

Halesowen Area Committee, 10th March 2010

Report of the Director of Adult, Community & Housing

Halesowen Library accommodation and changes

Purpose of Report

- 1 To consider the response from the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services to concerns with regard to Halesowen Library received at the Halesowen Area Committee on the 11th November 2009 and on the 14th January 2010.
2. For the Halesowen Area Committee to consider developments in service delivery arrangements in the Halesowen district area.

Background

3. The concerns received were in relation to changes to the reference provision at Halesowen Library, the suitability of the changes, the reduction in meeting room capacity, the Social Services offices relocation and the information given to Councillors about the changes.
- 4 **Halesowen Library**
 - 4.1 The library service has been undergoing an extensive modernisation programme as agreed by Cabinet on the 12th September 2007. This programme includes the extension of opening hours and the introduction of new technology to release staff to do more customer support by enabling customers to issue and return books themselves.
 - 4.2 The operational management team were given the role of local implementation to enable the introduction of additional opening hours of 10 hours a week in Halesowen Library which have resulted in an increase from 51.5 hours to 61.5 hours. The extended opening hours have included opening on Sundays from 10 – 2 for the first time and introducing late night opening to 7pm on Mondays – Thursdays.
 - 4.3 In order to implement the changes within budget and with the same staffing levels it was necessary to rearrange the internal layout of the library by reducing the number of floors from 4 to 3. This also meant that the arrangement of the library could be changed to meet the requirements of customers as demonstrated in complaints, comments and survey feedback the service had received.
 - 4.4 On the 5th February 2008 The Halesowen North and Halesowen South Councillors received information about the planned changes in an email from the Assistant Director (Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning).

- 4.5 In 2008/9, Dudley Libraries spent £623,820 on acquiring new stock across the service. This resulted in 66,599 new items being added across the borough to the 13 Libraries, 3 Library Links and Home Library Service. Of this total, 7,087 new items were added to stock at Halesowen Library - this represents 10.64% of the total. Any item of stock can be requested at any library, so stock will move around the borough in response to readers' requests during the year and some items are moved around as part of managing the stock and trying to ensure our readers see a fresh range of titles at each service point.
- 4.6 An effective library actively manages the book stock; before the modernisation programme Dudley did not meet the required rate of replacing all stock within 6.7 years (in Dudley it was taking over 10 years). The application of the appropriate stock policy to review, edit, remove and replace the stock has meant that Dudley now meets this standard.
- 4.7 The appropriate, streamlined reference collection of 839 items is now located on floor 3. In 2007 the reference collection was 1,018 including a number of multi volume items. The issue of proximity to study tables was raised by customers, so the Locality Librarian worked with the Halesowen User Forum to identify an alternative location for the stock nearer to the study tables. The work to create this area has now been completed. The library had a large amount of out of date reference stock and stock that was not being used. In addition items of non-fiction stock were shelved in the previous reference library.
- 4.8 The valuable local history material at Halesowen is still catalogued and kept in locked cabinets. The protection and management of this stock has not changed.
- 4.9 The library service subscribes to a wide range of reference resources freely available online. This means that expensive resources such as the Dictionary of National Biography, and a range of encyclopaedias that were previously only available in one library, if at all, can now be used by all library members.
- 4.10 The Library still has two rooms available for groups to hire – the Shenstone Theatre and the Capston Room on the top floor. The Coffee Lounge, which is no longer available, was only hired for c200 hours a year. The groups who used the Coffee Lounge have been given the option of moving to one of the other rooms with a discounted rate based on the charge they paid for the Coffee Lounge.
- 4.11 All Councillors were sent a letter on the 6th February 2008 by the Halesowen Locality Librarian with information about the Coffee Lounge no longer being available for bookings and the potential alternative arrangements.
- 4.12 The rearrangement of the floors has taken into account consultation with customers; and complaints, comments and survey feedback received from customers. It has also used good practice principles for modern library services especially the principle of a customer entering the library moving from the noisier types of provision to the quieter as they went further into the library.
- 4.13 The changes have involved reducing the number of public floors from 4 to 3 as managing the library service over 4 floors has always been difficult. In addition:
- In response to feedback from parents, the children's library has been moved to the main entrance floor with an automatic door operated by a button for safer and easier access. Safeguarding issues are covered by the library being away from the main thorough fare into the rest of the building, with the main

counter placed to enable the monitoring of those who enter the area. In addition the area for the youngest children has been put at the back of the library area. To date we have had a lot of positive comments from parents about this move which has made it much easier for them to access the service.

