Stratford library's café and TeenZone attract teenagers with its sofas, TV and racks of fashion and music magazines. The article also referred to initiatives such as the Reading Agency's YouthBOOX which supports partnerships between youth and library services aimed at reaching socially excluded young people.
- 2.4. Members also took into account information contained in a number of documents, which are referenced in section 3 of this report.

**Recommendations:**

**That the Libraries, Information and Museums Manager be requested to report back to the committee on 13 April 2004 on the feasibility and costings of the following suggestions:**

- 2(A) Ways of engaging excluded young people and those with learning difficulties in library usage to re-engage them including the provision of specialist books tailored to the needs of dyslexic adults and young people including developing partnerships with the LEA Inclusion Unit**
- 2(B) The possibility of installing listening posts (floor standing dual sided units with separate control panel, 6 disc multi changer digital audio CD player with headphones for each side) within the main libraries to allow the public to listen to music/story compact discs**
- 2(C) The setting up a 'Friends of Library' scheme, using a formal constitution governing how it should operate, to encourage community support and involvement in the libraries and potentially as a method of income generation**
- 2(D) Further developing retail opportunities in libraries**
- 2(E) Improving the décor to give a more welcoming ambience to libraries**
- 2(F) The introduction of a programme to support libraries e.g. author supper evenings – as a way of generating income and advertising the library service**

**At the time of reporting any recommendations from the review to the Cabinet (early in the municipal year) to encourage the Cabinet to consider, as part of the budget setting process for 2005/2006, clearing the backlog of maintenance of libraries and putting in place a regular rolling investment programme of improvements to libraries**



### 3. RESULTS FROM CONSULTATION/EVIDENCE TAKEN FROM WITNESSES

3.1. In an attempt to engage with members of the public it was agreed that a poster be placed in all Medway libraries requesting comments from the public on how Medway's libraries could be modernised. Unfortunately no responses were received.

3.2. Written evidence was received from Dr John Walker, Strategic Manager, Medway Adult and Community Services, and is as follows:

*“A key issue is the co-location of services – and we have an excellent example at Lordswood library – we see a benefit for the public in increasing local access to learning, and in learning resources – which libraries hold – and learning taking place in the same building. The Lordswood experiment could be written large across the whole of Medway and though there are collocation examples elsewhere, e.g. Sutton – Medway citizens would be best served by a comprehensive co-location project, extending to, potentially, all libraries”*

3.3. No specific response was received from Medway Access Forum or the Ethnic Minorities Forum.

3.4. The group took evidence from Ralph Tebbutt, Pensioners Forum during which the following points emerged –

- ❖ One of the things which it felt would be of great use to pensioners would be a meeting place where they can have light refreshments (at low cost) and relax
- ❖ It appears that the libraries work well with pensioners at the moment and have already been working to increase IT skills and to help with research, photocopying etc
- ❖ The more Council services can be linked together the better pensioners will like it
- ❖ There is still a large section of the pensioner community who are not engaged in the forum and whose needs are not being addressed. It is difficult to know how to communicate with this sector of the community

3.5. Harry Harrison, Manager, Children and Families also gave evidence during which the following points emerged –

- There is a professional library based in the health and community services directorate which is mainly unused and locked. Members felt this was a wasted resource and could be developed further to open it up for the use of staff at Medway Council and other agencies involved in children and families work
- The Bookstart programme, currently paid for by Sainsburys, has been demonstrated to be a success. Particularly bearing in mind the green paper “Every Child Matters” which underlines that all services ought to

think how their service development impinges on children. Bookstart improves the capacity of children to learn and can give them a year's start in their attainment – this has a knock on effect when they start school giving them greater confidence as well as knowledge.

- There is a team of social workers in Oxford Road working with disabled children and a grant has been given to the council to do some joint work with families and children aged 0-3 who are disabled. It was felt that this group could look at gaps in provision for young children generally.
- Areas offering hands-on activities particularly for young children would be very welcome. An 'imaginationarium' – an activity area where children can play hands on, could be built into libraries. The history of Medway could be highlighted at the libraries with interactive toys to excite children's imagination.

