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**LIBRARY STANDARDS – TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP –  
FINAL REPORT**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) -Councillor Stephen Harker, Education Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) - Geoff Pennington, Director of Education**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To report the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the outcome of the Library Standards Task and Finish Group.

**Information and Analysis**

2. The Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 9th February, 2003, established a Task and Finish Review Group to investigate how this Council's performance against the library standards compared with that of neighbouring authorities.
3. The Task and Finish Review Group presented its final report (**attached as an Appendix**) to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 5th April, 2004.
4. At this meeting, the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny referred the recommendation, as detailed below, to Cabinet for consideration :-

That in light of the comparative figures from the Tees Valley Authorities Library Standards it be recommended that the Darlington Borough Council Cabinet give urgent attention to the following:-

5. Plans for a new Library in the North of the Town be included in future budgets and visions.
6. That the renewal of the mobile library vehicle be given urgent priority status.
7. That the efforts of the library staff to offer such an excellent service despite setbacks be recognised and supported.
8. That funding be found to continue the work of the new e-link in the old Arts Gallery enabling Social Inclusion in this vital field.
9. That £5,000 be provided to promote Social Inclusion through the Housebound Service.

## **Director's Comments**

10. The Library Service is currently undergoing both a financial review and a staffing restructure which will look at addressing some of the issues identified. The DCMS is consulting on new Public Library Standards and is planning to remove or change some of the standards which we currently do not meet. The mobile library is a cause of concern and once a full appraisal of the best option for replacement is determined this will be actioned. As part of an ongoing review there are a number of other innovative service delivery models being considered including delivering from school libraries and village halls.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

11. No formal consultation was undertaken in the production of this report other than the consultation undertaken by the Review Group itself.

## **Legal Implications**

12. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

13. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

## **Council Policy Framework**

14. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

## **Decision Deadline**

15. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

## **Recommendation**

16. It is recommended that :-
  - (a) The recommendations of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny be noted; and
  - (b) The committee be advised that the mobile library will be replaced as a matter of priority;

- (c) The e-library be developed using existing resources to meet rising use and expectations;
- (d) The performance of the library service be assessed against the new public library standards when they are published; and
- (e) The work to make the library a key part of the council in terms of delivery of social inclusion be confirmed and developed.

### **Reasons**

17. The recommendations are supported as this is a period of transition for Library services nationally and it is prudent to wait until clearer guidance on service provision is received from DCMS.

**Geoff Pennington**  
**Director of Education**

### **Background Papers**

Reports to meetings of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 9th February and 5th April, 2004.

Lynne Wood : Extension 2287  
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## LIBRARY STANDARDS TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

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### FINAL REPORT

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#### Introduction

1. This is the Final Report of the Library Standards Task and Finish Review Group, which was established by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 9th February, 2004 to consider how this Authority performs against the Library Standards compared with that of neighbouring authorities.
2. It is worth mentioning at this point that neighbouring authorities have the following Library facilities :-

| Local Authority      | Static Library | Mobile Library | Bookbus |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| Hartlepool           | 7 Branches     | One            | One     |
| Middlesbrough        | 12 branches    | One            | One     |
| Stockton             | 11 branches    | One            | One     |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 13 branches    | Two            | None    |

3. The report describes how the Task and Finish Review was conducted and its findings and recommendations. It is important to stress at this point that Task and Finish Reviews are not intended to be a full-scale review, but ones which may highlight areas which require attention or further investigation.

#### Membership of the Task and Finish Review Group

4. The following Members on the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee comprised the Membership of the Task and Finish Review Group :-

Councillor S. Robson (Chair); and  
Mr. M. Fryer, Darlington Association of Governor's Representative.

#### Acknowledgements

5. The Task and Finish Review Group acknowledges the support and assistance provided in the course of its investigations and would like to place on record their thanks to the following :-

Ruth Bernstein, Head of Libraries and Community Learning Service, Education Department;  
Karen Graves, Democratic Support Officer, Corporate Services Department; and  
Christine Bates, Democratic Support Officer, Corporate Services Department.