- The teenage library has been moved to the main entrance floor, working closely throughout with local teenagers on design, layout and stock, again the teenagers are delighted.
- The public access PC's have been moved from floor 5 to floor 3. 20 of the computers have been replaced and 6 upgraded. To date we have had many positive comments from customers who had not realised the resource existed, and the usage of the computers has increased. For example in the 2nd quarter of the year in 2009 – 2010 they were used 14,645 times compared with 9,521 for the same quarter in 2008-2009
- A quiet study and reading area has been created on the 4th floor with tables and chairs next to a large proportion of the non-fiction stock.
- New kiosks have been put into the library for customers to issue and return items.

4.14 The numbers attending and using the library ("footfall") has increased as a result of this development. In 2008 the number of visitors was 199,150 or c3,900 per week. In 2009 it is 201,100 a year or c 4,000 per week. This includes 130 – 200 people using the library on a Sunday from 10 – 2. This increase in use is against widely reported national trends of reducing visits to libraries.

4.15 The number of items issued from the library has also increased by 6% in the 3rd quarter of 2009 – 2010 compared to the same quarter in 2008-2009 Q3 2009-10

4.16 Active borrowers in the third quarter of 2009-2010 have gone up by 13.6% when compared to the same quarter in 2008-09 An active borrower is someone who has registered at Halesowen Library and used their ticket once in a 12 month period.

4.17 In the recent Cipfa Survey of Library Users carried out in October 2009:

- 98% of library users (over 16) thought the opening hours were Good (30%) or Very Good (68%) and 3% thought they were Adequate. No-one thought they were Poor.
- 81% of library users (over 16) thought the choice of books were Good (47%) or Very Good (34%) and 15% thought it was Adequate. 4% thought it was poor, but no-one thought it was Very Poor.

4.18 There was a temporary reduction in display space on the entrance floor due to the creation of a separate counter for Social care clients as an interim measure. The creation of a single joint reception in late December means that this space is now back in use for displays.

4.19 There has been a pilot project carried out to test the potential strategic development of Dudley Council Plus having outreach sessions at Halesowen Library.

4.20 The Library service was shortlisted for an e-government award in the category 'e-government excellence' for its Radio Frequency Identification Project which has enabled the introduction of the self issue and return kiosks.

5 **Adult Social Care**

- 5.1 The Adult Social Care staff were advised by Corporate Property Services that the upper floors of the Town Hall premises had to be rapidly vacated for health and safety reasons.
- 5.2 The need to identify alternative accommodation at minimal cost to the Council in the Halesowen area coincided with the need to make improvements to the use and presentation of Library facilities.
- 5.3 As a result 53 social care, home care and support staff have moved their base to the Library premises.
- 5.4 A plan for a consultation room to be put onto the main entrance floor of the library has been shared with library customers, social care clients, staff and key stakeholders. The plan and the results of the consultation will be shared with the Area Committee at the meeting on the 10th March.

6 **Children's Specialist Services**

- 6.1 The Town Hall ground and first floor offices continue to be used safely by Children's Specialist Services staff from Children's Services Directorate, so addressing the health and safety issues that now rule out use of the upper floors.
- 6.2 This enables continued use of the asset whilst plans to move staff to an alternative location are progressed as the building is not suitable for use as an office.

Finance

- 7 This strategic development was part of a value-for-money approach in co-locating council services

Law

- 8 Under the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council is a Library Authority with a requirement to provide '*a comprehensive and efficient library service*' as defined by the setting of Public Library Service Standards. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) set these standards on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). A revised performance management framework for public libraries, drawn up by the Museums, Libraries & Arts Council, has been created to replace the Public Library Standards.
- 9 Adult Social Care Services are provided to the public as a result of a range of legislation and guidance including the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 and other related legislation

Equality Impact

- 10 The impact on all users of the service have been taken into account in the work carried out using consultation and feedback.

Recommendation

11 It is recommended that the Area committee:-

- note the information contained in this report
- note the plans for the design and location of the consultation room



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List of Background Papers