

Review Committee – 11 October 2011

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **11 October 2011** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: Mrs H L A Glynn

Cllr Mrs P Aves
Cllr Mrs A V Hale

Cllr R D Pointer
Cllr I H Ward

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr J Lucas - Essex County Council, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Culture

OFFICERS PRESENT

P Gowers - Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power - Committee Administrator

236 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

237 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Mrs P Aves, Mrs H L A Glynn, Mrs A V Hale and I H Ward each declared a personal interest in Item 5 of the Agenda, Essex County Council's Library Service, by virtue of their being a library user.

238 ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S LIBRARY SERVICE

County Cllr Jeremy Lucas provided Members with an overview of the Essex County Council library service.

Essex County Council (ECC) views libraries as an important part of community life, which are often seen as a 'front door' to local government services. Partnership working with borough, district and parish councils, the Citizens Advice Bureau, tourism services etc is a growing trend in libraries across the county.

The mobile service for all destinations has been retained, albeit in some cases with fewer stopping places. The fleet of mobile library vans has been reduced from 12 to 10 and there is no longer a spare vehicle on standby.

Savings have been achieved in the static libraries by way of a reduction in library opening hours and in the total number of staff employed by the library service.

A further revenue stream has been created by way of ECC offering a library service (including top level management, bibliography, cataloguing, buying and computer services) for other councils across the country. An initial order has been awarded and negotiations are now taking place with other authorities.

A further benefit of partnership working is that library opening hours can sometimes be extended if another organisation uses the library. An example of where this has been possible is where, say, a District Council has used library premises to operate a facility for Council services to the public, such as recycling bag collection or paying Council tax. The library staff will provide a front desk service to the public and computers will be linked to the Council system. This will enable the library to extend opening hours and employ additional staff or offer additional hours to existing staff. As most libraries now operate an automatic scanning system a library service can be offered even when specialist library staff are not present.

A major review of all properties owned by ECC will evaluate usage of all the County Council's premises with the possible option of amalgamating services in one premises in an area. The Council is on target to achieve further savings in the library service over the next three years.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- The reason for the severe cuts to opening hours in some libraries in the Rochford District was due to these libraries historically having enjoyed far longer opening hours than their size warranted, compared with other libraries in the county. The recent review of the libraries was used to rationalise the number of hours each branch was open by measuring the usage of each branch against the population in the area. Each library was then allocated a standardised number of opening hours according to catchment size.
- Although it was hoped that activities in libraries would not be cut, in some instances it may be an inevitable result of the review of the management structure, which had resulted in some compulsory redundancies.
- Permanent closure of any currently operating library would be avoided at all costs.
- Trends of library use were measured in various ways, including levels of books borrowed, logging on to library computers and use of other facilities. Spot checks were also periodically undertaken in particular libraries.
- There are no plans to increase the video service in libraries as this no longer produces revenue in the way it used to.
- There is a growing trend towards the provision of e books in the county's libraries. The county library service has an agreement with 3 providers of

e books; this service is currently available in Rayleigh library. It is hoped that Amazon will make its 'Kindle' service available to public libraries in the UK. The library service would pay a subscription to the provider for a licence for library users to download books.

- There was concern that the move of Rochford library from Market Square to Roche Close access difficult for the elderly and disabled, as there is no parking directly outside.
- There is now a facility to access reference books online in the county's libraries.
- A non-commercial café, 'The Book Rest', operated in four of the county's libraries. This was linked with Community Services and staffed primarily by adults with learning difficulties. It has not been economically viable so far to have a commercial coffee shop in any of the county's libraries.

239 THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Forward Plan and noted its contents.

The meeting closed at 9.05 pm.

Chairman

Date

If you would like these minutes in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.