

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Report on the Library Service Review

Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Select Committee

July 2004



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**Office of the Deputy Prime Minister :- 'The development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government'.
September 2002.**

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Portfolio and Cabinet Member: Sports, Leisure and Culture
Councillor Smith

CMT Member: Head of Performance and Policy

Subject: Library Service Review

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 19 August 2004

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Ref: 5/LLOSP/SC

Part: I

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to submit recommendations to the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Full Council following meetings of the Select Committee responsible for the purpose of reviewing the current Library Service.

Corporate Plan 2004-2007

This report links to the delivery of the Corporate Objectives –

To improve the Library Service through investment and rationalisation of provision in the context of joined up service delivery.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land

The primary implications concerning the recommendations outlined in this report are related to the allocation and distribution of resources.

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety etc.

None

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

- (1) That the Cabinet adopt the document Library Futures (appended to this report) and be recommended –
 - (a) to require Officers to develop a detailed and fully costed action plan for the future to include a full workforce evaluation;
 - (b) that further consideration be given to the co-location of services to include the structure and management of staff;
 - (c) that a future model of hub and gateway suggesting the range and scope of services to be available be developed and produced for consultation and discussion;
 - (d) that on completion of the Council's mapping exercise, the Cabinet Member for Sports, Leisure and Culture in consultation with the Director for Lifelong Learning give further consideration to the co-location of some Council services;
 - (e) that an additional qualitative consultation with people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds be undertaken, as this was not covered fully in the previous consultation;
 - (f) there is a review of current fees and charges with respect to income target and a comparison with neighbouring authorities' charging policies;
 - (g) to ask the Head of Lifelong Learning (Community Leisure and Learning) to consider ways of increasing income over a three year period;
 - (h) to undertake a pilot scheme in selected areas across the City having regard to the aforementioned public ideas and views for the future;
 - (i) that following the adoption of the document 'Library Futures', the service reviews its operation and produces a business plan to make it fit for its future purpose;
 - (j) that consideration be given to the future marketing of the library service to raise awareness of the services and facilities and that the marketing strategy be linked to the Library Future as a tool to measure increased usage;
 - (k) a review be undertaken of the People's Network and its fitness for future purpose;

- (2) that the views of the public, who participated in the consultation, as previously noted, be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member Holder for Sports, Leisure and Culture and the Director for Lifelong Learning;

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action

None

Background papers:

- (1) Heather Newham consultants report 2003 - Part II (LL 68 03/04)
- (2) Property Register for Education and Community, including maps (LL 76 03/04)
- (3) Future Library Developments (LL 77 03/04)
- (4) Issues and the need for change (LL 78 03/04)
- (5) Plymouth Points of View Library Summary Report (LL 79 03/04)
- (6) Library Footfall data (LL 80 03/04)
- (7) Link-up Project Brochure (LL 84 03/04)
- (8) Annual Library Position Statement – version 1 (LL 86 03/04)
- (9) Visitor Count 2002 (LL OSP 3 03/04)
- (10) A Vision of Plymouth's Library Service (LL OSP 4 03/04)
- (11) Library Service Marketing Strategy (LL OSP 6 03/04)
- (12) Library 3 Year Building Programme (LL OSP 17 03/04)
- (13) Vision for Public Libraries (LL OSP 18 03/04)
- (14) Library Development Plan (LL OSP 19 03/04)
- (15) Annual Library Position Statement – version 2 (LL OSP 20 03/04)
- (16) Icthus Consultation Report on hard to reach groups (LL OSP 24 03/04)
- (17) Library Futures document (LL 06 04/05)
- (18) ALPS (LL 07 04/05)

REPORT OF THE LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

LIBRARY SERVICE REVIEW

1.0 Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed a work programme for the Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel. It was agreed that one of the topics to be considered would be a review of the Library Service. A Select Committee was convened to scrutinise the current library service provision.

