OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

10 MARCH 2009

AD HOC PANEL FINAL REPORT –

REVIEW OF LIBRARIES IN MIDDLESBROUGH

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.   To present the findings of the Ad Hoc panel into their review of Libraries in Middlesbrough.

AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

2.   The overall aim of the panel was to undertake an investigation of the library provision in Middlesbrough in order for the panel to contribute recommendations towards the Council's current efficiency review.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

3.   The terms of reference for the Scrutiny investigation were as outlined below:

(a)   To examine what methods have been used to increase visitor numbers and consider what more could be done.

(b)   To consider ways to increase levels of income within the service.

(c)   To consider where efficiency savings could be made and the likely impact of those savings.

(d)   To consider current library provision, proposed provision and alternative methods of providing the service more efficiently.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

4. Members of the Panel met formally between 9 December and 8 January 2009 to discuss/receive evidence relating to this investigation and a detailed record of the topics discussed at those meetings are available from the Committee Management System (COMMIS), accessible via the Council's website.

5. A brief summary of the methods of investigation are outlined below:

    (a) Detailed officer presentations supplemented by verbal evidence.

    (b) Visits to the Rainbow Centre Library, Whinney Banks Library and Abingdon Library

6. The report has been compiled on the basis of their evidence and other background information listed at the end of the report.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

7. The membership of the Panel was as detailed below:

    Councillor J Brunton (Chair), Councillor JA Walker (Vice-Chair), Councillors Bloundele, Dunne, Elder, C Hobson, Majid, McIntyre and Williams

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8. The panel was instructed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board to undertake a review of library provision in Middlesbrough to coincide with an internal efficiency review of libraries. It had been necessary to undertake a review because Middlesbrough's library service was considered to be expensive against the government's measurement on value for money. It was also expensive when compared with other authorities' figures.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

9. The panel began the review by looking at the current method that was used to measure value for money within library services. The panel learnt that the government standard for value for money in the library service was measured by cost per visit. Put simply, the cost of running the service divided by the total number of visits from each library. The unit cost per visit for Middlesbrough was £4.26. By comparison, in terms of Middlesbrough's position within the quartiles, in order to climb out of the bottom quartile the threshold was £3.46. In order to get into the upper quartile the cost would need to be £2.53 per visit.

10. A comparison with neighbouring authorities was made and their costs were as follows
    Redcar and Cleveland - £2.74
    Stockton - £3.05
    Hartlepool - £3.23
    Middlesbrough - £4.26

11.   Therefore both locally and national Middlesborough's library service by comparison was regarded as one of the most expensive library services in the country.

12.   The panel was given a table that detailed the direct and casual staff costs, premises' costs/supplies, the number of visits, issues, income, active members and percentage available PC use. The figures showed that the smallest library was Stainton which had 20 active members. Whinney Banks had 205 active members, Newport had 156 active members compared with Acklam which had 4,619 active members and Central with 6,900 active members.   The full table is attached at Appendix 1.

Current Provision

13.   The panel was informed that the library service in Middlesbrough was provided through the Central Library, twelve branch libraries, one village centre and a mobile library. It also provided a range of services in addition to the general library provision. For example the buildings were used to support local communities that included a range of services which supported the council's literacy objectives as well as providing a social and meeting space for local community groups and organisations.

Access to Libraries

14.   People could access a branch or mobile library somewhere across the town for up to 63 hours per week. Of those hours 23 were outside of normal office hours.   The Public Library Service Standard (PLSS) target for aggregated opening hours per 1,000 population was 128 hours, the current aggregated total in Middlesbrough was higher than that target at a total of 159 hours. It was also noted that many of the services were also accessible to people around the clock via the web site, including the ability to search for book availability and ordering books.

Opening Times

15.   The panel was given a timetable of all the opening times. It showed that the majority of libraries had some provision up until 7pm on certain days and 10 libraries were open on a Saturday. The Rainbow Centre library was the only library open on Sunday mornings and, due to its proximity to the leisure centre and the shopping area, received a high number of visits on Sunday.   It was also noted that there were 23 of the 63 hours per week of access to a branch or mobile library that was outside of normal working hours.

16.   The panel learnt that all residents were within 2 miles of a static public library, with 98% of residents being within one mile of a library. The PLSS target for the proportion of households living within a specified distance of a static branch was 88%. It was also noted that Middlesbrough had above average provision of static service points.

Staffing

17.   The panel learnt that the service was delivered by 62.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Staff made up of 91 individuals at 13 libraries and 1 village centre. Nine branches operated with a maximum of two staff on duty and three branches operated with a maximum of three staff on duty.   The other staff included support service and Central Library staff. Staffing levels were allocated on the basis of need in terms of health and safety. A casual pool, equivalent to 2 FTE was required to ensure that libraries remained open during holiday periods and to cover for sickness.

