

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE MEETING

12.11.03

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ARTS & LIBRARIES

NAME OF WARD(S)

ALL

REPORT TITLE: Library, Museum and Archive Best Value Review

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report summarises the key findings and recommendations of the recent Library, Museum and Archive Best Value Review; and sets out an action plan for their implementation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members note the findings of the Best Value Review Panel.
- 2.2 That members approve the Action Plan set out in section 5 of Appendix 1, and summarised in paragraph 6.4.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 An increase in the level of the library stock fund and of library opening hours will be funded from the growth already agreed within the base budget from 2004/5 onwards. For Library, Heritage and Cultural services, this is £280K in 2004/5, £190K in 2005/6, and £190K in 2006/7.
- 3.2 Growth bids have been submitted for 2004/5 as follows: £65K for BRAIN; £300K for re-structuring following the Best Value Review; and £150K for essential Health & Safety and maintenance works. If the growth is not approved, there will be implications in terms of the extent to which the review recommendations can be implemented. Some of the growth within the base budget will need to be diverted into re-structuring the service and this will have an impact upon the number of additional hours possible. It is critical that a balance is maintained between investment in additional hours; the ability to purchase new stock; and the need to ensure an organisational structure that is robust enough to ensure effective management of the service, that meets the Public Library Standards in terms of the level of professional staff, and that ensures the availability of the

specialist expertise required to deliver the Government's "Framework for the Future" for libraries.

3.3 A sum has been allocated from within the budget in the current financial year to carry out the recommended assessment of library buildings.

3.4 In the longer term, the review will identify the financial implications of the options available for each building.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 A major review of the library staffing structure has already begun, with new posts identified and the recruitment of new staff already underway. The review includes a rationalisation of the senior management of the service and a revision of all job descriptions/functions to include new responsibilities. The new structure will be subject to consultation with staff at all levels. There will be an increase in staffing costs and potential premature retirement contributions and these costs will be absorbed within existing library resources and by agreed growth over next two years. Recruitment costs will be met from within existing resources.

4.2 The new staffing structure and job descriptions will reflect existing skills sets such as the ICT training currently being rolled out to all library staff; and other learning and development needs such as enquiry handling skills are also currently being addressed across the service, within the existing training budget. The implications of implementing the recommendations of the Customer Services Best Value review will require staff to acquire new skill sets and this will need to be costed separately.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, local authorities are required to provide a "comprehensive and efficient " library service. The Public Library Standards, to be met by all authorities from April 2004, are regulatory under the Local Government Act 2000. Both the museum and archive are discretionary services, but under section 224 of the Local Government Act, 1972, local authorities are required to make proper arrangements for any records that belong to them or are in their care. The museum registration scheme, operated by Resource the commission for libraries, archives and museums, sets out minimum standards to be met by all museums.

6.0 DETAIL

6.1 Scope of the review

The scope approved by members was as follows.

The Best Value Review should develop a realistic and sustainable strategy for the delivery of effective, efficient and economic library, museum and archive services in Brent. It will need to address the following issues:

- i) The aims and priorities of the emerging Cultural Strategy for Brent
- ii) the desire to increase levels of use of all three services, especially by non-traditional users

- iii) the need to determine a response to the Public Library Standards in as cost effective a way as possible
- iv) the location, suitability and number of library buildings needed in the future, and the opportunities for development offered by co-location with other facilities and by regeneration projects
- v) the current bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding to re-locate the Grange Museum
- vi) the recommendations for the Library Service of the lifelong Learning Best Value Review in terms of the contribution that the service makes to supporting and delivering learning and to promoting access to learning opportunities
- vii) the recommendations of the Customer Service Best Value Review in terms of the role of libraries as first stop access points to Council and other services, and the implications for the location and opening hours of libraries, the management of information services, physical presentation, and staff skills and training.

The Review will also need to address the following key points flagged up by the Audit Commission in inspections of library service reviews, but which can also be applied to museum and archive services:

- i) whether the libraries provide the books and information that people want
- ii) accessibility
- iii) whether services are easy and pleasant to use
- iv) levels of awareness amongst non users of the service.

6.2 Self assessment process

The self assessment comprised research carried out specifically for the review, as well as the analysis of previous pieces of research. Reports on each of these pieces of research can be found as appendices.

Consultation

Consultation carried out as part of the review consisted of a Citizens' Panel questionnaire, user focus groups, non-user focus groups, a member focus group, a survey of Friends' and user groups, and interviews with key stakeholders within the Council.

Existing consultation results and reports were also analysed. These comprised the Brent Residents' Survey, the CIPFA Children's Public Library User Survey, a Children's Panel Activity Day, a survey aimed at assessing young people's views on the refurbishment of Ealing Rd Library, a questionnaire to schools on the museum education service, and the results of the Council Staff Survey for the Library and Museum & Archive services.

Comparison

The team analysed key performance indicators for a baseline assessment of comparative performance. Additionally, a benchmarking questionnaire was circulated to all London boroughs.

Those Councils with Beacon status under the "Libraries as a community resource" strand were visited, as were other libraries, museums and archives identified as being exemplars of best practice in some way.