2.0 Select Committee Structure

Councillors

Councillor Nicky Wildy, in the Chair
Councillors Dann, Mrs. Foster, Savery, Stevens and Mrs. Pengelly

Lead Officers/Witnesses

Councillor Peter Smith – Portfolio Holder for Sports, Leisure and Culture
Councillor Tom Wildy – e-government Champion

Karen Brimicombe – Project Officer Services Location (Appraisal)
Rhea Brooke – St Peter Ichthus Society
James Coulton – Head of Community Leisure and Learning
Philip Gasche – IT Manager
Chris Goddard – Resources and Information Manager
Laura Harris – Customer Focus Project Leader
Brian Holgate – Public Services Librarian
Bronwen Lacey – Director for Lifelong Learning
Frank Lowry – Support and Development Librarian
Alasdair MacNaughtan – City Librarian
Sue Mc Donald – St Peter Ichthus Society
Sandra Pentney – Professional Support Librarian
Mark West – Assistant Neighbourhood Renewal Officer
Christina Smale – Business Manager
Sam Swabey – Granby Island Project Manager
Sandy Teske – Corporate Consultation Officer
Lesley Thatcher – Link-up Project Manager
Sally Walsh – Co-ordinator of Library Services to Young People

3.0 Objectives and Terms of Reference

3.1 The Library Services Select Committee agreed that the purpose of the review was to consider the Consultant's report on the Strategic Review of Plymouth City Council Library Services and the feedback from Plymouth Points of View public consultation. Also to monitor and evaluate progress relating to the current Annual Library Position Statement (ALPS) and to establish a Medium Term Strategy, focusing on –

(i) Co-locations

- hub and gateway
- dual use
- staffing

(ii) ICT

- Best practice
- Libraries and e-government
- Libraries, ICT and learning
- People's Network sustainability

(iii) site visits

(iv) gaps in provision

(v) social inclusion

(vi) reviewing the current Library Service Marketing strategy

(vii) partnerships

4.0 Hearings

4.1 The Committee met on 12 occasions to hear from Lead Officers and witnesses, consider background papers and public consultation feedback, conduct site visits and to formulate a report of recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

Timetable of meetings -

24th November 2003
1st, 8th and 15th December 2003
12th and 19th January 2004
2nd February 2004
1st March 2004
14th and 26th April 2004

10th May 2004

26th July 2004

5.0 Background Information

5.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places a statutory duty upon Plymouth as a 'Library Authority'. The Act states that "it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient service for all persons desiring to make use thereof". Although the Act does not closely define 'comprehensive and efficient' a number of standards for the public library service have been published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Statute requires that the core public library services of book lending and information provision be provided free of charge to all those who "live, work or study" in the local authority's area.

5.2 Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the New Decade, published by the DCMS in February 2003, is the government's ten-year vision for public libraries – how libraries can best serve their communities in the 21st century. Framework for the Future aims to promote public libraries, give them improved visibility, and to set out why libraries matter. Each year, local government spends around £800 million on public libraries. There are many excellent library services that are focal points for their communities, working at the heart of local and central government objectives for learning, and social cohesion. The Government wishes to see every public library achieve this potential for the benefit of all communities. The central themes of Framework are:

1. Books, reading and learning

Knowledge, skills and information are at the heart of economic and social life. Libraries can provide access to virtually all books ever published and much more. In an informal, supportive and stimulating environment, libraries can encourage reading and provide access to learning for everyone.

2. Digital citizenship

Libraries are providing access to vastly more information than ever before through the Internet. They enable all citizens to have access to information and services and are central to the delivery of electronic government.

3. Community and civic values

Libraries are safe, welcoming, neutral spaces open to all the community. They are particularly well placed to engage hard to reach groups, working with education, social, health and leisure services.

5.3 However, to achieve the ambitions of these themes, Plymouth City Council will need to adapt to meet the changing needs of their communities. The first and principal area of work will therefore be to support the

transformation of library services so that they can deliver what communities expect and need in the 21st century.

- 5.4 A Library Position Statement was produced by Plymouth City Council in 2002 and the Secretary of State required a document to be submitted as a rolling programme every year. The Select Committee aimed to review the 2003 Plan and to formulate a medium term strategy.
- 5.5 Following the Council CPA review at the start of 2003, which highlighted concerns over silo working, clarity was sought as to how to develop the business of providing a high quality library service in Plymouth. The Council needed to review how to effectively deploy its resources and to consider how to be more creative and innovative in delivering the service. The Select Committee considered how to incorporate these precepts into the scrutiny process whilst simultaneously monitoring the existing Library Position Statement, concentrating on:
- The management of Libraries (2004);
 - Identifying surplus accommodation (including schools) and leasing options available;
 - Co-locating with other public services;
 - Identifying possible partnerships and where appropriate establishing links;
 - Reviewing provision at a local level, recognising that each area has different expectations and priorities;
 - How to incorporate the library vision into the School Organisation Plan.

