



Kirklees
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

**O
V
E
R
V
I
E
W
&
S
C
R
U
T
I
N
Y**

Ad Hoc Scrutiny Review

Report on

Library Services to Children

June 2001

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

BACKGROUND

The Panel was established by the Scrutiny Executive at its meeting on 4 January 2001 after references by Mrs M Woodcock, retired Children's Librarian, Mr C Strachan, UNISON Steward and all staff in the Books+ Department, Cultural Services. Concerns had also been raised by Councillors who attended a scrutiny training session at Northorpe Hall on 17 October 2000.

MEMBERS

Councillor Rita Briggs (Chair)
Councillor Tony Woodhead
Councillor Susan May

The Lead Officer was Cliff Stewart (Head of Personal and Strategic Services Resources) and Julie McDowell from Committee Services provided support.

MEETINGS

The Panel held meetings on 6 March 2001, 14 March 2001, 30 March 2001 and 9 May 2001. The Panel are grateful to the following witnesses who were interviewed during the course of the Scrutiny:-

Mr Jonathan Drake, Head of Cultural Services
Ms Louise Little, Pre-School Learning Alliance
Mr Jonathan Douglas, National Library Association
Mrs Margaret Woodcock, Retired Children's Librarian
Mr Ian Blakely, Fastlane Programme Manager
Ms Dianne Hird, UNISON and Books+

The Panel also received written evidence from Councillor Annie Smith, the Youth Libraries Group and UNISON.

REPORT

Terms of Reference

The Panel's terms of reference were:-

- (i) To determine the immediate effects of the decision of the Lifelong Learning Management Board to reduce library services to children.
- (ii) To determine what, if any, elements of the service affected have been adopted by other services of the Council.
- (iii) To determine whether it was reasonable for the Lifelong Learning Management Board and Head of Cultural Services to foresee those elements of the decision that have not been resolved by other services of the Council.

INTRODUCTION

The Panel was established following requests for a Scrutiny Review from Mrs Margaret Woodcock, retired Children's Librarian, Ms Jean Heywood on behalf of the staff in Books+

and Mr Chris Strachan, Reference Librarian and UNISON Steward. They were concerned about the effects of the decision made by the Lifelong Learning Management Board on 29 September 2000 to fund £97,000 ongoing savings by means of an organisational review of the Library Service. The savings agreed by the Management Board included reductions in specialist children's services, ceasing developmental services to children (promotional work, loss of Story times, class visits and events such as Baby Days) and the transfer of staff from Books+ delivering services to schools, from Cultural Services to the Schools Effectiveness Service.

Following the decision of the Management Board there were a number of articles in the local press which generated public interest in this issue. As a result of articles in the press Councillors questioned the decision made by the Lifelong Learning Management Board and at a scrutiny training session held on 17 October 2000.

EVIDENCE PRESENTED

On 14 March 2001 the Panel received evidence from invited witnesses. The Chair of the Panel explained the process of Scrutiny to the witnesses and thanked them for attending:-

(a) Mr Jonathan Drake, Head of Cultural Services

Mr Drake submitted a report which gave the background to the Lifelong Learning Management Board's decision to reduce library services to children, the reasons for the reductions, impact of the proposals on services to children and the next steps. *A copy of the full report presented to the Panel is appended as Appendix 1.*

Mr Drake gave evidence that in the financial year 2000-2001 Cultural Services was required to make savings of £97,000 from the Service's base budget to enable the Council to balance its books. The Service was directed to do this by means of a review of Library Services. The review was to have two other purposes:-

- (i) To address changes in demand on the Service and review out dated job descriptions and structures.
- (ii) To reshape the Service. Forthcoming challenges include the Public Library Standards, the People's Network and other initiatives. There is a need to make best use of resources and to ensure the structure will accommodate additional staff when funding becomes available.

Mr Drake stated that Cultural Services delivers a wide range of services to children. It was not the only area targeted for cuts but was the largest. There were insufficient resources to provide all services. The core services for adults and children including mobile libraries, book purchasing and branch libraries had to be protected and were off limits as part of the review. The situation had changed somewhat since the proposals were first put forward, as a result of additional resources being made available, and detailed discussions with Councillors, staff in Cultural Services and elsewhere in the Council and comments from users.

