

ADULTS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

MEETING, 17TH JANUARY, 2010

Present – Councillors Clare (Chairman), L. Byrne, Hall, Kay, R. Ronson, Sherrington and J. Walsh (as deputy for Councillor Greenhalgh).

Also in Attendance

Mr. J. Rutherford	-	Director of Adult and Community Services
Ms. S. Crossley	-	Assistant Director (Adult and Community Services)
Ms. J. Spencer	-	Head of Libraries, Arts, Museums and Archives
Mr. A. Scott	-	Policy Accountant
Mr. J. Dolan	-	Consultant – Libraries
Mrs E. Tatman	-	Bolton Arts Forum
Mrs. S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Councillor Clare in the Chair.

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Greenhalgh.

24. MINUTES

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Group held on 9th December, 2009 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

25. WIRRAL ENQUIRY

Ms S. Crossley, Assistant Director of Adult and Community Services, gave a presentation on the background to the recent Wirral enquiry, together with the main outcomes and findings and possible implications for Bolton.

Members were reminded that a decision of Wirral Council to close 24 libraries had been called in by the Secretary of State as it had been deemed to be a breach of statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (PLMA).

Wirral Council had decided to rationalise its library services and invest £20M in 13 Neighbourhood Centres as a replacement for 24 libraries. Subsequently, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council had lodged a complaint to the Secretary of State under the PLMA claiming that Wirral was not complying with its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service.

The findings of the Secretary of State had revealed that Wirral was in breach of its statutory duties on a number of counts, namely:-

- failure to make an assessment of local needs;
- the requirements of older, disabled people and deprived communities had not been taken into account;
- the general requirements of children had not been taken into account;
- no strategic plan;
- unclear understanding of range and extent of services; and
- lack of logic displayed.

As a result, the Secretary of State had required:-

- the production of a Strategic Plan within 6 months;
- annual updates for the next five years;
- a demonstration of how needs would be met; and
- evidence of working with stakeholders and groups.

Ms Crossley went on to outline the implications for Bolton and the need to ensure that the recommendations of the Library Policy Development Group following its recent library review, complied with the requirements of the Secretary of State. An overview of the recommendations showed that Bolton Action Plan complied with all the concerns expressed in the Wirral case.

Following Ms Crossley's presentation, members discussed the Wirral case and Bolton's future Action Plan for libraries. Members felt that Bolton had always valued its libraries and the findings of the Library PDG had reflected that. In addition, it was felt that the future development of libraries could be linked closely to Building Schools for the Future to reinforce the library network.

It was agreed that the presentation be noted.

26. EMPOWER, INFORM, ENRICH: THE MODERNISATION REVIEW OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES: BOLTON'S RESPONSE TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE

The Director of Adult and Community Services submitted a report which outlined Bolton's suggested response to the Consultation Exercise undertaken by the Minister for Culture and Tourism regarding the modernisation review of public libraries.

By way of background information, the report advised that on 1st December, 2009, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport had launched a two month consultation exercise seeking the views of a wide range of people on the future of public libraries.

The Hodge Review posed the following questions as significant challenges to ensure the future relevance and sustainability of the nation's public libraries:-

- how could the library service demonstrate to citizens, commentators and politicians that they were still relevant and vital?
 - how could the current trend of decline in library usage and grow the numbers using their local library be reversed?
 - how could all libraries respond to a 24/7 culture and respond to changing expectations of people who wanted immediate access to information?
 - how could libraries grasp the opportunities presented by digitisation; and
- how could the library service cope with limited public resource and economic pressures?

The consultation questions were attached at Appendix 1 to the report and various suggested responses were put forward. Members were asked to consider and comment on these. The responses would be documented and submitted to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport by 26th January, 2010.

Members were reminded that many of the questions posed had been referred to and addressed in the recent review undertaken by the Library Policy Development Group and the resulting Action Plan which had been drawn up to inform the future sustainable development of the service in the Borough.

It was agreed that the Executive Member for Adult and Community Services be requested to endorse the recommended responses, as detailed in the presentation submitted at the meeting, and that this should be submitted to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as Bolton's response to the modernisation review.

(The meeting started at 1.00 p.m. and finished at 2.55 p.m.)