6.0 The Committee's Findings

Library Position Statement 2004/2005 and document 'Library Futures'

- 6.1 The DCMS assessment of the Library Position Statement 2003(LPS) remained as "fair", however the Corporate Vision improved to "good".
- 6.2 A serious resource issue has been highlighted repeatedly and, whilst there is encouraging evidence that the Council is now committed to improving the Library Service, the need for more funding is inescapable. Unless additional financial resources are forthcoming, progress towards realising all the targets set in the LPS will be limited.
- 6.3 The Position Statement has a prescribed format and will be supplemented with an action plan.
- 6.4 The Select Committee was consulted during the production of the document 'Library Futures', which is appended to this report.

Recommendation: that Cabinet adopt the document ' Library Futures'

Strategic Review of Plymouth City Council's Library Service

- 6.5 The Council invited Heather Newham Associates to conduct a strategic review of the library services as part of the Leisure Trust project. The Select Committee considered the findings of the review and noted that the report concluded the way forward for the Plymouth City Council Library Services would be to adopt an holistic position to create a vision for the future setting a series of practical goals to which the City and the Library Service could aspire.
- 6.6 It was identified that the Library Service previously were unable to assimilate corporate and strategic objectives within service level planning, as there were none. Changes to methods of communication could quickly benefit the service and all those who work in the service.
- 6.7 The conclusion of the report focused on the benefits that a medium term strategy for the library service would bring and drew upon the findings made throughout the six-month review. The Library Position Statement must be closely aligned to the Library Futures' Plan, which would aid in the further development of the themes therein thus ensuring that future service priorities are matched to the corporate aims.
- 6.8 It was clear throughout the document that the key focus was to encourage the library service to modernise and change, whilst remaining within the common service framework

Recommendation: to require Officers to develop a detailed and fully costed action plan for the future to include a full workforce evaluation

Plymouth Points of View data

- 6.9 The Select Committee took advantage of the opportunity to utilise the second Residents Panel Survey (Plymouth Points of View) run in June 2003, to survey public opinion. The advantages of using the survey would enable the Committee to seek the views of Plymouth's residents. The response to the survey of over 1000 residents was high (70% -80%). The aim of the survey was to acquire an understanding of the awareness and usage of the library service in the City as well as expectations in respect of opening times.

- 6.10 The survey was administered by post or online in early June 2003. The panel membership stood at 1534 at the start of the survey, and 1076 responses were received. The following key points were identified -

Current library usage

Just under half of the respondents (48%) said that they currently used the library service in Plymouth.

Awareness/usage of lending services

Almost all respondents (96%) were aware that the library had books to borrow which was the most heavily used service. The majority were aware of the other lending services, but only one quarter were aware of home deliveries for housebound people.

Awareness/usage of computers and technology

Nearly three quarters of respondents (72%) knew there was access to photocopiers at the library, though less than a third (31%) knew about training courses on the Internet. Photocopiers was the service used most often (20%) compared with only 3% who said they had used the training courses and 'access to the Internet was used by 9% of the respondents.

Awareness/usage of information services

The majority (89%) of respondents knew that the library provided information and reference services and three quarters (76%) knew about information on local events and groups. The lowest levels of awareness were for the 'family history research facilities'. Services with the highest awareness had the highest levels of current users.

Awareness/usage of multimedia hire

About two thirds of people (67%) were aware that the library hired out CDs and nearly as many (61%) knew that it hired out videos. About half of respondents (51%) knew about DVD hire and a third (35%) knew that the library hired out language courses. Video hire (15%) was the most commonly used service followed by CD hire (10%) and language courses were only used by 1% of respondents.