### **Aim of Review**

6. The initial aim of the Review was to consider how this Authority performs against the Library Standards compared with that of neighbouring authorities, however, during the Review it was also decided to highlight the initiatives currently being implemented, piloted and discussed by this Council.

### **Method of Investigation**

7. The Group met on 4th March, 2004 at the Crown Street Library and undertook discussions with Ruth Bernstein on the Public Library Standards and Darlington's performance in comparison to neighbouring authorities. A table of Standards and Statistics showing this Authority's performance compared with neighbouring authorities was circulated to Members to enable them in their Review. Notes of that meeting are attached as **Appendix 1**. The table of Standards and Statistics is attached as **Appendix 2**.

### **Conclusions**

8. The following are the conclusions and findings of the Group :-
  - (a) It is recognised that, due to the lack of static Libraries, Darlington cannot compare to the Tees Valley performance, having failed to meet 13 of the 30 Public Library Standards. Hartlepool alone has seven static Libraries compared to two in Darlington.
  - (b) Prior to Unitary Darlington was included within the figures for Durham County Council, which gave a more favourable result.
  - (c) The Library Standards were currently under review and were to concentrate on quality issues not quantity. We also believe that if the Standards were amended and/or re-worded slightly this would result in Darlington gaining more favourable results. Our comments will be put forward reflecting this viewpoint when consulted.
  - (d) The Mobile Library is a statutory obligation which would cost £130,000 to replace. However it is recognised that the Mobile Library is in a poor state of disrepair and funding needs to be secured in order to provide a quality service to members of the public unable to attend a static library.
  - (e) The PLS figures for Darlington did not reflect the innovative ideas recently implemented and/or currently under consideration which are detailed below :-
    - (i) Provision of a Story Sack Library within the new Skerne Park Primary School which would be fully integrated within the Crown Street Library via a computer

link. A member of Library Staff would be available for 18.5 hours per week who would be able to process all Library requests 'at the touch of a button' without the need to attend the Crown Street or Cockerton Libraries;

- (ii) The above service at (i) above would also soon be available to the residents of Firthmoor with the facility being incorporated within the Community Centre;
  - (iii) An opportunity exists to promote Social Inclusion through the Housebound Service and a survey was currently being undertaken to investigate the feasibility of this; and
  - (iv) The provision of Library Packs for new housing estates was to be considered in order to promote the service.
- (f) One PLS at which Darlington excelled is PLS10 – Number of visits to Library Website. The number of 'hits' Darlington experienced was 14,479.60 compared to just 470 at Middlesbrough and 9,641 at Stockton. This is seen as a clear indication that the way forward is through the expansion of IT services.

### **Recommendations**

9. That in the light of the comparative figures from the Tees Valley Authorities Library Standards it be recommended that the Darlington Borough Council Cabinet give urgent attention to the following:
- (a) Plans for a new Library in the North of the Town be included in future budgets and visions.
  - (b) That the renewal of the mobile library vehicle be given urgent priority status.
  - (c) That the efforts of the library staff to offer such an excellent service despite setbacks be recognised and supported.
  - (d) That funding be found to continue the work of the new e-library in the old Arts Gallery enabling Social Inclusion in this vital field.

### **Library Standards Task and Finish Review Group**

**LIBRARY STANDARDS TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP**

**4th March, 2004**

**PRESENT -**

Councillor S. Robson and Mr. Fryer.

Officers – Ruth Bernstein and Karen Graves.

The meeting was convened by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee (Minute LLL63(3)/Feb/04) in order to consider how this Authority performs against the Library Standards compared with that of neighbouring authorities.

Ruth Bernstein, Head of Libraries and Community Learning Service circulated to the Group a table showing comparisons of the performance of Darlington, Hartlepool, Stockton on Tees and Middlesbrough against the standard recommended by the Public Library Standards (PLS). It was reported that the figures for Redcar and Cleveland were not available.

