

**SEFTON COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
(Regeneration & Environmental Services)**

**LIBRARIES ASSETS MANAGEMENT REVIEW WORKING GROUP  
PART ONE**

**FINAL REPORT  
3<sup>rd</sup> APRIL 2009**

## **Foreword**

Sefton's libraries are at the heart of our communities. The Members of this Working Group visited all of the borough's libraries and were extremely impressed by the level of service that was provided by committed and knowledgeable staff. It was apparent to us that the library's role within the community should be maintained following any review of asset management. The diversity of our communities was also apparent during the visits to all of the libraries, and whilst we support a consistent approach to service provision we also acknowledge that we should respond to our communities' needs, which may vary in different parts of the borough.

This review has ensured that Members have gained a preliminary understanding of the issues facing the library service in the Borough, and this will ensure that Part Two of the review will be undertaken in a comprehensive and robust manner.

We are grateful for the support provided by the Overview & Scrutiny Team and the Leisure Department, with particular thanks to Christine Hall (Head of Library & Information Services) and Steve Deakin (Assistant Director, Leisure Services).

Cllr David Pearson  
Lead Member  
April 2009

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## **1.0 LIBRARIES ASSETS MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

Further to Minute No. 7 of 3 June 2008, the Overview & Scrutiny Review Committee (Regeneration & Environmental Services) considered the report of the Legal Director on the Work Programme to be determined by the Committee in respect of Working Groups. It was resolved that a new Working Group be appointed as follows.

### **1.1 Membership**

Councillors Pearson (Lead Member) and Webster. It was agreed at a later meeting that the membership would be extended to include Councillors Booth and Cluskey.

### **1.2 Terms of Reference and Objectives**

1. To clearly establish the criteria for undertaking a Libraries Service Asset Management review.

At the first meeting of the Working Group, which was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009, Members received an informative presentation from Christine Hall, Head of Libraries, and substantial background documentation regarding the service. Following discussion at this meeting it was felt by Members that this review should not focus solely upon the condition of library buildings and that the review should take into account the wider aspects that affect service delivery. It was also felt that a comprehensive review would be a lengthy and complex process and therefore proposed that the review would be split into two stages. Stage One would determine the specific criteria for the review and Stage Two would undertake the actual review over a lengthier period of time in the next Municipal Year.

### **1.3 Meetings / Site Visits**

- Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009 - Working Group Meeting, Southport.
- Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2009 – Site visits to libraries
- Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2009 – Site visit to Southport Library
- Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2009 – Site visits to libraries
- Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2009 – Working Group Meeting, Bootle
- Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 – Working Group Meeting, Crosby Library

In addition to the above meetings / visits individual Members of the Working Group took the opportunity to conduct their own visits to Sefton Libraries and gather information of relevance to the review.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 The National Context**

The 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act sets out the statutory requirement for local authorities to provide a comprehensive library service for those who live, work or are undertaking full time education in the authority. The Act does not attempt to define the term ‘comprehensive’ although the development of a set of national public library standards in 2001 did go some way to defining the Government’s expectation of core services, and contributed to the Council’s score for the Corporate Performance Assessment. They included targets around the areas of distance to a static library, opening hours, internet access, user satisfaction, stock requests and number of library visits.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008, The Public Library Service Standards were replaced with one national indicator for libraries as part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. This is National Indicator NI9 – use of public libraries. The use is collected by an active people survey (576 in Sefton, in October 2008). Use is defined as:

- A visit to a public library building or mobile library to make use of library services (including to print/use electronic resources or to take part in an event such as a reading group or author visit)
- The use of on-line library resources or services remotely (i.e. used a computer outside the library to view the website, catalogue or databases)
- Access, and receipt, of the library service by email, telephone, fax or letter
- Receipt of an outreach service such as home delivery or library events outside a library building

Use of other libraries and archives services is excluded. The indicator measures those who are 16-years old and over.

Following on from the publication of the Public Library Standards the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published a “*Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade*” was published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in February 2003 which went further in setting out the Governments expectations for delivery of local government library services.

The “*Framework for the Future*” report identifies a “modern mission” for libraries. Three areas of activity were identified which meet these criteria and should be at the heart of libraries’ modern mission:

- the promotion of reading and informal learning
- access to digital skills and services including e-government
- measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship

The framework is still in place, with the national action plan produced each year, and will form part of the DCMS review.

There are currently two national reviews of library services. One is by the DCMS to review the current models of provision and identifying both existing

best practice and new innovation, to refresh the Government's vision for the public library service that enables local authorities' to deliver their aspirations to their communities. It will focus on 5 areas:

- Digital services and information literacy
- A skilled and responsive workforce
- Capturing impact
- A community-led service
- Funding innovation

The second review is an Inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management: Inquiry into the Governance and Leadership of the Public Library Service in England. This is now focusing solely on the governance and leadership of public libraries in England. It is expected to be complementary to the DCMS Review, and have regard to the recently concluded Unison review "Taking Stock."

## **2.2 The Regional Context**

Libraries within the North West region collaborate on a number of initiatives to improve service delivery and efficiency. These include a North West (and Yorkshire) contract for books and multimedia items plus a regional reader development programme. Libraries are also looking at what services can be shared across the region.

## **2.3 The Local Context**

The borough of Sefton is economically diverse with a widespread of deprivation and affluence. Some wards in the south of the borough in Bootle and in the central area of Southport are in the 10 percent most economically deprived in the country, whilst some wards in Formby and Crosby are in the country's 5 percent most affluent. These ward differences are demonstrated by the demographical data which have an impact upon the service delivery across the Library Service.

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), in conjunction with Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), carried out a peer review of library services in October 2007. The outcomes of this assessment have helped shaped the service delivery plans for the Library Service and highlighted areas for improvement, including the need for a Library Assets Management Review. An important aspect to derive from the assessment was the concern that there is a tendency to concentrate on the buildings, rather than service delivery when considering service improvement.

## **3.0 THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES**

Libraries have a specific role to play in community development. They have multiple uses including to borrow books, music and film; find out information; participate in events. They have an important role in the community as places to meet, learn and enjoy and every library now offers internet access.

Social and demographic changes and changing patterns of living and working

have a significant impact on public service needs and requirements, including those relating to leisure and cultural services. In addition, the Government recognises that the delivery of library services also has an impact wider agendas and priorities outside of the individual recreational enjoyment.

Public libraries help create a vibrant local economy by improving skills, supporting and encouraging learning, helping unemployed people, providing local information and improving digital citizenship.

#### **4.0 SEFTON LIBRARIES: A SNAPSHOT**

Sefton's Library Service currently has a budget of £4.5m per annum. This includes expenditure on buildings, bookstock, and staffing, and income from overdue charges, multi-media hire charges.

There are currently 13 static libraries and 1 mobile library:

Ainsdale  
Aintree  
Birkdale  
Bootle  
Churchtown  
College Road  
Crosby  
Formby  
Litherland  
Maghull  
Netherton  
Orrell  
Southport

These all provide a lending and information service. In addition, there is a local history service and specialist information service at Crosby and Southport. There is also a Home Visits Service for people unable to leave their home to visit a library.

A summary of overall visits and book issues for Sefton's Libraries is as follows:

2007/08 = 1,264,615 visits    2006/07 = 1,353,817 visits  
2007/08 = 1,545,682 issues    2006/07 = 1,615,581 issues

Comparative data with Merseyside and Metropolitan authorities shows that out of 35 metropolitan authorities, Sefton is placed:

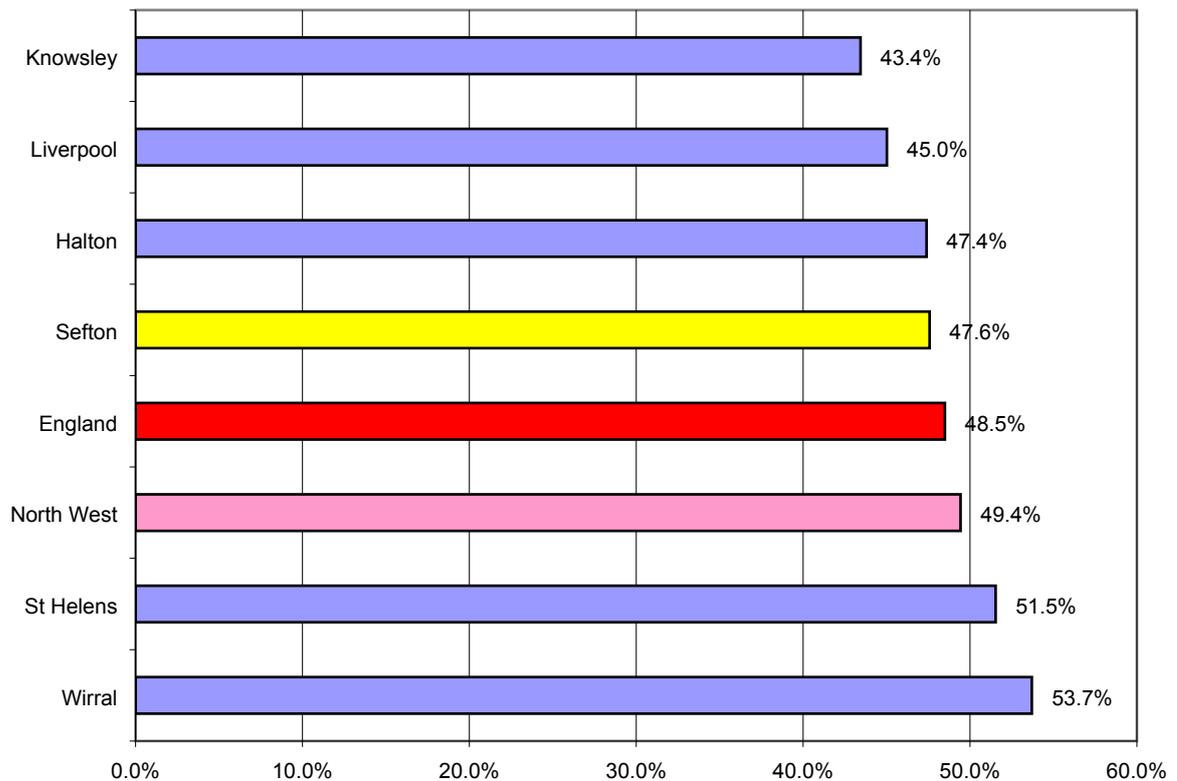
- 30<sup>th</sup> for the number of staff per head of population
- 33<sup>rd</sup> for number of libraries per head of population
- 27<sup>th</sup> for number of visits per head of population
- 30<sup>th</sup> for cost per visit

The data shows that Sefton operated a value for money service but with less than average number of visits.

The results of the NI9 survey are shown in the table below.

National Indicator	Result 2007-08	Result 2008-09	North West Average	England average
NI 9 - Use of public libraries	N/A	47.6%	49.4%	48.5%

47.6% of Sefton residents say they use public libraries. This is below the England average, at 48.5%, and the North West at 49.4%, although it is the third highest on Merseyside. The Wirral has the highest participation rate in the North West at 53.7%, and Wigan has the lowest at 38.7%.



## **5.0** SITE VISITS

Members of the Working Group visited all 13 libraries in Sefton (and the mobile library), and the following is a summary of their comments.

### Customer Focus

Members were concerned about the Opening Times for libraries. Currently the libraries are closed during lunch hours and have limited weekend opening times. Members were informed that lunch time closures were often necessary as staff had to eat lunch in the library as the backroom facilities were not available / in very poor condition.

*“Poor staff facilities at most libraries”*

*“Staff quarters are abysmal” (Ainsdale library)*

*“Kitchen is deplorable” (Churchtown library)*

*“Staff quarters are unacceptable” (College Road)*

Members noted that the provision of car parking to library buildings varied significantly and felt that location of building for transport routes would have an impact on the level of customer use.

*“The absence of car parking, and recent changes to the bus routes suggest that the location is far from ideal for customers” (Bootle Library)*

Members were concerned that not all libraries were clearly signposted within surrounding areas, nor were clearly identifiable as a library building. There was also inconsistency with the branding of the signage.

*“Poor signage of most libraries”*

Members felt that staff were hindered in their ability to respond to customer needs, for example some libraries cannot meet the demand for IT usage and a lot of libraries are unable to expand their work with children and young people as a result of the building design.

The mobile library was considered an excellent investment, although there was some concern that the current routes do not meet the needs of customers.