**Recommendations:**

**That the Libraries, Information and Museums Manager be requested to report back to the committee on 13 April 2004 on the feasibility and costings of the following suggestions:**

- 3(A) The feasibility of opening up the specialist health and community services directorate library under the Council's library service thereby allowing the Council's staff to access the learning and development resource more easily and extend the specialist information to all agencies working with children and families across Medway**
- 3(B) The provision of dedicated areas within libraries where children can have storytelling sessions, play computer games and have a "hands on" activity area using themes**
- 3(C) Assessing which libraries could be adapted to build in a social area for the public to use to meet, sit comfortably, have light refreshments etc**
- 3(D) Looking at the possibility of arranging informative talks for instance relating to parenting skills/issues with childcare facilities, in liaison with other council services**
- 3(E) Investigating the feasibility of finding external partners to continue funding the Bookstart programme when the programme of funding finishes**

**That the Director of Education and Leisure and Director of Health and Community Services be requested to ask the staff involved in joint work with children and families (children aged 0-3 years) to investigate gaps in provision for learning for those children and report back to the Environment and Front Line Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

#### 4 CHATTERBOOKS SESSIONS

- 4.1. As part of the review process Councillors Kearney and Maisey attended separate Chatterbooks sessions in Cuxton and Twydall libraries. The sessions are designed for children aged 8 to 12 years old to meet regularly to share their love of books and reading. They are given the chance to borrow new books and to participate in activities, which further enhance their reading experience.
- 4.2. Councillor Kearney commended the involvement of Orange plc (Telecommunications Company) in providing library packs for young children with pencils, information, stickers etc. to encourage library usage but with no apparent advertising on them.
- 4.3. Councillor Kearney also noticed that the library staff who are involved in working with members of the public and authors on a regular basis did not have any business cards and felt that this did not give a professional image. He thought it would be helpful for all library staff who have regular contact with outside organisations and the public to have such cards. Another concern raised during these sessions was that once young people reach the age of 13 they appear to lose contact with the library service – it was felt that action should be taken to address this issue.

**Recommendations:**

**That the Libraries, Information and Museums Manager be requested to report back to the committee on 13 April 2004 on the feasibility and costings of the following suggestions:**

- 4(A) The feasibility of introducing business cards for all members of the library service who have regular contact with outside organisations to create a more professional image**
- 4(B) To identify ways of engaging with young people over the age of 13 to encourage them to use the library service**



## **SECTION THREE**

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- 1. DEMOS – Overdue – How to create a modern public library service – April 2003**
- 2. Beacon case study – Stockton-on-Tees and Wirral**
- 3. Empowering the Learning community – Miranda McKearney**
- 4. Young People Now magazine dated 8-14 October 2003**
- 5. Building Better Library Services – Audit Commission Recommendations**
- 6. Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions - Beacon Council research**
- 7. Information about the Bookstart project supplied by Harry Harrison, Manager – Children and Families**
- 8. Medway Council's Staff Newsletter – September 2003**
- 9. Suffolk Libraries as a community resource – access for all to learning, information and imagination**
- 10. Friends of Libraries – standard constitution – provided by Sutton Council**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE LIBRARY TASK GROUP**  
**OF ENVIRONMENT AND FRONT LINE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**  
**COMMITTEE**

**Terms of reference**

1. To investigate the means by which Medway Council's library service can be enhanced and improved to provide quality services, responsive to the needs and lifestyles of all areas of the community and to take the service into the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
2. Investigate ways of improving the Council's measurement against the performance indicators relating to library usage

**Methodology**

Information/visit/evidence from beacon authorities – Stockton on Tees and Suffolk County Council, Wirral etc

Making use of existing material from cultural services best value etc

Use of advertising including Medway Matters for questionnaire for the public

**Take evidence from:**

Gill Woodhams, Library Manager

Andre Fox – Service Manager, Older People

Probation link

Sharon Williams - Housing Advice and Allocations

Surinder Dhindsa – ethnic minorities

Medway Access Group

John Walker, Adult & Community

Ian Sparling, Youth Offending Team Manager/Harry Harrison – Family Support Manager as facilitators to enable the task group to engage with young people

Outreach workers

Library staff

Unemployed

Schools (speaking to the children as well as the teachers)

Other groups/associations, which the task group feel would enable them to progress their report.

**Timings**

Evidence session on 3 September 2003 at 5.00 p.m. in the Archives Centre with Gill Woodhams

Arrange 1 or 2 internal evidence sessions (October/November)

Visit to Sutton (November – Gill Woodhams to arrange – needs to be on a Wednesday)

Arrange 1 external evidence session with 2 expert witnesses (December)

1 summing up session (December)

Produce report (Jan/Feb)

Ready to feed into next year's public libraries position statement