Awareness/usage of children's services

Awareness of children's story tapes was the highest (60%) and the lowest awareness levels were for 'rhyme time' at 45%. Usage of children's services was relatively low for all of the services – between 2% and 4% for all five of them. The majority of current users were in the 30 to 44 years group, with only a few in younger or older groups. However with regard to future usage, those between 20 and 29 years showed a very high rate of interest (40 to 50% compared to the overall rates of around 20% generally).

The library used

Nearly a third of respondents (30%) chose the Central Library as the one they would use most often, with 13% saying they would not use a library. The biggest factor in choosing a library appeared to be locality. When mapped by postcode it appeared that most of the smaller libraries drew their customers from the local area, even the Central Library had a greater concentration of customers within its vicinity. The main exception to this rule was the Crownhill Library, which appeared to draw customers from a wider area of the City.

Preferred visiting times

On weekdays around a third of respondents indicated that they would prefer to visit the library during mornings, a third in the afternoons, a quarter in the early evenings and a tenth in the later evening (roughly a third in evenings in total). During weekends the picture was slightly different, with approximately half of respondents saying that they would want to go in the morning and only a relative few saying that they would visit in the evenings.

Preferred opening times

Approximately a quarter of respondents thought that the libraries should be open before 9.00 am, with a third saying that they should be open after 9.30 am. Saturdays had fewer respondents (19%) wanting opening before 9.00 am, and Sundays had fewer people again (13%) wanting earlier openings, with a higher proportion thinking they should open after 10.00 am.

Preferred closing times

The survey indicated that the most popular time for closing during the week was 7.00 pm, with approximately a third indicating that this was their preferred time. About a third thought the library should close between 8.00 pm and 10.00 pm during the week. Saturdays (44%) and Sundays (55%) had far more respondents indicating that 5.30 pm was a satisfactory closing time.

The Select Committee identified the requirement for further quantitative consultation with all users and potential users, which needs to include a higher representation from Black Minority Ethnic Groups.

Recommendation: to undertake a pilot in selected areas across the City having regard to the aforementioned public ideas and views for the future.

Co-locations – hub and gateway

- 6.11 The Select Committee considered information on the number of visits, issues and enquiries dealt with at each library and established that seven libraries had 'high and medium usage' and were responsible for 84% of the total annual library business. This suggests that the Council should move away from the current "one size fits all" approach and begin to tailor individual library sites using the network concept of hub and gateway libraries, equipped to respond to the needs of the local community. To improve its building stock, the provision of hub libraries, which would be large all-inclusive service points supported by the Central Library would play a key role in assisting the gateway libraries. The gateway libraries would be able to draw from a hub and the central libraries, enabling them to offer the local community a wider range of library services.

Recommendation: that a future model of hub and gateway suggesting the range and scope of services to be available be produced for consultation and discussion.

Co-locations – dual use

- 6.12 Over the last decade many local authorities have provided "one stop shops" in order to provide access to varying advice and information at one site. A large number of "one stop shops" throughout the nation were provided in conjunction or in association with library services. Without one clear official route to council departments, members of the public often find accessing the right service for them difficult and time-consuming. There are several advantages to local authorities providing one stop shops including access to a wide variety of council services from one service point. This would give the Council 'a face' directing members of the public quickly to the most appropriate service for their need. The libraries are the most used personal service provided by the Council and are ideally suited to co-location with other Council services.
- 6.13 The Council as part of the implementation of the Customer Focus Strategy is currently in the process of mapping all current service and delivery points to be provided, identifying where future joint service delivery points could be located across the City. The School Organisation Plan will also provide a framework to identify which schools/land could possibly be used as co-location sites.

Recommendation: that on completion of the mapping exercise, the Cabinet Member for Sports, Leisure and Culture, in consultation with the Director for Lifelong Learning, give further consideration to the co-location of some Council services.

Co-locations – staffing

- 6.14 National surveys demonstrated that it was now common working practice in other library authorities for all library staff to be appointed on a citywide basis, available to work at any library and often working as required at several different libraries during the course of a week. This is now also the case in Plymouth.
- 6.15 It was highlighted that at some of the smaller libraries in Plymouth 'lone workers' operated and this gave cause for concern. A risk assessment on each site has been undertaken to determine a practical support system for all employees working alone.
- 6.16 To enable co-location of staff to be feasible it must be recognised that all staff would need to be multi-skilled in ICT, and possess a wide knowledge base of other services and resources to assist in directing people to the right place. The development of front line staff would be essential with the need for training to be incorporated into the service as an ongoing process, with regular appraisals and the formulation of an appropriate structure for the use of staff development.