### Community Engagement

Members were impressed with the library staff and the level of engagement with the community. There are however, varying levels of activity in different libraries.

*“Very committed staff”*

*“Very good school room” (Aintree Library)*

*“Library used in the evenings by the police and for IT lessons” (Litherland)*

*“Rooms rented out to community groups” (Formby & Crosby)*

The libraries section of the council website allows full access to the catalogue and reference services. Some libraries also contained information kiosks.

Members did feel that more communication about the services provided would be beneficial to the users of the service. The prominence given to community information varied from library to library.

Members felt that the lack of public toilets within the library buildings hindered the work undertaken with the community, for example bringing school classes to the library. However it was noted that staff tried to accommodate this problem by providing access to staff facilities.

#### Equality and Diversity

Members heard about examples of engagement with groups in the community, both library users and non-users, including class visits to primary and secondary schools, the extensive Harry Potter book launch across the Borough and activities for parents and toddlers.

Members also saw evidence of working with BME groups and European migrants.

*“The computers are used a lot by the Polish Community” (Southport)*

There was some concern about the capacity of some library buildings to fully respond to service users with a disability, including access to the building and the use of older book shelving which were fixed to the walls and very high.

*“Disabled ramp too steep” (Churchtown)*

*“Problem with the doors opening outward” (College Road)*

It was recognised that an effective Home Visits Service was in operation.

#### Working in Partnership

There are concrete examples of where the Library Service has engaged in partnership to improve service delivery.

##### *Maghull Leisure Centre*

The Maghull Leisure Centre & Library development is now underway. Building has commenced and Officers meet on a weekly basis to monitor the build programme and ensure that the scheme remains within the contract sum.

##### *Netherton Activity Centre*

There is currently a commitment from Council for £5.1 million for the scheme to provide a new facility for the library, sports centre and arts facilities on the same site. The designs for the building are being developed.

##### *Southport Cultural Centre*

The Council has been successful in achieving £4 million from “Sea Change” and has committed £7.3 million to date for this project. Further bids for external funding are being developed. The project will completely refurbish the library, arts centre and art gallery and join the services together into one Cultural Centre.

Opportunities exist to develop closer working relationships with voluntary sector organisations (to promote volunteering, information and advocacy services) and other public bodies to promote health and community safety in local neighbourhoods and other council services to extend first stop services.

## Library Buildings

Members do recognise that the condition, location and design of buildings are a key driver in considering service improvement

*“The exterior of the building is deplorable” (Ainsdale)*

*“The basement suffers from flooding and is in dismal condition” (College Road)*

*“Structure and fabric of the building is poor (asbestos)” (Churchtown)*

*“Large areas could be better utilised” (Crosby)*

*“Exterior of the building is badly in need of attention” (Litherland)*

## **6.0 FINDINGS**

- Libraries have multiple uses and provide an excellent community base for local people
- The condition of the library buildings are generally poor, with significant resource implications for maintenance and improvement
- The poor design of buildings and lack of public facilities such as car parking may have an impact upon the number of visits recorded
- Despite the conditions of buildings there is evidence that staff provide a positive service to customers – although there are limitations due to the building design and available facilities
- There is evidence that the co-location of services and partnership working with other departments and organisations would provide improvements to the asset base and contribute to the Council’s corporate objectives
- There is a need to support service improvement through the production of medium to long term strategies
- Demographic profiles affect the level of usage for particular service areas

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Working Group recommends that Part Two of this review is included within the Committee’s Work Programme for 2009/10 with a starting date of June 2009.

The Working Group recommends that Part Two of this review consist of an in-depth analysis of each individual library which would incorporate the following:

- Condition of building (conditional survey) including maintenance and refurbishment costs and DDA requirements
- Potential for co-location of services (links to other strategies, for example Building Schools for the Future)
- Demographic information
- User Statistics
- Revenue costs of each library
- Medium – long term planning

The Working Group recommends that Part Two of the review would also consist of interviews with Library Staff, relevant Council Officers, further visits to Sefton Libraries and identification of local and national best practice.

The Working Group also recommends that Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services) be kept informed of the work being undertaken and be given the opportunity to participate, where appropriate, in Part Two of the review.