The following points were discussed/considered :-

- The Authorities that were used as comparisons had more libraries with Hartlepool alone having seven static Libraries.
- Previous to Unitary Darlington was included in the PLS figures for Durham County Council which gave a more favourable result.
- Plans for a new Library at Harrowgate Hill were shelved due to lack of finance and unfortunately it was too late to include a Library within the Education Village development at Haughton.
- Finance of £430,000 has been secured to add an adult learning centre to the new Skerne Park Primary School. Space has been identified within the centre for a Story Sacks library, which will be incorporated within the library service. A member of staff was to be made available together with a computer link to the Crown Street Library to ensure that all requests were dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- It was stated that the emphasis of Partnership working was to think of the customer and access to the service was a prime factor. It was hoped to provide a similar service to the residents of Firthmoor with the Community Centre being the “point of call”. Work was currently being undertaken with residents to encourage the use of “booking books from home”.
- Following a request to possibly incorporate a Library in the New Harrowgate Hill School development it was reported that the Joint Strategy Unit had mapped out libraries and library users and it was found that more users were from disadvantaged areas, as they could not afford to buy books, and rural areas. It was considered a waste of effort and

money to provide the service within affluent areas.

- Negotiations were currently in hand with Darlington College of Technology to determine whether or not this Council could work with their Library thereby making it into a Community Library with a wide range of books, magazines, audio tapes and computer facilities. As a new Principal was in post Ruth was hopeful of a favourable outcome.
- The PLS figures for Darlington did not reflect the innovative ideas currently being considered and it was stated that money from the book funds may have to be used for other things however this would be avoided as much as possible as the quality of the stock would then be affected. A suggestion was made that the PLS figures be used to illustrate that the Library Service cannot take further financial cuts.
- The Housebound Service offered by the Women's' Royal Voluntary Service, which was used by approximately 80 people borough-wide, now cost £5,000 to operate however there was no money available within the current budget however funds had been found to source the service for another year. Service Level Agreement negotiations were currently in progress.
- The Housebound Service was seen as an excellent opportunity to promote Social Inclusion and a survey was currently being undertaken to ascertain what other services could be offered i.e. music, laptops, internet – in order to link into other services currently on offer by this Council.
- New Library Standards were to be restructured and concentrate on quality and not quantity issues, which it was hoped would improve Darlington's score considerably. Looking at the PLS scores overall out of 30 Darlington achieved 17, Hartlepool 27, Stockton 19 and Middlesbrough 21.
- PLS1(i) – Crown Street Library and Cockerton large libraries but not really based in residential areas therefore this standard was not met by Darlington or Stockton.
- PLS3(ii) – None of the Authorities, including Darlington, met this Standard however Stockton narrowly missed out.
- PLS6(i) – Darlington narrowly missed this standard however Middlesbrough rated very poorly.
- It was reported that Darlington would have difficulty in reaching the Standards unless more static libraries were provided. However if the Standards were amended/re-worded Darlington would have a better chance of reaching more of them. For instance in PLS1(i) was reworded to read 'Proportion of households living within one mile of a Public Library Site/Access' the target would be reached due to the amount of off site computers and accesses now/due to be made available. When Darlington is consulted on the new Standards that comment will be put forward.



- It was further stated that West Park Development would have been an ideal opportunity for the placing of a new Community Library however the Library was never consulted. Ruth stated that she would like to put a 'Library Pack' through all letterboxes of new housing estates which would introduce the service and contain a basic questionnaire.
- The Mobile Library was in a serious state of repair and was in urgent need of replacement. A new mobile would cost £130,000 and external funding is not available as a mobile library is a statutory obligation.
- It was suggested a list of big priority issues be drawn up and the successes of the Library highlighted.
- The e-library costs £30,000 per year to run and as there was no money in the budget to support the revenue costs the e-library may have to reduce its opening hours or eventually close