The team also analysed Best Value reports from other authorities to identify examples of innovative improvements and to assess what other authorities had learned, particularly in terms of challenge and competition. Audit Commission Best Value inspection reports were analysed to identify those factors that inspectors define as the features of a good service.

Competition

A financial analysis was undertaken, covering the cost effectiveness of elements of the services and making comparisons with other similar services. The scope of existing and potential partnerships to improve services and create economies of scale was reviewed. Alternative models of delivery were investigated for their potential to improve services or cost-effectiveness. The team carried out a structured exercise to identify the desirability of exposing the services to external competition.

Challenge

A mystery shopping exercise was undertaken to assess the quality of customer experience. The team organised a Challenge Workshop, incorporating external experts, to challenge its key findings and conclusions, and to develop alternative solutions.

6.3 Review Panel findings

6.3.1 The Panel met over two days in March 2003. Its conclusion was that “the self assessment [is] a thorough and comprehensive piece of work and the management team are fully aware of what’s going on nationally. The team are also aware of their weaknesses and are trying to address them, they have a clear and convincing vision based on best practice elsewhere”.

6.3.2 The Panel recommends a step change to bring services into line with what is happening elsewhere in London and nationally, where local authorities are undertaking major reviews and modernisation of their library and museum buildings. This would be based on flagship developments tied to a rationalisation of buildings. To support this, the other recommendations are:

- rationalisation should be tied to investment and not seen as savings driven
- changes to the staff structure and staff roles to match capacity more effectively to known and anticipated demand
- improved performance management and marketing capacity as essential building blocks of service improvement and to widen the user base
- development of the role of friends and user groups
- creating a role for libraries as first stop access points for Council services
- ensuring that support is available corporately and departmentally for key elements of the change programme (HR, project management, property issues).

6.4 Implementation of the Action Plan

6.4.1 The major element of the action plan, which can be found in section 5 of the Best Value Panel report (Appendix 1), is a strategic, long-term

building improvement and modernisation programme. This would be a phased programme based on:

- a thorough assessment of each existing building against a set of criteria (eg. condition, use, demographics). Consultants would be appointed to carry out this assessment that would form the first step of this element of the action plan.
- opportunities available over the next five to ten years through, for example, property developments, regeneration, external funding streams, aspirations of potential partners
- the Council's plans for re-configuring public facing services in response to community needs.

6.4.2 A modernisation programme is needed for the following reasons:

- the majority of libraries (including the Brent Archive) and the museum have not been re-decorated or re-fitted for at least ten years, and in some cases for longer
- building locations were determined in some cases over one hundred years ago and do not take into account modern lifestyles or patterns of usage
- some of the Borough's most deprived neighbourhoods do not have ready access to a library or library facilities
- the locations of many libraries, and of the Archive, are not ideal, being as they are in residential areas, isolated from other facilities such as shops, bus routes, main roads or tube stations
- the problems with the Museum's location and its inaccessibility have been well documented
- in some cases, the current size or layout does not allow for the potential or even existing customer base.

6.4.3 Maintaining the status quo would mean:

- continual high costs and asset rents of thirteen buildings, some of which now require major re-fits
- buildings will continue to deteriorate without major capital input
- a slow programme of cosmetic and piecemeal refurbishment based on the ability to attract relatively small sums of external funding
- Brent will fall behind its neighbours, many of whom are expanding and developing their buildings
- Brent will be unable to fulfil the Government agenda set out in Framework for the Future, published by DCMS in February 2003
- The Council will have a limited ability to attain an excellent CPA score in the Libraries & Leisure category.

6.4.4 Reviewing the current pattern of libraries in Brent will enable a radical re-think of how services are provided, including the opportunity to re-configure public facing services, and to target particularly deprived neighbourhoods. Such a re-think could result in:

- centres of excellence, for example, at Wembley, as part of a new civic centre, and at Willesden Green, following re-location of the museum

- satellite libraries, in strategic locations, such as Ealing Rd, Kilburn and Kingsbury, possibly co-located with other public services
- major improvements to Willesden Green, which has not been re-decorated or re-furnished since it opened 14 years ago
- improved staffing at strategic levels to provide high quality innovative services
- improved facilities such as first stop shops, public toilets, study spaces, homework clubs in all libraries
- community libraries – small collections and PC links in venues such as the new Children's Centres, with dedicated, peripatetic staff to maintain and exploit them
- a new state of the art museum within Willesden Green Library Centre, and a new state of the art library, archive and family history centre within the Wembley development.

6.4.5 The benefits to Brent would be:

- a tangible statement of civic pride and identity
- being seen as a provider of excellent library, museum and archive services
- the ability to attract long term external funding and to be seen as the partner of choice
- effective access to Council services for residents across the Borough
- a contribution to the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods
- more cost effective services
- an enhanced ability to achieve an excellent CPA rating.

7.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following papers were used in the compilation of this report:-

- i) Library, Museum and Archive Best Value Review self assessment report, March 2003

Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Karen Tyerman, Assistant Director, Education, Arts and Libraries, Chesterfield House, 9 Park Lane, Wembley, Middx HA9 7RW. 020 8937 3146. Karen.tyerman@brent.gov.uk.

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