

REPORT TO: Cabinet Member – Leisure and Tourism

DATE: 9 February 2011

SUBJECT: Closure of Local History and Information Service Unit

WARDS AFFECTED: All

REPORT OF: Graham Bayliss, Director of Leisure and Tourism

CONTACT OFFICER: Christine Hall, Head of Library and Information Services

EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL: No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

One of the savings agreed by Council on 16th December 2010 for the next financial year 2011/2012 was the deletion of one of the local history and information service units, based at either Crosby or Southport Library. This report presents, for the Cabinet Member to consider, the rationale for the termination of services at one unit.

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

Full Council approved the closure of one of two local history and information service units on 16 December 2010. A decision about which particular unit will close is needed so that the necessary work and staff consultation can take place, enabling one of the units to close by 30 June 2011.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

Due to the advantages of the Crosby Library site detailed in the report, it is recommended that this should be retained as the site of the Sefton Local History and Information Service.

KEY DECISION: No. This report is not a key decision in itself but forms part of the process for setting the Council's budget.

FORWARD PLAN: Yes. Setting the Council's budget is included in the Forward Plan

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Following the expiry of the call-in period for the minutes of this meeting

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: None – this was a budget decision made by Council

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework: Council has agreed a reduction in budget of £80,000 for the Local History and Information Service.

Financial:

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2009/ 2010 £	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

Legal: None
Risk Assessment: None
Asset Management: None

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

Staff who work at the Local History/Information Services units at Southport and Crosby

The Interim head of Corporate Finance and Information Services has been consulted and his comments have been incorporated into the report FD 635

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CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community			✓
2	Creating Safe Communities			✓
3	Jobs and Prosperity			✓
4	Improving Health and Well-Being			✓
5	Environmental Sustainability		✓	
6	Creating Inclusive Communities			✓
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy			✓
8	Children and Young People			✓

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Local History and Information Service Units (LH + ISU's) at Crosby and Southport Library provide specialist support and information for Sefton residents and visitors and for staff at the other libraries.
- 1.2 The Information Service provides a range of reference books and other materials plus expertise in the provision of information to customers, and supports staff dealing with information enquiries in libraries. The nature of this service has changed dramatically over the past few years with the introduction of the internet and more material available as an on-line resource. Sefton subscribes too many of these resources, and they are available via the website. There are many hard copies of reference books that are no longer published; however, the service at both Crosby and Southport is well used and still retains collections of reference books.
- 1.3 The Local History Service provides a more specialised service, dealing with local history enquiries. These vary considerably, from lengthy research by authors, students, media etc to family history enquiries. Family history research has increased enormously over the years, with people wanting to look up records of where their families lived, were born etc. There is much material needed for family history that is not available via the internet and sometimes what is on the internet is incorrect and needs checking from the original source. The collection includes archive material, books, pamphlets, photos, street directories, maps, microfilm and microfiche of local newspapers, census returns etc. The collection is not on open access and is split into two different types. The working collection is the most used, and is immediately available to view via a member of staff. The other is a reserve collection, more specialised and requires notice for staff to access. There has been some digitisation of the collections but cost and staff time have prevented an expansion of this. Digitisation would make a lot of the collections available without the need to visit a library.
- 1.4 It is unusual for a local authority of the size of Sefton to have two local history units. Even large local authorities such as county councils have one specialised unit, usually located in a central archives/record office.
- 1.5 Southport Library is currently in temporary premises awaiting the completion of the Southport Cultural Centre. Therefore, the Local History and Information Service Unit is operating a limited service from Formby Library.
- 1.6 As part of budget reductions to be made by the Council, Cabinet at its meeting on 28th October 2010 approved the closure of one of the LH + ISU's, saving around £80,000. This is part of saving SCL8 (a) Libraries Specialist Services. This recommendation was ratified by Full Council on 16th December 2010.

2. CRITERIA FOR CLOSURE

- 2.1 When determining which unit to keep open a number of factors need to be taken into account. Although the information service and local history service are provided as one service, the needs of the local history service are more specialised and its needs are the ones that govern the decision to be made. Factors to take into account include location and car parking, space to house the working collections, who/how the service is used. Whichever unit is closed, the one remaining open would need to access both collections and be able to deal with enquiries from across Sefton.
- 2.2 Crosby Library is a south/central location in Sefton. It benefits from extensive dedicated parking for customers, many of whom are older people and with mobility difficulties. Southport Library is in the north of Sefton and has no dedicated car parking.
- 2.3 Crosby has the space and potential to expand the working collection to deal with enquiries about Southport. Southport would not have had the space to expand prior to the development of the Cultural Centre, and there will not be sufficient space available once the Cultural Centre is open. Also, the floors where storage facilities would be available do not have the load bearing capacity to accommodate another collection. Crosby has an extensive basement area, which currently houses the majority of Southport's collection.
- 2.4 There is more demand for local history at Crosby than Southport, and Crosby deals with more enquiries (62%) than Southport (38%). The people who use Crosby enquire about Crosby, Formby, Liverpool and Maghull areas whereas those using Southport in general only enquire about Southport. This reflects the collections that are kept at both of these sites.
- 2.5 The staff at Crosby host the south Sefton forum of local/family history groups/societies etc which is very active in the wider south Sefton community. However, the Southport local community is very interested in local and family history, is organised and would want the collection to remain at Southport.
- 2.6 Whichever unit closes the collection of microfilms and microfiches plus the readers to use them could be kept at the other unit. The staff from the main library would be trained how to use them, and would be able to help customers use them. They would not be able to deal with specialised enquiries resulting from this and would refer them to staff at the local history unit. The material available in this format is amongst the most popular and heavily used, due to the high interest in family history. At Southport, there will also be some visual local history material available as part of the museum at the Cultural Centre.
- 2.7 When looking at possible future developments for the local history service, there is space to develop at Crosby, including rooms to begin a digitisation programme.

- 2.8 The staff who work in the Local History/Information Services units were also consulted. Whilst there was some support for retaining the service in Southport, they were generally agreed that the location that needed to remain open was Crosby, for the reasons outlined in this report.

3. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Whichever unit closes, there will be deletion of three (full time equivalent) posts. No decision has yet been agreed what process this will take, but staff at both units will be given the same opportunity to apply for the posts that remain.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Whichever local history and information service unit closes the local community who use that service will be inconvenienced and have to travel further. The decision about which unit remains open needs to be based on the unit that can best meet demands from across the whole of Sefton. It is officers' view that the only unit that can do this adequately is Crosby.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 Due to the advantages of the Crosby library site detailed in this report, it is recommended that this should be retained as the site of the Sefton Local History and Information Service.