DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Special Joint Meeting of **Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **Monday 12 March 2012 at 11.00 am**

Present:

Councillor D Boyes (Chairman)

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Committee:
Councillors B Arthur, B Bainbridge, M Campbell, M Hodgson, C Magee, E Mavin, J Nicholson, P Stradling, J Turnbull and A Wright

Co-opted Members:
Mr A Cooke, Ms M English and Mr M Iveson

Co-opted Employees/Officers:
Mr J Hewitt.

Members of the Economy and Enterprise Committee:
Councillors C Carr, J Cordon, B Graham, J Hunter, P Jopling, J Moran, A Naylor, C Potts, M Wilkes, M Williams and A Willis.

Co-opted Members:
Mr T Batson, Mrs O Brown, Mr D Lavin and Mr JB Walker.

Also Present:
Mr D Kinch and Councillors B Avery, A Bainbridge, J Blakey, J Chaplow, G Holland, S Iveson and M Plews.

Apologies:
Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, A Barker, D Bowman, B Myers, Supt. P Beddow, Mrs Harrison, Mr Kitching and Mr T Thompson.

A1   Declarations of Interest, if any

There were no Declarations of Interest.

A2   To develop an Overview and Scrutiny response to the County Council's Library Strategy Consultation

The Chair welcomed Members of both Committees to the joint Committee meeting and identified that the purpose of the meeting was to develop an overview and scrutiny response to the Library Strategy Consultation.

The topic of libraries is cross cutting between both Committees in terms of areas within the Altogether Wealthier element of the Council Plan and previous work undertaken by Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A joint report of the Assistant Chief Executive and the Head of Social Inclusion which provided Members with supporting information ahead of a presentation regarding Durham County Council's Library Strategy Consultation (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Social Inclusion was in attendance to deliver the presentation (for copy of slides see file of Minutes) and Members were advised that the presentation was also being delivered to all 14 Area Action Partnerships.

Following the presentation, the Chair suggested that with having the knowledge and advice of specialist Officers and the Cabinet Portfolio holder in attendance did Members prefer to have one discussion on the Consultation questionnaire or work in small groups to develop the response. Members supported the suggestion to stay as a large group and the Chair advised that discussion should take place on each consultation question, Members views would be noted following which a response to the consultation would be submitted on behalf of the Committees.

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager advised Members that Public Consultation questionnaire attached within Appendix 2 included 12 questions and that the first three questions related to an individual response so was not required to be considered by the Committees within their response to the Consultation.

Consideration was given to question 4 of the consultation which asked whether the new vision for the library service was supported. The vision read as follows:

"Libraries in County Durham will provide books and access to information and services. They will work with their local communities to ensure that they meet the needs of the people they serve. They will be welcoming, accessible, vibrant and safe places for all".

Members commented that the vision was comprehensive and full support was given to it. Members found the vision to be inspiring and inclusive, and was fitting to the direction in which Members envisaged the library service would take.

Consideration was given to question 5 of the consultation asked whether the proposed aims of the library strategy were supported. The aims read as follows:

- **To inspire a community of reading and learning**
- **To create community library hubs, involving local people**
- **To be modern and responsive**
- **A well managed and efficient service**

Members supported the proposed aims of the library strategy were in keeping with the vision. Members found the aims reflected the importance of libraries being multi purpose facilities and responsive to their user, while at the same time reflecting the importance of the promotion of reading and literacy.

Consideration was given to question 6 of the consultation which asked whether the proposed need for library services was supported.

The Chair commented that Members' support to the proposal would be recorded, based on the comments made when consideration had been given to questions 4 and 5 of the consultation.

Consideration was given to question 7 of the consultation regarding whether it would be better to reduce opening hours generally rather than close some libraries.

Members commented that they felt the Council had done very well in making proposals which would not see any of the County's libraries close. There was broad agreement amongst Members that reducing opening hours in general was much more preferable than closing library facilities.

Consideration was given to question 8 of the consultation, which asked whether library opening hours should be more consistent across the County.

The Head of Social Inclusion clarified that the question meant whether every town centre library should open for 36 hours per week and every community library open for 20 hours per week. The question was not seeking views on how those hours should be used, merely whether each library should operate the same hours of opening in a week.