The Services to Children affected and the new arrangements introduced were as follows:-

- (i) **Storytimes, Baby Days and other Reading Development Events** (mostly in summer holidays)

This work was valued and enjoyed by the children who took part and their parents/carers, but it was additional to the core statutory services. The Lifelong Learning Management Board's view was that when, within approved budgets, resources were insufficient to meet all demands, the priority had to be to focus provision on children who were not established library users, by further developing work with schools (see (iii)). Subsequently, in the Budget for 2001/2 cross-party agreement was reached to increase budgets by £25,000 to reinstate the Storytimes Service on an ongoing basis.

- (ii) **Selection, Purchase and Management of Stock**

These activities formed a large part of the duties of two posts in Books + which fell vacant in 1999. Some of the stock work was thereafter taken up by Branch staff, advised and assisted by the remaining public library children's staff. In the future, the advisory role will be taken on by a service wide children's post which was increased to full time by means of provision of £9,400 in the original Review proposals, which strengthens specialist provision. In addition, computerised stock control introduced recently will increase efficiency, making available vital management information, especially about usage.

- (iii) **Induction into Library use for School Classes**

This service was provided "on demand" by Books +, and consequently did not reach all schools. On 28 November 2000 Lifelong Learning Management Board approved £25,000 from the Education Service budget to appoint two Library Education Officers (LEOs). In fulfilment of the commitment in the original Review proposals to take account of the literacy needs of young children, these posts will offer and promote this service to all infant and early junior schools, working closely with the School Effectiveness Service and the Routeways to Success programme in the Education Service.

- (iv) **Long-term Block Loans to Pre-School Groups**

This Service was run centrally by Books + (public library) staff. In future, the Library Education Officers will operate this service with support through the new Social Inclusion management arrangements. The introduction of the Foundation Stage of the National Curriculum for many of these groups will change their requirements, which will in turn change the service and how it is delivered. Discussions are under way between Libraries, Kirklees Early Years Service, School Effectiveness Service and Routeways to Success, and existing users have been consulted.

- (v) **Voluntary and Parents Groups**

Children's activities (mainly storytimes and craft sessions) have additionally been delivered in around 7 libraries by voluntary groups, with support on an ad hoc basis from a range of staff. These valued initiatives, supplementing but not substituting for core services, will be put on a more sustainable footing and their development encouraged as the changes set out in (i) to (iv) above are implemented.

The largest single saving (£26,600) was made by deleting the Books + Manager post. The management of the Books + Schools Library Service will be taken on by the Resource Manager in the School Effectiveness Service, and the public library elements will be taken on by members of the Libraries Management Team.

The net impact of the savings can be summarised as follows:

	£	Full Time Posts
Total reduction in expenditure on children's' services	97,400	4.52
Management post, duties absorbed by existing managers	26,600	1.00
Schools' induction work and playgroups, delivered by new LEO posts	25,000	1.24
Advice on children's services and stock purchase	9,400	0.50
Funding to reinstate Storytimes and other activities	25,000	1.00
Net effect on service delivery	11,400	0.78

It is estimated that a significant amount of the balance of £11,400 will be accounted for by the changed approach to stock management (see (ii) above).

The Council has approved the overall framework of the Libraries Review, and the resource changes shown above. The detailed implementation of these decisions is now the subject of negotiations with the Trade Union, taking into account the views of staff, other services and users, and seeking to deploy money and posts to best advantage. Additionally, existing collaboration is being strengthened and developed between Libraries, School Effectiveness Service, Kirklees Early Years Service, the Routeways to Success programme, schools and providers in the community.

Mr Drake stated that Storytimes, Baby Days and other reading development events received most attention from the press. In making their decision the Lifelong Learning Management Board regarded them as valuable, but in terms of the order of priority at the time, it was decided to discontinue them. At the Council meeting on 29 February 2001 the budget for 2001/2002 was set. An additional £25,000 from outside was put into the budget to fund Storytimes and children's events i.e. one full-time post and running costs.

The Panel was informed that a Social Inclusion Manager would be recruited to cover priority groups with a view to increasing user numbers. The post would be responsible for the children's service in children's public libraries. Two part-time posts of Library Education Officers would work with Schools in Libraries and give pre-school advice on Library Services. The School's Library Service (Books +) based in School Effectiveness Service will continue to support School's Libraries and Teachers.

The Panel was informed that the process of negotiating and consulting with staff had not yet finished. The Public Library Standards would place considerable financial pressure on Local Authorities and would result in more resources being put into Library Services.

Putting a new structure in place would help to take this forward when extra funding was put in, for children and adult services alike.