Recommendation: that further consideration be given to the co-location of services to include the structure and management of staff.

Site Visits

- 6.17 There are 17 community libraries across the city of Plymouth, some located in leasehold buildings. A number are located in council buildings and ownership does not fall within one department. Members of the Select Committee visited the majority of the library sites. From the buildings viewed, and the information gained with respect to the few sites not visited, the Committee Members were of the view that a number of buildings were in need of significant renovation and refurbishment.
- 6.18 National research had identified the importance of locating libraries and shopping centres together to gain maximum usage. Four small libraries are located in inappropriate places and are not attracting large numbers of users. Committee Members were of the view that an ideal environment for future libraries could be within or near to a retail environment as it would attract footfall to both the library as well as provide an economic regeneration impetus to a shopping area.
- 6.19 It was clear that utilisation of buildings should be optimised and be subject to a separate review to determine the minimum number of properties

required, the location, in order to deliver the desired level of services. Investment in buildings should be prioritised against a clear set of criteria based on the Council's Corporate Plan and provide value for money. The service should exploit and maximise opportunities to realise capital value through disposal and re-investment to give better service outcomes.

- 6.20 A new Central Library would provide an iconic building, creating a link between the retail centre and the cultural developments set within the Mackay vision for Plymouth. A modern well-resourced Central Library site should attract substantial numbers of visitors to the City and accelerate the process of regeneration and investment of the city centre.

Recommendation: that following the introduction of the document 'Library Futures', the service reviews its operation and produces a business plan to make it fit for its future purpose.

ICT – Local Authority Corporate Best Practice

- 6.21 The implementation of the Council's Customer Focused Strategy was underway, which was committed to making information available to the public at all City Council locations and within this sphere, libraries generally operated good practices with regards to providing a service to the public. Problems had been experienced with regards to implementing the strategy, as departments tended to operate as a single entity resulting in a need for the Council to act corporately in order to provide a better public service. It is important that there is a cross platform for information technology to assist communication and liaison between departments, as many individuals use be-spoke or 'stand alone' software equipment. The ICT provision throughout the Council needs to be multi-dimensional with a central hub available to all channels. A review of the infrastructure within the Council with regard to technology skills and knowledge, along with Citrix, the facility to deliver Information Systems via one hub and many PC's was underway. When the new structure becomes available the Library Service would be able to make significant progress to realise a number of the ALP targets.

ICT – future generation of income

- 6.22 Libraries and e-government
E-government is about people and service delivery, not systems and processes. The government's requirement is that 100% of council services should be accessible by electronic means by the end of 2005.
- 6.23 Libraries contribute substantially to e-government by giving citizens access to Web-enabled services through the 'People's Network'. The People's

- Network was a Lottery-funded project which put Internet-connected computers into every public library in the UK.
- 6.24 Plymouth libraries have 110 easy-to-access and easy-to-use computers across the service. Limited Lottery funding and limited development caused by local government reorganisation meant that Plymouth libraries computer were limited to Internet access, and the full potential could not be realised.
- 6.25 It was clear that investment in ICT provision in libraries was required, together with a need to redefine delivery to combine digital and traditional services.

Libraries, ICT and learning

- 6.26 Libraries have a key role as social and learning centres, which promote community cohesion. They also provide a trusted and credible source of information and training to target groups in the community.
- 6.27 The People's Network (see 6.20) supports learning in the community. It was identified as a work package in its own right in the Lifelong Learning e-Learning Strategy.
- 6.28 To support all users the service developed the *Plymouth cyberLibrary*, a website listing other websites which have all been carefully selected by Plymouth librarians for their outstanding quality.

