

Council

23 October 2014

Agenda Item 38

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Library Plan 2014/15 - Update - Extract from the Proceedings of the Economic Development & Culture Committee Meeting held on the 18 September 2014

Date of Meeting: 23 October 2014

Report of: Monitoring Officer

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE***Action Required of the Council:***

To receive the item referred from the Economic Development & Culture Committee for approval:

Recommendations:

(1) To approve the Library Plan 2014/15.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE COMMITTEE

4.00 pm 18 September 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Councillor Bowden (Chair); Councillors Hawtree (Deputy Chair), Deane, Morgan, K. Norman, Randall, Robins, Smith, C. Theobald and Wealls.

PART ONE**24 LIBRARY PLAN 2014/15 - UPDATE**

24.1 The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive seeking agreement to the final version of the Libraries Plan 2014-15 following public and stakeholder consultation.

- 24.2 It was noted that the Plan had received provisional approval at the meeting of the Committee held on 19 June and had been updated and amended subsequently to ensure that it included any revisions required following further community engagement and consultation. The results of this consultation process were set out in Section 5.3 of the report.
- 24.3 The Plan set out the Council's vision for the service, building on recent successes and outlining priorities and objectives for the next 18 months in the context of the service's overall plans and objectives for delivery across the city as a whole. It was considered that the Plan demonstrated how Libraries could help deliver broader corporate objectives and support the development of sustainable communities. In view of its status as a key strategic document the Library Plan required approval of full council.
- 24.4 Councillor Smith commended the report and the work carried out by this service, although he considered it was regrettable that the mobile service had been lost, enquiring regarding the take up on the alternative arrangements which had been put into place. He emphasised the need to extend the level of collaboration with other partners and agencies. Councillor K Norman enquired specifically regarding the level of take up of the Home Delivery Service. The Head of Libraries and Information Services explained that these arrangements had been well received, this service was more cost effective and could reach more vulnerable people than had been the case with the mobile library service and gave better access to the range of services available to borrowers. This service was building up slowly as there were limitations dependant on the number of volunteers and where they were located within the city.
- 24.5 Councillor Morgan echoed the points made by Councillor Smith considering that it was important to publicise and encourage use of the wider range of services available. Libraries had an important role as community hubs and in providing access to services other than borrowing books. The Head of Libraries and Information Services confirmed that this was one of the stated priorities in the Plan.
- 24.6 Councillor Bowden, the Chair commended the wide range of services available stating that library provision was linked to other services whenever the opportunity arose, for example, in Woodingdean where it was linked to the health centre, in Portslade and at the new development in Circus Street, Brighton for which planning approval had been given the previous evening. The Circus Street development would include a Brighton University library to which the public would have access.
- 24.7 Councillor Wealls thanked officers for forwarding copies of the most recent CIPFA profiles to him. Whilst acknowledging the quality of professional service provided and high levels of customer/user satisfaction, he remained of the view that the costs of service provision appeared high even when set in the context of comparable authorities. He also considered it was important to encourage users to borrow books as this one of the core functions of a library.
- 24.8 Councillor Hawtree stated that notwithstanding technological advances it was clear that people still loved books and continued to use them in addition to Kindles, computers and other means of accessing available information.
- 24.9 Councillor Robins welcomed the fact that services were available to those who were housebound. There were tremendous health and wellbeing benefits as a result of

human contact and access to services which prevented individuals from feeling isolated or cut off. These were important and valuable benefits which helped to reduce tension and the need to access other services.

24.10 Councillor Randall stated that it was a sign of the times that the nature of library use and direct book borrowing might change, notwithstanding the increased use of digital and other medias, library use remained popular across the city. It was important that Libraries remained at the heart of their communities.

24.11 Councillor Morgan concurred and considered it was important to spread available assets, for instance Whitehawk Library in common with other branches was shut on certain days each week. He was also concerned that in a continuing harsh financial climate that financial necessity did not compromise the services provided. The Chair, Councillor Bowden responded that the valuable contribution made by the Library service was recognised and that cross-party discussion on how this valuable resource could best be protected would take place.

24.12 Councillor C Theobald referred to Patcham Library, located in her Ward, it was a popular and well used library which would benefit from longer opening hours, and hoped that consideration could be given to how this might be achieved.

24.13 The Head of Libraries and Information Services stated that a reduction in the number of books borrowed was part of a national trend across the country, but that this had been lower across the city than elsewhere. The Libraries Plan had a strong emphasis on reading, and a revised Reading Strategy for the city was in development, working with Children's Services. Libraries were also working with Adult Social Care and Health colleagues to support the prevention agenda. As part of a PFI scheme the apparent costs of service delivery as set out in the CIPFA figures appeared high as the PFI revenue payments also covered capital costs, whereas the comparisons with other authorities were much better if this was taken into account. Discussions were taking place with CIPFA to see how this could be meaningfully reflected in future reports.

24.14 **RESOLVED:**

(1) That the Committee endorses the Libraries Plan for 2014-15; and

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL

(2) That the Plan be approved.