Mr Drake informed the Panel that he recollected some discussion about Storytimes and Baby Days at the Lifelong Learning Management Board meeting and cross-party pre-briefing. He stated that many changes and a number of cuts were proposed, so there was a lot for Members to focus upon. He stated that at the Management Board attention was focused upon the impact of loss of Storytimes on children, and on the cuts in staffing at Chickenley and in the reference department.

Mr Drake informed the Panel that reading development services for children will continue to operate in a reduced form. Baby Days were not covered by the additional resources of £25,000 put back into the service by the Lifelong Learning Management Board on 28 November 2000 but there may be scope to reintroduce them as resources and work programmes take effect. Mr Drake indicated that only as the new posts are filled will it be possible to sort out what is a reasonable workload for the staff and how individuals can deliver the service in a sustainable way, working with colleagues from KEYS and other services.

(b) Louise Little - Pre-School Learning Alliance

Louise Little presented the following evidence:-

What would be the immediate effects of the decision to reduce Library Services to children?

Voluntary Groups receive no specific funding for books, but are still expected to deliver the Foundation Stage Curriculum. The Nursery Grant does not provide enough money to fulfil the obligations of the Foundation Stage Curriculum if books, currently available from the Library Service, need to be purchased.

Many outlying rural areas rely on the delivery of library books. This is a valued part of the Service which must not be lost. If lost it could have an impact upon the local libraries as it encourages a visit to the library when the books are collected.

Practitioners use the library books as a resource for their professional development, as an aide to planning and as a stimulus to activities they provide. PLA tutors, providing training for practitioners, value the use of books on loan which are classified into the six areas of development, as outlined in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage.

If the service is lost children would lose the variety of books available. If the book range became static children could lose interest and not develop a love of books. Most settings work to themes and so need a large number of books on the same subject, according to their theme.

The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage states under the section on Communication, Language and Literacy: "this area of learning includes communication, speaking and listening in different situations and for different purposes, **being read a wide range of books** and reading simple text for a variety of purposes. To give all children the best opportunities for effective development and learning in communication, language and literacy, practitioners should give particular attention to:- giving opportunities to share and enjoy a wide range of rhymes, music, songs, poetry, **stories and non-fiction books**".

Implementation of the Foundation Stage Curriculum, which begins at the age of 3, is a statutory requirement for all settings who are in receipt of the Nursery Grant for 3 and 4 year olds. Almost all play group settings in Huddersfield have registered to be in receipt of this grant.

Evidence shows that the availability of a large variety of books is a strong factor in encouraging early reading. It would be impossible for settings to purchase the variety they need and they would not have enough space to store them.

The Playgroup settings that are currently achieving OFSTED reinspection on 2-4 years (rather than 1-2) are doing so in part because of the Library Service resources.

What elements of the Service affected have been adopted by other Services of the Council?

Several campaigns seem to be meeting the needs of very young children for example Babies into Books, Sainsbury's Book Start etc. But if library services to pre-schools are reduced or lost then the long term benefits of these scheme will not be as effective.

Was it reasonable for the Management Board and Head of Cultural Services to foresee those elements of the decision that have not been resolved by other Services of the Council?

A better understanding of the role of pre-schools service delivery within the Kirklees Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership was necessary.

(The above evidence was read out to the Panel)

Louise Little stated that Books+ delivered a very good service to 88 playgroups. Borrowing books from the branches would not be the same. The Panel was informed by Jonathan Drake that playgroup leaders have taken part in discussions on the future of the service, and following their suggestions, consideration was being given to delivering book boxes to Branch Libraries convenient for playgroup leaders to visit, while continuing to run the service from Red Doles Lane as at present.

(c) Jonathan Douglas, National Library Association

Mr Douglas informed the Panel that the National Year of Reading supported the National Literacy Strategy and the importance of giving children activities around reading has been recognised since then. Mr Douglas expressed concern about a reduction in capacity to do this. National redevelopment projects were being rolled out on a large scale with a high profile. Children wanted to take part and their local library could miss out.

In respect of Surestart and Early Years initiatives, EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) was currently underway. Early evidence showed that social, economic or educational deprivation of parents could be counter-acted by making available high quality, educational materials to children for example by attending local libraries. It was working particularly well under the Surestart project. Libraries in these areas had increased membership amongst children. If the number of children's librarians was restricted the ability to attract funding under the Surestart project was reduced. The Lifelong Learning agenda had to be initiated by the time children left school. The opportunity to access computers in a library setting, for example, to do homework would be limited.

Without specialist training Librarians were not best equipped to deal with the unique client group of children. Specialists could subtly interpret the needs of children for example in respect of security and safety. Children's librarians were book experts, reading the book before buying it and successfully promoting it to the right child at the right time.