18. In addition to frontline staff there was a team of 12 librarians who operated across the service and were based in the branch libraries. Their role was to increase the use of libraries through promoting books, reading and learning and encouraging use through activities and events.

Mobile Library
19. The service operated a mobile library that delivered services to sheltered accommodation, care homes and some outlying estates with a high elderly population. The housebound service operated a delivery service to those unable to physically access a static library contributing to the new National Indicator (NI) NI142 – the number of vulnerable people supported to maintain independent living. In 2007/08 the mobile library cost £74,525 to run and the housebound service cost £31,363.

20. Members were interested in the current use of the mobile library and whether or not it could be used to promote library services further. The mobile library had been used for promotional purposes and had been available at some of the town's big events such as the Cleveland Show, the Mela and the 10k Run. It was considered that there was scope in the future to extend its promotional use.

21. The panel learnt that the mobile library schedule was reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it covered need efficiently. Members enquired as to whether the mobile library could be used as alternative provision. It was noted that it could be used in principle, but that the suggestion would have to be looked into carefully because the bus was currently running to capacity and there was little time available during the week in the current schedule.

22. Members considered that the use of mobile libraries could be enhanced as an option because they did not want to lose library services and considered that it was important to be able to provide alternative provision.

Performance and National Indicators
23. The panel learnt that the new NIs that were introduced in 2008 only had one measure that directly affected libraries - NI9 the use of public libraries. It would be measured through one question in a national active user survey which, at the time of writing, had not been confirmed. Middlesbrough was not reporting on the measure in the LAA 2008-2011 but would be monitored locally.

24. Up to 2007-08 the Library Service had been measured through the PLSS, which involved BVPI 220. It measured outputs such as visits, opening hours, access and satisfaction. The CPA self-assessment framework included the PLSS value for money indicators and measures related to provision of stock. In 2007-08 the service performed well against the PLSS, it achieved 8 out of 10 standards, but less well against CPA overall.

25. Table 1 demonstrates the over provision and that the costs per visits are above that of other authorities. Visits and borrower numbers needed to increase in order to reach national targets.

Table 1

PLSS/CPA	Description	National Target	Middlesbrough Result 07-08
PLSS1	Proportion of households living within a specified distance of a static library	88%	98.5%
PLSS2	Aggregated scheduled opening hours per 1,000 population for all libraries	128	159
PLSS6	Number of library visits per 1,000 population	6,300	4714
C4	Active borrowers as a percentage of the population	Lower 20.4%/Upper 27.3%	19.5%
C13	Cost per visit	Lower £3.46/ Upper £2.53	£4.26

Budgets

26. The panel were informed that the library budget was broken down into three areas

Table 2

Item	£000	Percentage
Staffing	1,654	72.6
Purchase Fund	419	18.4
Other Operational Costs	4	9
Total Expenditure	2,277	100
Income	(103)	4.5

27. The category 'other operational costs' include essential items such as telephones, stationery, marketing etc. The panel were told that those budgets were extremely tight, with little scope for finding efficiency savings. No savings could be found within building costs because the partnership contract meant that those costs were no longer contained within the service's budget. There were also limited opportunities to increase income without restricting the service to those who can afford it. It meant that savings would have to be found from either the staffing or purchase fund budgets.

28. The purchase fund was £419,000 and was broken down as follows:

Table 3

Item	£000
Adult Fiction	75
Adult Non-fiction	50
Large Print	27
Spoken Word	20
Children	60
Ethnic Material	15
CDs	7
DVDs	20
Games Media	7
Electronic resources	20
Reference	40
Newspapers	7.5
Other (binding, promotions, subscriptions, inter-library loans etc)	70

29.   It was noted that the CD market was slowing and the service was not now buying as many CDs. The media rentals market constituted a good proportion of the libraries' income, it accounted for £19,000 in 2007/08 with an additional £1,300 in media fines. The issues in 07/08 for all media was 52,977 which accounted for 8% of the annual issues.

Resources
30.   The panel were informed that over the last six years there had been a large-scale investment of over £2m from the capital programme. Following a Best Value Review, investment was made in both the fabric of the buildings and the bookstock.

31.   There had also been some additional one-off funding in the last two years in order to provide an improved programme of events. The funding included

- ♦ 2006/07   Regeneration Initiatives Fund   £10,000

- ♦ 2007/08   Performance Reward Funding   £20,000

32.   That additional funding and the improvements resulted in an increase of active members of 7.9% (27,016 members) and an increase of 3.2% in issue figures against the national trend of decline. However this did not produce an increase in the number of visits.

33.   Panel members were told that a direct link between additional events and an increase in visitor numbers was difficult to quantify. However funding to provide a wider range of outreach activities and events had an impact. If it was possible to

build the funding into the base budget then the programme of events could be maintained, hopefully leading to a further increase in library use.

Location

34. A map of the location of each library is attached at Appendix 2. The circles represent a mile radius from the library. It can be seen from this diagram that there is an overlap in a number of areas.

35. A mapping exercise had been carried out regarding library membership. It was noted from anecdotal evidence that adult users sometimes use more than one library and those under 16 tended to use only their local library.

TO EXAMINE WHAT METHODS HAVE BEEN USED TO INCREASE VISITOR NUMBERS AND CONSIDER WHAT MORE COULD BE DONE

36. It was noted that nationally the use of libraries was declining. Panel members were informed about the different ways Libraries' staff had used in order to try and increase visitor numbers over the last 12 months.

37. A flavour of these activities included

Table 4

Adult Activities	Children's Activities
♦ National year of reading – launch by Richard Milward, author of Apples ♦ Get Boro Reading campaign – recommended titles to shoppers and good bag give-aways ♦ Six Book Challenge ♦ Reading Groups in various libraries ♦ Big Boro Read ♦ Mad March Activities ♦ Competitions, Promotions and book launches	♦ Booktime – all reception age children in Middlesbrough visited the library to collect a free pack, which included 2 free books ♦ Boys into books ♦ Bookstart ♦ School holiday events and summer reading scheme ♦ Teen Heaven ♦ Regular storytimes, class visits and craft sessions

38. Members suggested that if available, more detailed information on the age profile for previous years my assist in identifying any trends which would inform the development of promotional events appropriate to the age profile.

39.   The following chart detailed the age profile of users.   Table 5

Age Profile of Users
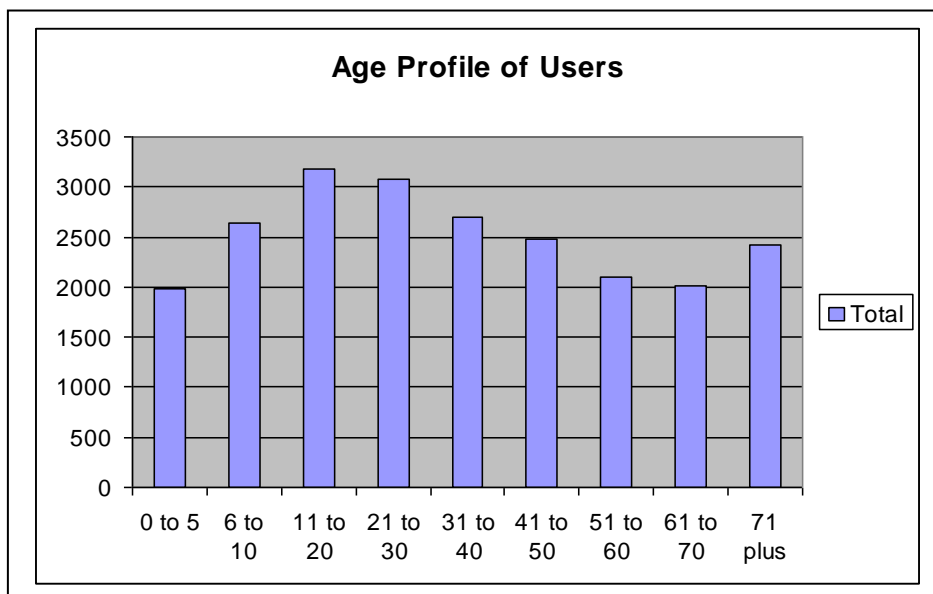
TO CONSIDER WAYS TO INCREASE LEVELS OF INCOME WITHIN THE SERVICE

40.   The panel was given details of the income generated within 2007/08. It included a variety of items and included approximately £15,000 from the rental of DVDs, £15,000 from fines, £8,000 from photocopying. The total income received was £76,385.

41.   The library service received nearly £4,000 from library users who signed up to the £1 per year fee to use the library's computers to access the Internet. The panel thought that the £1 fee was low for the service provided and thought that there might be scope to increase that fee.

42.   The panel acknowledged the innovative ways that had been used by staff in order to both generate income and increase visitor numbers. The panel was informed that there was little scope within exiting budgets to undertake any additional activities that would generate income. The panel felt that there was room to increase membership by using the marketing expertise within the council in order to promote awareness of the facilities that were available at libraries.

43.   Reference was made to the current methods that were used to advertise book sales that included the use of the Council's web site which Members considered to be a good idea. However due to the fact that the main costs in the budget related to staffing, the purchase fund and some operational requirements there was little that could be done to significantly increase current efforts to generate additional income without increasing charges which may impact on usage especially bearing in mind the social-economic factors in Middlesbrough.

44.   Members examined the idea of increasing charges for organisations using library facilities. It was noted that a nominal fee was charged for certain groups however in the majority of cases groups would not be able to afford any fee.

TO CONSIDER WHERE EFFICIENCY SAVINGS COULD BE MADE AND THE LIKELY IMPACT OF THOSE SAVINGS

45. The panel discussed whether savings could be made in respect of the cost of the buildings. The panel were informed that the current partnership with Mouchel meant that the buildings were owned by Mouchel and therefore any building costs were not within the service budget and therefore not available as potential savings.

46. Members considered staffing costs and questioned the higher costs that appeared against some of the libraries. In most cases where costs were higher it was where those libraries were group headquarters and more librarians were based there and some were used for outreach activities. In response to the query as to the feasibility of outreach workings being located at one base the panel were advised that this was not possible due to the space limitations of existing buildings.

47. The panel then asked for more detailed staff costs, primarily overtime payments. There were two types of overtime payments. Firstly enhanced payments for working weekend hours, which were paid as an additional ½ time payment at the member of staff's current grade. The second type was for any additional hours that the member of staff agreed to work to cover sickness, annual leave, meetings, training courses etc to ensure the service continued to run. It was noted that the amount varied between branches because some of the staff worked as relief in branches other than their base and overtime payments were coded to their base branch.

48. Members sought information on the cost of redundancies, however as redundancies were not indicated at the time it was difficult to put a cost to such figures.

49. A suggestion of increasing opening hours to increase visitor numbers was made however this would bring increased costs such as staffing etc.

TO CONSIDER CURRENT LIBRARY PROVISION, PROPOSED PROVISION AND ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF PROVIDING THE SERVICE MORE EFFICIENTLY

50. The panel compared the provision of library services across the Tees Valley

Table 6

Borough	Costs	No of libraries	Number of mobiles	Visits	Cost/Visit	Population
Middlesbrough	2,846,476	13	1	652,413	£4.36	138,700
Hartlepool	1,838,434	8	1	591,142	£3.11	91,400
Redcar	2,619,250	13	1	954,325	£2.74	139,400
Stockton	2,902,559	11	2	952,330	£3.05	190,200
Darlington	1,337,080	3	1	335,712	£3.98	100,000

51. Members were interested in Redcar's visitor numbers, as Redcar had a similar population and a similar budget for libraries. Members were informed that the visitor numbers had been high due to increased footfall from pensioners renewing their bus passes at libraries across the borough creating an artificially high visitor number.

CONCLUSION

52. Based on evidence given throughout the investigation the Panel concluded:

   a) The panel acknowledged that it was a difficult challenge facing the efficiency review to identify ways of reducing the unit costs whilst at the same time not impacting on visitor numbers and usage.

   b) The panel felt that there was little scope in trying to reduce the existing budgets as a way of making savings.

   c) That the cost per visit to Middlesbrough's libraries was by comparison with other local authorities too high and provision exceeded the Government's target of the proportion of households living within a specified distance of a static branch.

   d) The panel acknowledged the innovative ways staff had used in order to increase usage within the budget that they had available. Members thought that there was scope within the existing budgets by using marketing expertise within the council to further promote awareness of the facilities available at libraries.

   e) That the mobile library was a good way of promoting the service and providing access to the library service. Members were keen to see an increase in its role in those areas.

   f) That the nominal fee of £1 per year to access the internet in libraries was considered a very low charge and that an increase could be used to help raise income.

   g) That the panel welcomed the use of technology to provide a 24/7 service to library members and agreed that this facility should be promoted to ensure public awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

53. That the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:

   a) In view of the current over provision of libraries a programme of library closures should be developed based on closing those libraries with low usage and where there was another library in close proximity. The programme should be one that ensures that alternative provision, such as community management and longer opening hours in remaining branches, is provided. This should be agreed in consultation with local communities.

   b) That the responsibility of the running of Abingdon Library should be returned to Abingdon School.

c) That the current Whinney Banks Library is closed in view of the closure of the Youth and Community Centre.

d) That alternative arrangements are sought for the current library provision at Stainton Village Hall.

e) That any staff that are affected by the closures are offered re-deployment within the Council or voluntary redundancy where appropriate.

f) That a review of the current use of the mobile library is undertaken with a view to encouraging further use in areas where closures have occurred.

g) A review of the pricing structure for the media rentals market and the annual charge for internet use is undertaken with a view to raising charges.

h) That the service increases its promotion of the library facilities in Middlesbrough including placing an emphasis on the learning facilities provided by libraries (ie promoting literacy events, IT and Information Skills etc) and also the services that are available to library members through the website.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

54. The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our investigation. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:

- Tim White, Director of Regeneration
- Jen Brittain, Libraries Operations Officer
- Diane Fleet, Senior Librarian
- The staff of the Rainbow Centre, Abingdon and Whinney Banks Libraries

**COUNCILLOR JAN BRUNTON
CHAIR OF THE AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL**

February 2009

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

(a) Minutes of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel 9 December 2008 and 8 January 2009