

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2015 starting at 6.30 pm

Present

Councillor Stephen Carr (Chairman)
Councillors Graham Arthur, Robert Evans, Peter Fortune,
Kate Lymer, Peter Morgan and Colin Smith

Also Present

Councillor Nicholas Bennett J.P., Councillor Simon
Fawthrop, Councillor Alexa Michael, Councillor Diane
Smith, Councillor Michael Tickner and Councillor Angela
Wilkins

288 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were presented on behalf of the Director of Finance.

289 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

290 GATEWAY REPORT: PROPOSALS FOR A COMMISSIONED LIBRARY SERVICE

Report DRR15/089

Work to progress a new approach for delivering library services in difficult financial circumstances included an option to consider commissioning the library service. Report DRR15/089 provided:

- an overview of the soft market testing outcome;
- the outcome of public consultation and staff engagement (details in Part 2 report DRR15/090).

The report also:

- considered alternative options for the future of the library service;
- outlined a proposed joint procurement strategy with L B Bexley to market test the library service; and
- identified the implications of commissioning the library service on current arrangements, identifying indicative costs, and how risks would be managed (with commercially sensitive issues affecting procurement and contracting arrangements also identified - details in Part 2 report DRR15/090).

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The report further provided an update on the separate procurement process to identify suitable community management options for the Council's six community libraries; the report suggesting an alternative option that could be considered should no such arrangements be agreed.

The new approach also sought to explore opportunities to renovate and improve the physical condition of all library buildings and upgrade the IT infrastructure. Property considerations related to leases, maintenance liabilities and rent were set out in Part 2 report DRR15/090.

Supplementary information had also been provided to Members setting out the outcome of a consultation meeting with Trade Unions and Departmental Representatives on 16th October 2015.

Concerning Community Libraries, it was anticipated that a recommendation could be available on a potential contract award in the New Year.

Since previous Library service reviews, a number of local authorities had now successfully commissioned their library service. A number of companies could also provide a range of library services to meet the Council's expectations. It was now an appropriate time to take the commissioning process forward and test the market.

Members sought clarification on a definition of active Library Service users and clarification that library usage included visits for reasons other than book borrowing. Confirmation was also sought on statutory requirements for library provision and background to the proposed community managed approach for community libraries.

The Deputy Leader commended colleagues, particularly the Portfolio Holder for Renewal and Recreation. The Library system needed to be retained and the Deputy Leader was pleased it was possible to retain every library in the borough through a difficult process and to provide improved library facilities at Biggin Hill, Penge and Orpington. The time had now come to consider **looking at other models for providing the service** and the Deputy Leader congratulated officers on their work. He was excited about the opportunity and the borough's libraries **would** be saved with a greater community use in future.

Reference was also made to investment in combining libraries with other services, this being considered a way forward so that library locations could act as a community hub. When combined with other services, evidence suggested that community based libraries increased their opening hours for core library services.

Councillor Angela Wilkins (Crystal Palace) referred to library closures at L B Lewisham and it was understood that difficulties were being faced in finding volunteers. She suggested that the library model at L B Lewisham faced a problem and library usage had reduced. Cllr Wilkins felt that similar issues could arise for community libraries at L B Bromley under community management.

Members were advised that L B Lewisham was looking to to see larger and more community managed libraries. Community management arrangements such as an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) or Charitable Trust were provided in other Councils. However, the model was more popular with County Councils who, due to the size of their library services and the number of libraries, could overcome some of the issues faced by London Boroughs.

Members supported the library service being market tested and a final decision on commissioning the service would not be taken until offers are known. Flexibility continued to be important in options for the community management of community libraries.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the outcome of soft market testing, public consultation/staff engagement, and the alternative options presented be noted;**
- (2) officers be instructed to market test the library service, beginning a formal procurement process jointly with L B Bexley;**
- (3) the procurement strategy and contracting arrangements set out in Report DRR15/089 be agreed; and**
- (4) progress made in a separate tender exercise to identify community management arrangements for community libraries be noted.**

291 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (VARIATION) ORDER 2006 AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

292 GATEWAY REPORT: PROPOSALS FOR A COMMISSIONED LIBRARY SERVICE

Report DRR15/090

Further to Report DRR15/089 considered in Part 1 proceedings, Report DRR15/090 provided additional information of a commercially sensitive nature.

Chairman

The Meeting ended at 7.21 pm