The Panel was informed that the University of Oxford, Institute of Education in London and Cardiff University had undertaken research and given evidence to the Education and Employment Select Committee in the House of Commons. The direct result of that evidence was funding of toy libraries by the Government.

(The above evidence was presented verbally to the Panel)

(d) Mrs Margaret Woodcock, Retired Children's Librarian

Mrs Woodcock informed the Panel that following public protest measures were being put in place to mitigate the decision of the Lifelong Learning Management Board. Mrs Woodcock stated that to a large extent she was reassured by what she had heard from Mr Drake in his evidence to the Scrutiny Panel. However, the Books+ Department dealt with the needs of children, it was about to disappear and nothing was being put in its place. Properly trained library specialists for children were necessary. Mrs Woodcock indicated that she was not against change but the proposal did not replace an integrated children's library service. There were constant denials and attempts to disguise the true situation. She had hoped that there would be a more honest approach. Many posts had been deleted and left vacant for a long time. Mrs Woodcock felt that the creation of a new post of qualified librarian had been done retrospectively.

(The above evidence was presented verbally to the Panel)

(e) Mr Ian Blakely, Fastlane Manager

Mr Blakely informed the Panel that Fastlane is a Lifelong Learning project which is part of Routeways to Success. The project works with schools and communities across approximately 80 schools in the regeneration area of Kirklees. Work is undertaken with babies, school children, parents, other adults and elderly people to promote fun in learning. Fastlane works in enumeration districts of Kirklees classed as economically deprived. The programme is being extended across Kirklees.

Babies into Books started in Kirklees approximately 3 years ago and became famous nationally. It was a new exciting initiative and Mr Blakely was disappointed that it had stopped. There were a lot of Babies into Books groups in Kirklees. The project worked closely with the Library Service and Health Visitors. Baby Days were held in local libraries with the help of children's librarians. 26 days were held and 168 babies, 262 toddlers and 300+ adults took part.

Mr Blakely was disappointed that the Baby Days had stopped, but new initiatives were always being considered. He had met with the Assistant Head of Service for Libraries to discuss the proposed changes at the time. New proposals included training local people to tell stories to children in Libraries and other community venues.

(The above evidence was presented verbally to the Panel)

(f) Ms Dianne Hird, UNISON

Ms Hird informed the Panel that a £97,000 cut was specific to cuts in staff and it propelled the restructure in the libraries. Members chose to cut the Books + service. This meant the closure of half the department dedicated to the needs of children aged 0-18 years. The department had been set up as a unified service for children whether in school or the local library. Books + Schools and Books + Libraries were split into separate departments. The former was to transfer to Education, the second would be subject to cuts. Much of the work of specialist staff would be put in jeopardy. She felt that the full implications in respect of provision for children were not thought out at the time.

A post at Senior Manager level was to be deleted. Very little work was being done at a strategic level. Prior to staff shortages Books+ staff had worked with Early Years Staff and valuable partnerships were established. The Literacy Development workers were trained in library and information skills. What is the role of future staff in initiatives for example Surestart? In respect of the Babies into Books project, Books+ staff had worked with Health Visitors etc. A group of parents/carers focusing upon books had been set up at New Mill. Due to staff shortages they had been unable to set up more groups, and groups had been unable to visit the libraries. There was a mailing list of 900 families keen to hear of events in libraries.

The libraries had worked to ensure that all children in Kirklees had opportunity to access the high standard of service, the Events Team ensured that they could attend. Large scale projects were tackled for example, colour coding of books so they are child friendly using the same system as in schools. Visits to local libraries by Authors on book launches attracted visitors. The value of reading a book for sheer pleasure should be recognised. How many other agencies had a service open to all covering all areas?

The Vision of the Council says there should be access to information for communities in Kirklees, the education and future involvement of everyone should be supported and that individuals should be supported in their future development. This is what libraries are about if you have the important resource of staff. Children are a specialist client group under the library standards.

Ms Hird informed the Panel that provisionally there were plans for two Baby Days in every library and to go to community centres, village halls and health centres, but due to staff shortages these were abandoned.

In respect of looked after children the Panel was informed that the Books Plus Manager had been on a Committee made up of people in education concerned about working with looked after children. She was involved in the project "A Book of My Own". At present there were 12 book collections in homes but not a lot of pro-active work was being undertaken in that area. The books were not changed regularly. In the past they were well used.

Ms Hird submitted a file of newspaper cuttings about the Babies into Books Project and a catalogue of Storytime activities and events.