People's Network sustainability

- 6.29 Lottery funding only covered the initial computers and three years' line rental. This will come to an end in January 2005. Ideas for increasing Library Service income to contribute to sustainability were considered.
- 6.30 One option for consideration in the short-term is the smartcard, specifically the 'e-purse' function. A smartcard is one of the latest addition to the world of IT. The same size as a credit or debit card, a smartcard has a 'chip' embedded in it which is capable of storing a lot of information about cardholder. Some cards can be credited with financial value and used for payment, for example for car parking, leisure facilities, library charges or bus fares.
- 6.30 The overall level of income raised in Plymouth libraries was low when compared to CIPFA 'Nearest Neighbour' authorities. Plymouth's library charges for services have been set according to a perception of the community's ability to pay, balanced against the need to generate income, and ensure that the charges do not deter potential service users. This policy is subjective unless it is backed up by current market research.

Recommendation :

- ***that there is a review of current fees and charges with respect to income target and a comparison with neighbouring authorities' charging policies;***
- ***to ask the Head of Lifelong Learning (Community Leisure and Learning) to consider ways of increasing income over a three year period;***
- ***a review be undertaken of the People's Network and its fitness for future purpose.***

Staff Training and Development

- 6.31 Libraries have incorporated the Individual Performance Appraisal scheme through which personal development training needs are identified. Staff development is co-ordinated and prioritised following each Performance and Development review and involves staff being assigned to waiting lists for in-house training. Training needs are continuously reviewed and prioritised according to business need. To enhance communication lines throughout the library service, a working party has been established and a series of recommendations have been approved by the Library Senior Management Team and are currently being implemented.

Gaps in Provision

- 6.32 It was determined that Plymouth's Library Service are not currently meeting all of the Standards set by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. These Standards are based on population to allow comparison with other similar authorities. It was clear that Plymouth's Library Service spends the lowest amount per head of population of its fifteen comparators.
- 6.33 In 2003 the Library Service did not meet 10 of the 30 Standards. The Library Service has improved its performance against the Standards over the last twelve months, and with the additional investment allocated for 2004/5 it is anticipated that between two and four further standards could be met by April 2005. Two additional satisfaction standards may also be

met but this will not be known until the next scheduled ODPM survey in 2006. The service is striving for continual improvement, but will require sustained additional investment to do this

Gaps identified are as follows:

- Opening hours. The number of hours that the libraries are currently open fall short of the required Standard. This has been identified as a national problem.
- Stock purchased. The current stock was highlighted as limited by the 'complaints and suggestions books' held in all libraries. Although the stock budget is managed well, the level of investment in library stock is below that required to meet the Standards for the acquisition of new items. Self evidently, the stock was central to the existence of any library and national surveys had shown that the stock of a successful public library needed to be constantly and proactively managed, to ensure that it both anticipate and reflected the needs and demands of its users.
- Locations. The library locations do not best serve all of the residents within the City and falls short of the recommended Standard that libraries shall be sited within one mile of 88% of the population. The Service does meet the standard where there must be a library within two miles of 100% of the population.
- Mobile library service. The service was discontinued in 2001/02, and previously delivered services to those members of the community who were not actually housebound but nevertheless were unable to travel to static sites easily i.e. children, parents with young children, older people and the economically disadvantaged. A traditional mobile service is one method of bridging gaps in library provision but is expensive to purchase and maintain. The Library Service should investigate the possibility of innovative solutions to service delivery of which a mobile service could be a component.
- Number of computer terminals currently provided. The ICT was highlighted as a serious concern throughout the review as the service fails to meet the Standards. If a new Central Library is created, this would have a very positive effect on improving the service delivery and achieving Standards.

Complaints

- 6.34 Minor complaints, comments and suggestions are monitored by a Principal Officer and regularly reported at the Library Services Senior Management Team. They are all answered by the most appropriate Senior Officer, and acted on immediately where this is possible. Direct replies are made by letter, email or telephone and where responses are considered to be of interest to a wider audience they are published on the “You comment – we answer” section of the library website.
- 6.35 More serious official complaints, as designated by the Corporate Complaints Policy, are monitored by the Lifelong Learning Complaints monitoring Officer. These normally receive a response from the City Librarian, or a member of the Library Services Senior Management Team in his absence. Issues are brought to the attention of the relevant Senior Officer and immediate action taken where this is possible.
- 6.36 In all cases where a longer term solution is required the processes allow for issues to be fed into service planning and the Library Position Statement.

