

**Scrutiny Committee for Promoting
Strong, Healthy and Safe
Communities**



4 March 2009

**Community Libraries/Community
Hubs Scrutiny Project**

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose

1. To update members of the Committee about progress to date with the scrutiny investigation into community libraries/libraries as community hubs.

Background

2. At the meeting of the Committee held on 24 November 2008, Members received a progress report on the community libraries/community hubs scrutiny project.
3. The terms of reference (focus) for the project as agreed by the Working Group are "Providing Libraries in County Durham which meet the needs of our communities; promote social inclusion and cohesion; and improve work opportunities for local people."

Project Progress

4. Since the last report, work on this project has continued, with visits to libraries in County Durham and in the Gateshead Borough Council area to look at best practice. Members have also taken into account equalities and diversity issues during the course of the project.

Emerging Themes

5. The Working Group is expected to conclude evidence-taking by the end of February and will begin formulating a report thereafter. Some of the emerging themes which have been highlighted during the course of the investigation relate to:
 - The need to develop a Vision and Strategy for Library Provision in County Durham which is corporate and links to other plans and strategies, where relevant, of the Council
 - Ensuring that library staff have the right skills and training to ensure that they can support users of the library service in a changing environment (i.e. increasing numbers of visitors to branch libraries are seeking information from the internet about job vacancies and preparation of CVs)
 - Ensuring that libraries cater for all sections of our communities (i.e. NEETs, minority and ethnic groups, and the socially excluded) and provide places where people can come together to learn and network

- Better marketing and encouragement of people in local communities to use local libraries (i.e. opening hours)
- Balancing provision for traditional users (i.e. provision of books and provision of IT, CDs and DVDs)
- Ensuring that there are mechanisms in place within the Council to ensure greater co-ordination and co-operation in the provision of new libraries (i.e. the opportunities for joint or collaborative provision afforded by the Building Schools for the Future programme, future Primary School provision, other Council developments and use of existing District Council stock within the new Unitary Council)
- Making libraries more welcoming (i.e. improved facilities such as access to toilet provision, meeting rooms, café type facilities)
- Safety issues for staff
- Ensuring that library provision is co-ordinated with and complementary to other types of provision in local communities (i.e. community centres and leisure centres)
- Exploring opportunities for enhanced facilities and provision in libraries via sponsorship and other innovative ways of working.

The above list is not exhaustive.

6. It is expected that a report and recommendations will be produced for consideration by the end of March 2009.

Recommendation

7. That the Committee note progress and the emerging findings in relation to the scrutiny investigation.

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