(The above evidence was presented verbally to the Panel)

(g) Written Evidence

(i) **Councillor Annie Smith**

The Panel received written evidence from Councillor Annie Smith who expressed concern that Playgroups had not been planned for properly and that there had been no consultation about this issue either with them or Kirklees Early Years Service. Councillor Smith stated that Playgroups provide very valuable experiences for small children with very limited funding. Most of them are now subject to OFSTED inspection and the quality of provision they make for early literacy opportunities is something they are judged on. It would be very difficult for them to make good, varied high quality book provision without the help of the lending library service and the loss of the service would have a major impact on the quality of early years provision in Kirklees. Councillor Smith asked why they had not been included in the Library Service planning process and asked for confirmation that the service to playgroups is being continued in the way that integrates it with school provision and protects it from being overlooked in the future.

(ii) **UNISON**

UNISON has submitted support from famous Authors and a petition with 1,865 signatures to a campaign against cuts in the Library service.

(iii) **National Youth Libraries Group**

The Chair of the National Youth Libraries Group sent a letter to express concern at the proposed cuts. A high quality children's library service enables local authorities to support the current Government policy of alleviating child poverty, creating patterns of lifelong learning and social inclusion. A reduction in children's reader development work was of particular concern. The foundations of the reading habit were made in the early years as research on Book Start and other projects demonstrated and the proposed cuts were likely to be damaging to the status which reading has among families and children.

CONCLUSIONS

(i) **To determine the immediate effects of the decision of the Lifelong Learning Management Board to reduce Library services to children.**

A specific area that has been neglected within the debate is that of the Council's responsibility as a Corporate Parent.

The effect of the decision on the Baby Days held by the Libraries service was not addressed.

(ii) **To determine what, if any, elements of the service affected have been adopted by other services of the Council.**

The Panel looked in detail at this issue and its findings are encapsulated in the report of Mr Jonathan Drake, Head of Cultural Services, which is appended.

(iii) **To determine whether it was reasonable for the Lifelong Learning Management Board and Head of Cultural Services to foresee those elements of the decision that have not been resolved by other Services of the Council.**

In considering this area of scrutiny the Panel were minded to reflect on both the process and the various activities encompassed within the Library Services to Children.

It was apparent from discussions with Members and Officers that particular areas of possible concern were not made explicit either within the report of 25 September 2000 or during the discussion of the Lifelong Learning Management Board. This then had the effect of inhibiting an open and constructive discussion on the services that would be affected, alternative ways forward and the delivery of services.

There appeared to be an emphasis within the Service on employee issues as opposed to service delivery. These discussions were made more difficult due to vacancy management. Some other stakeholders also became focused on the employee issues, albeit extrapolating these issues to encompass the knock on effects into services. In addition the past and present professional barriers, combined with a wish of not wanting to change the service also ensured that initially the majority of the focus was on staffing issues as opposed to services.

This emphasis on looking at organisational issues resulted in Members being reactive as the various concerns were debated. Subsequently, various arrangements were developed to deliver the five areas of service leading up to full Council on 28 February 2001 at which time a further £25,000 was allocated to this Service to reinstate the Storytime service area.

Whilst much of the thinking appears to be reactive as opposed to planned the Panel recognises that the broadening of the Services involved in Library Services for Children is a positive step in achieving far greater inclusivity and addressing social exclusion. The point was made by a witness that there is a positive link into families by children accessing the library.

In conclusion the Panel believes that the failure to have an open and constructive debate with all stakeholders in the early stages of the budget process made it difficult for all services to be fully considered. The employee issues including the professional barriers should have been addressed sooner so enabling the discussions to focus on the service areas required and the impact of any changes. The Panel believes the changes coming from the work between September 2000 and February 2001 provide a number of opportunities in the area of Social Exclusion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Authority's Senior Management should examine the events leading up to the report of 25 September 2000 and the subsequent actions.
- (2) That reports should be more explicit where the public interest is involved and that this should be taken up by the Authority's Senior Management.
- (3) That the Lifelong Learning Core Team should review the arrangements with regard to meeting the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent.
- (4) That the Lifelong Learning Core Team should monitor the performance of the new arrangements comparing the outcomes against the current statistics, in addition the recruitment to the posts identified in the Head of Cultural Service's report should be monitored.
- (5) The Panel notes on a more general point that the Council may create difficulties for itself by not clearly identifying areas of public interest and then having discussions with stakeholders at an early stage, so ensuring a fully informed proposal.