Social Inclusion

- 6.37 A qualitative public consultation was carried out to complement the more quantitative work of Plymouth Points of View, highlighted at Paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5. The aim was to ascertain the views of people living within the five priority neighbourhoods of Barne Barton, Ernesettle, Honicknowle, North Prospect and Stonehouse about public libraries. These five neighbourhoods are the focus of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, with Devonport as the “New Deal for Communities” (NDC) neighbourhood making up the sixth study area.
- 6.38 A Partnership to undertake the work was formed with St Peter Icthus Society, which is a small community organisation based at All Saints House in Stonehouse. The consultation method was designed to be approachable and friendly without any assumptions about the literacy ability, tastes or library usage of any of the respondents. It also depended upon the use of face-to-face encounters with people living within the neighbourhoods themselves so that those considered traditionally “hard to reach” in terms of simply living in one area of the “priority” neighbourhoods were purposefully and strategically included. The following key points were identified –

Library locations

Over 90% of the entire sample knew where their nearest library was, what was not known was the facilities within the libraries.

Mobile libraries

Those who had problems with mobility wanted the mobile libraries reinstated. This was noticeable in Stonehouse where people had to travel the furthest distance to a library. People in Honicknowle also missed the mobile library and felt it should be reinstated where the bungalows were sited. Some primary schools in Stonehouse used to have the mobile library visit the school. At High Street School the literacy hour was timed to coincide with the visit by the mobile library service once a week. Parents and their children could exchange books and return them the following week. This service was removed around four years ago and its restoration could assist in tackling key floor targets. The percentage of eligible pupils gaining 5+ GCSE's (A-C), 2002 was reported at 16.4%, the lowest of all recorded scores in the five neighbourhood renewal funded areas although this could not be directly correlated to library provision.

Opening hours

There was a desire to see the library opening hours reviewed to include Sundays, particularly at the Central Library. The ideas of coffee shops within libraries, separate rooms with live musical performances on Sundays and the possibility of other cultural events within the city were also supported.

Information services

The respondents indicated that they would like to see travel information and displays by City Bus e.g. holidays and day trips, which could be displayed by renting space within libraries to advertise with computer link-ups for ticket purchase. Libraries could also be sales outlets, via computers for ticket sales for events at the Pavilions and Theatre Royal.

Library/community linked services

The cluster effect of the built environment, which linked Ernesettle Community Centre, Sure Start and the library together, was particularly effective with linked activities taking place across all three organizations e.g. the tiling project where different groups contributed to a piece of artwork within the library.

There was an interest in libraries, which could assume the role of "toy libraries" linking them further to primary schools and Sure Start, and in addition encouraging older children and the general public with computer games for example.

It was clear that community centres engaged in multi-group activities, and an example of this was cake decoration via community learning project work at North Prospect. There was a desire for provision of a part-time community librarian, which could be set up as a pilot project, to link-up with groups and community centres across the city as an extension of the work

carried out by librarians with Sure Start, and could include voluntary visiting schemes for housebound people.

Children

School children appeared to be using only the school libraries, except in Devonport where the schools had additional facilities such as the Mount Wise Learning Together library.

Teenagers desired access to computer games and also CD's within the libraries. The young people who participated, in the survey thought that libraries were for small children or the retired.

Library users

Public library membership appeared to decline with age into adulthood and then showed an increase in those over 60 years across all of the neighbourhoods. Having children appeared to prompt a renewed interest in books since parents we spoke to felt a responsibility to assist in their children's reading. The expectation that parents would read with children led to intense levels of lone self-help by parents with reading difficulties, who intended to learn to read with their children.

Book amnesty

Lapsed members who had lost their tickets were engaged in conversation to discover why they had not revisited libraries. Reasons concluded embarrassment over non-return of books and the payment of outstanding fines. Some respondents were fearful that fines may be totted up over several years or that they would be taken to court. The respondents would welcome the option of a book amnesty, which could include several "drop off points" within the city e.g. First Stop and libraries themselves.

