

Summary of consultation with Trade Unions & Departmental Representatives

The purpose of this document is to set out the outcome of a consultation meeting with Trade Unions and departmental representatives on 16th October 2015.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide the attendees with an overview of the report on proposals to commission the library service (DRR15/089) which is due to be pre-scrutinised by the Renewal & Recreation Policy Development & Scrutiny Committee on 27th October before being considered by the Executive on 9th November. The same information provided to the Library staff at consultation meetings about the proposals was also provided to the Trade Unions.

Trade unions and Departmental Representatives were invited; the meeting was attended by representatives from Unite, Unison and GMB.

After the key points from that report was summarised verbally at the meeting, the Trade Union representatives had a number of concerns and comments. A summary of these are given in this document. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Concerns about the process to identify suitable community management arrangements included asking how confident was the Council that they would find community management arrangements? Could officers reveal who had applied, whether they were organisations or individuals and what their proposals are? Would TUPE apply?

Management response: Expressions of interest had been received and business plans from shortlisted applicants had only just been submitted. It was too early to say exactly what the proposals for community management included, and it was not possible to disclose who had applied or what their proposals were under procurement regulations. The information was commercially sensitive. Until business plans have been evaluated and negotiation is complete, it is not possible to identify what the implication would be for staff or whether or not TUPE would apply, because this would ultimately depend on what the individual proposals were for staffing community libraries under community management arrangements.

- Concerns about community management in other areas were expressed, including the neighbouring borough of Lewisham.

Management Response: Community management arrangements have kept libraries open across the country and there are very few reported incidents of community management arrangements failing. Officers have looked at examples of community management in other boroughs to inform their requirements. This included reviewing best practice and learning from less successful arrangements. Consultation documents recently issued by the London Borough of Lewisham suggest that they are looking at extending community management to additional libraries in their service.

- A view was expressed that the public consultation was “rigged”, but that even so it demonstrated that the Council does not have public support for proposals to commission the library service. Unite had been running their own survey in which there had been a significant level of public interest. It

was also stated that there should have been a discussion with the public about whether or not to use reserves.

Management response: The public consultation surveys were designed to give respondents enough information about what a commissioned library service would mean for service users, and be transparent about what the implications for a directly managed service would be. There are two sets of results; one for the self-completion survey and one for the street survey. As was recommended by the independent market researcher before the survey commenced, the results of these two surveys are presented separately because two different methodologies were used and to present the responses as one whole figure would be to undermine their statistical relevance.

We understand that the Unite have completed their own consultation with the public. Despite having requested it, Unite have not provided us with a copy of their survey and therefore we are unable to comment on it .

- A question was asked about how those who participated in the soft market testing exercise expected to make savings on the service.

Management Response: Whilst the soft market testing did provide officers with information about potential business models, this information is commercially sensitive.

- Officers were asked how they would ensure that service levels would stay the same under a commissioned library service

Management response: An output based specification was being developed which reflects the current Library Service, and bidders were being invited to tender on that basis.

- Concerns about staff morale were expressed.

Management response: Staff have been invited to feedback their concerns or queries to management for a response on several occasions. To date, there has not been any written feedback. The purpose of the consultation meetings with staff was to try and inform them of the proposals in order for staff to better understand how the commissioning of Library Services may operate if agreed. The verbal feedback from these meetings is included in the documents presented to Committee.