

Proposed Reorganisation of Library Services – Outcome of Consultation

The purpose of this document is to set out the response to the consultation on the proposal to reorganise the library service in order to meet the reduction in the Library service budget by £300k. This document will be sent to all staff and will be submitted to Members as part of the report to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation Committee on 24 June 2014. For the purpose of the Committee this has been updated

Background

As part of the budget setting process for 2014/15 Members put forward a number of recommendations across a range of services in order to achieve the necessary budgetary savings required in order to achieve a balanced budget for 2014/15. This included a proposal to reduce the Library service budget by £300k. Library service staff were notified in writing on 16 December 2013 of this proposal and formal consultation commenced on 11 March 2014. It was decided that the consultation period would be for 45 days and ended on 24 April 2014. The main reason for a 45 day consultation was to allow staff a longer period of time to comment on any proposed changes around staffing structures, opening hours and timetables. It was considered very important that staff had enough time to comment on these proposals and to suggest any alternatives to the proposals. The new structure is designed to provide the best coverage arrangements for the new opening hours particularly including Saturdays, which have become increasingly difficult to cover. The main consequence of this is the change in balance from full to part time positions resulting in an overall increase in the number of staff working on a part time basis.

The additional time for consultation also aligned with consulting other stakeholders including library users. The response to this public consultation will be reported back to staff and Members as part of the report to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation.

Staff consultation

There were 6 formal consultation meetings held with staff at various locations. The meetings were well attended with 107 staff present which is 86% of the library service staff. At these meetings staff were informed of the overall budget gap of £52m and that the Executive decided in January to reduce the library budget by £300k. The rationale behind the proposals was explained to staff as well as the HR implications.

There were a number of themes that came out of the staff discussions at these meetings and these are listed below with management's response:-

Selection process – staff wanted to know how the new structure will be implemented.

Management's response – A representative from HR attended all of the meetings and the process will be that staff will be invited to express an interest in those posts which most closely match their current hours and grade wherever possible. It is hoped that when staff are asked to express an interest in positions that the majority of staff will be accommodated. It is intended to implement any changes to the staffing structure with the least disruption to staff as possible. A timetable of when HR processes will be implemented will be sent to staff in due course.

Sessional budget - staff wanted to know how the sessional staff were affected by the proposals.

Management's response – the budget for sessional staff will remain the same and is not affected by these proposals.

Public consultation – staff were concerned about some of the questions asked and also the timings of when the survey staff were visiting the libraries. Comments were also made that there was nowhere to make comments on the proposals if not present when the survey took place.

Management response- staff were informed that the timings were not set by management but had been arranged by the market research company to ensure that a representative sample was obtained at various times and days of the week. The public could make comments about the proposals via the feedback form on the website, by email or letter to Councillors. A number of the questions related to obtaining equalities data to help determine that no sections of the community were disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposals. Staff were told that any concerns about the survey should be directed to management.

Activity targets - some staff were concerned that with reduced hours they would not be able to meet the targets expected for activities.

Management's response – there will be 2 sets of targets for the year to take account of any proposed reduction in hours at some libraries later in the year.

Self-service machines – This facility is not available in all the libraries but will be rolled out to assist staff and enable them to undertake their other duties as part of the invest to save programme. Staff were concerned that there would be less interaction with customers.

Management's response – Staff should in the longer term benefit from this facility and it has been successful in the libraries where it is installed, especially Biggin Hill where it operates at times with no library staff present. At one meeting a member of staff at a library already having self-service commented how it did not inhibit interaction with customers. There will be new public PC's and Wi-Fi going into libraries which will benefit both customers and staff.

Lunchtime closures for Community Libraries – there was some discussion about this proposal but in the main the response from staff was positive. One benefit would be that customers would know the library was closed at lunchtime rather than having an arrangement of ad hoc closures due to staff shortages. It has operated successfully at Burnt Ash, Hayes and Shortlands for many years.

Mobile Library – staff were concerned about the implications of this on vulnerable customers.

Management response – the use of the mobile library has been declining over a period of time and by ceasing this service it contributes to the budget reduction, avoiding the need for more drastic reductions at static libraries which are able to provide a wider range of services. The Home Library Service will be able to help mitigate the effects for those who have no way of accessing a static library.

Income generation – Staff suggested that looking at new ways of raising income would be more important with the pressure on budgets.

Management said that all services have to look at how they can generate income. In libraries this is particularly relevant as the income on fines has reduced. Many activities in the libraries are free but some staff suggested that this is an area that could be looked at. The room rentals are another source of income and use of spaces on closed days should be explored further. The sale of further appropriate items could be another method to generate income.

Timetables and opening hours

Local Studies staff put forward a proposed timetable which would allow the retention of experienced staff in this section. Management wish to ensure the continuity of service and appropriate allocation of staff to maintain the best possible service to customers. It should be possible to achieve this at the Central Library without major change to the proposed timetable.

Penge staff suggested amended opening hours in the new library based on current and anticipated usage. It is intended to make appropriate changes in the light of this.

Staff at several branches proposed some further alterations to the proposed opening hours. These were considered in conjunction with the views of customers and as a result of consultation the opening times for Mottingham Library have been changed..

Trade Union and Departmental Representatives Consultation

An initial meeting was also held on 19 December with the Trade Unions and Departmental Representatives to inform them of the budget situation. A further meeting was held on 16 April 2014 and an update given on the consultation meetings which had already been held with staff and reassurance that the comments from staff would be considered.

It was explained that most staff will be accommodated in the new structure. There are a number of full time staff affected as some library opening hours may be reduced and there is not a requirement for full time staff at these libraries. These full time staff may be accommodated by working part time across two libraries.

The process for selecting staff, if the proposals are agreed, was discussed and this process will be subject to further discussions with both staff and trade union and departmental representatives. It was explained that because there was not a final proposal at that stage because the consultation period had not ended that information on specific staff affected was not known but was not expected to affect too many staff. There are a number of vacancies being held and these posts will contribute to the budget reduction required. A further meeting with be arranged following any Member decisions.

In the situation whereby individuals have written in with personal comments these have been responded to on an individual basis.

The consultation exercise has been very useful for management and I hope that staff are now clear about the proposals and implications arising from them. Management will be considering these comments further should the proposals be agreed by Members.

I would like to thank staff for their contribution to the consultation process and appreciate the ongoing commitment from staff to ensure the library service uses the available resources in the best way possible to meet the needs of the public.

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