Recommendation:

- (i) the views of the public, who participated in the consultation, as previously noted, be brought to the attention of the Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure and Culture and the Director for Lifelong Learning;***
- (ii) an additional qualitative consultation with people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds be undertaken, as this was not covered fully in the previous consultation.***

Library Service Marketing Strategy

6.39 The current library service marketing strategy was reviewed and it was determined that the strategy requires updating in light of the Corporate Plan. The Select Committee identified that the following actions would need to be taken prior to producing the strategy:

- Preparation of a short/medium and long term vision (Library Future Plan);
- Updating of the mission statement;
- Alignment against the Corporate objectives;
- Set marketing objectives and strategies in line with corporate issues
- Creation of a brand/identify to market the service.

Recommendation: that consideration be given to the future marketing of the library service to raise awareness of the services and facilities and that the marketing strategy be linked to the 'Library Futures' as a tool to measure increased usage.

Partnerships

6.40 In recent years it has been recognised that nationally the direct delivery of every service provided by local authorities may no longer be the most appropriate model for successful innovation and the development of new projects. In many service areas there have been successful projects based on partnership working but it was established that although there are examples of good practice, public libraries have been slower to develop in this respect.

6.41 The current City library service operates through a city-wide network of seventeen static libraries, a schools library service and community services, which include a home delivery service delivered by WRVS volunteers. The DCMS guidelines for the preparations of annual library plans states that “any plan for an individual service must relate to the overall Local Authority planning process” and also “the library service does not exist in isolation. The Local Authority’s policies to address the needs of its population should be stated where they impinge on the library service”.

6.42 Communication with various partners to bring forward developments at the North Hill Quarter were ongoing and a new Central Library would link the retail centre, the North Hill Quarter and the University Campus.

6.43 To continually increase and develop partnerships is vital, with resourcing for pump-priming of carefully selected projects, which could have the

ability to deliver successful outcomes, a key area which must be fully explored. The continuation of Local Studies Day with local groups would hopefully provide the opportunity to lead to new partnerships. It was clear that that there was a need to build partnerships with further relevant Plymouth community based organisations, including Learndirect, which so far has been unsuccessful.

Recommend that community profiling be undertaken and consultation developed and implemented. The consultation feedback should link to the service development plan in conjunction with the Council's consultation team.

7 Monitoring

- 7.1 The Library Position Statement to produce an action plan to show the standards will be achieved as well as how developments of the service will be taken forward and achieved, (including timelines and key actions). The Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel to receive progress reports on a quarterly basis for the next 12 months.

8.0 Summary

- 8.1 It is clear that the review of the library services has highlighted the need to evaluate the viability and value of services currently provided and the ongoing need to establish a range of affordable services, to meet the Council's community and corporate objectives, which would need to be incorporated into any plans and aspirations for future service development.
- 8.2 Mirroring national trends there has been a decline in book borrowing in library both nationally and locally. The service as a whole has been struggling to meet the demands and needs of users; investment of new books, provision of study space, information and for public access to ICT.
- 8.3 The Library Service meets two thirds of the DCMS Public Library Standards with which libraries are expected to comply. Long term under-resourcing of the Library Service needs to be addressed and reversed to enable the delivery of an improved service and to reduce the current number of failing Standards.
- 8.4 The Best Value Review concluded that the service was under-funded and would require additional funds in order to meet the Public Library Standards by 2004.
- 8.5 The service needs to build upon its proposal to create a hub and gateway structure by developing a modern mission statement, reconfigure itself

and improve the provision by offering more bespoke programmes to meet the needs and requirements of local communities throughout the City. A wider range of resources are needed to make the facilities more appealing to a diverse age range to promote reading, informal learning, access to digital services and tackle social inclusion, thus building community identity and developing citizenship. Consideration should be given to the overall leadership and management of the service, including the development of the workforce, governance and advocacy, sustainability and funding, marketing and culture, partnerships to maintain standards that are achieved.

9.0 Chair's Summary

9.1 The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, would like to –

- a. Confirm that the topic of the Library Service Review had been considered with conscientious and serious application;
- b. Thank all officers and witnesses concerned for their contribution, enthusiasm and dedication to this Scrutiny Select Committee with particular thanks to Christine Crown and Christina Smale for their support during the review.