Members expressed concerns in relation to the style and wording of the consultation document. In particular relation to question 8, Members found the wording to be ambiguous.

The majority of Members supported a consistency in opening hours across the county.

Consideration was given to question 9 of the consultation, which asked whether town centre libraries should be open longer hours than community libraries.

In response to a query from a Member, the Head of Social Inclusion clarified that the proposal to operate longer hours of opening at Clayport library was as a direct reflection of the fact that Clayport was the busiest and most accessible library within the county, furthermore the county's specialist collections were housed there.
Furthermore he highlighted that Clayport library had already seen a reduction in opening hours, as it no longer opened on Sundays.

Following that explanation, a significant number of Members were supportive to the opening hours proposed for Clayport library, acknowledging that it was within a cosmopolitan city and also generated a lot of footfall from University students.

There was consensus from Members that because of larger population levels which generated increased usage, operating longer opening hours at town centre libraries was supported.

Consideration was given to question 10 of the consultation which sought views on the proposed criteria for those communities who would be served by mobile libraries.

Concerns were raised in relation to potential implications for areas where the proposals were to remove the mobile library facility and reduce the opening hours of the community library.

Further concerns were raised in relation to rural areas where bus services had already been reduced and proposals were such that there would be a reduction in the number of stops made by the mobile library.

There was a suggestion from Members that a phone in service could be developed to facilitate the public to ring and request that specific items be available on the mobile library for collection.

The Head of Social Inclusion advised that accessibility mapping had been conducted to aid development of the proposals and Members were informed that, based on the evidence gathered, the majority of households within the county would remain within 20 minutes travel time of a library. Furthermore, Members were advised that for many mobile library halts that were being removed, the evidence indicated that there was a lack of use.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Libraries and Lifelong Learning highlighted that the council already had an online library where books could be renewed or reserved for collection at either a branch or mobile library and for people who were housebound there was a 'books on wheels' service.

Members emphasised that it would be important to effectively communicate to the public any changes made to the routes and stops which the Mobile Library service would be undertaking. Such communications would need to be clear, concise and understandable. Members also requested that should the proposed changes to the Mobile service be implemented, then a review should be conducted six months following implementation. The review should assess the impact and effectiveness of the changes. The changes would need to be flexible to ensure that, upon review should more viable options become apparent, then changes to routes and stops could be made accordingly.
For example should the review indicate that some stops were being under utilised, then flexibility to the scheme would allow necessary changes to be made.

In response to Members queries, the Head of Social Inclusion clarified that should the proposals ultimately be approved, continual monitoring would be conducted on the usage at all mobile library halts, for viability. The Head of Social Inclusion further concurred that consideration would be given to the suggestion to review the situation once a review of bus services had been conducted, to ascertain whether resources needed to be deployed differently.

Consideration was given to question 11 of the consultation, which sought views on whether local communities should have a say in the opening hours of their local library.

The majority of Members were in agreement that this should be the case, and that there should be flexibility across the county in order that library opening hours were responsive to local need. Communities should be afforded the opportunity to utilise the library service according to need.

Members highlighted that community libraries would be multi use facilities and as such should be particularly flexible in accordance with local demand.

It was suggested that where need dictated, flexible work patterns should also be considered, in order to cater directly to local need, and ensure accessibility and maximum usage of all facilities.

In conclusion Members placed significant emphasis on the need to consult with local communities.

Consideration was given do question 12 of the consultation which sought any additional comments on the proposals including any impact that the changes might have.

In response to a query from a Member, the Head of Social Inclusion clarified that all Parish and Town Councils were represented on Area Action Partnerships, as such consultation and communication was being held directly with the AAP's rather than with each individual town and parish council of which there were many. Members were informed that all Parish and Town Councils had been written to, to advise of the consultation.

Further information was requested, namely a list of all current mobile library stops and a list of all which were proposed to be removed. (Head of Social Inclusion to action)

Following conclusion of the discussions on the Library Strategy consultation, the Chair clarified that Members comments would be incorporated into a direct submission from the Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee.