

## **Libraries service and reviews**

### **Summary**

This paper provides brief information on the DCMS Libraries Modernisation Review and the independent review of the Wirral library service.

Craig Westwood (DCMS) will attend the board to give an update on progress of this work and to hear questions and comments from members.

### **Recommendations**

That members note and the update at the Board meeting from DCMS.

### **Action**

Subject to members' comments, officers to take forward appropriate actions.

# Libraries service and reviews

## Background

1. At its 16 March 2009 meeting the Board met with the DCMS Libraries Modernisation review team to offer a local government steer to the development of the review. The Board again discussed the review at its meeting on 19 May 2009.
2. A statutory service, local authority spending on library services rose from £651m in 1996/7 to £965m in 2006/07. Usage remains reasonably consistent although the latest figures show evidence of a small reduction<sup>1</sup>. There is no single model of library delivery: some services are very innovative in their approaches, using co-location, digital support and library resources to deliver many agendas including community cohesion, skills and learning support, business start up, third sector support or health promotion. Others still take a more traditional approach.

## DCMS Libraries modernisation Review

3. The LGA continues to be involved in the DCMS Libraries Modernisation Review. Following members' input at March Board the LGA facilitated a focus group of local authority Chief Executives to feed into the review. The LGA is represented on the Review's steering group. The group has not met for some time. On 11 June, Barbara Follett invited the Advisory Council on Libraries to consider and revise the draft review document.
4. We expect the DCMS to publish its findings shortly. The LGA is planning a conference for **14 December 2009** to bring together library authorities to share best practice from the sector and to discuss the DCMS review.

## Independent review into the Wirral library service

5. Wirral Metropolitan District council, on 15 January 2009, agreed recommendations in its Strategic Asset Review (SAR), including that the council should close either 11 or 12 of its current 23 Libraries. This decision is expected to save the council £3.1 million, from a cultural services budget of around £30 million.
6. On 3 April DCMS announced that there would be an inquiry into the library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council, to gather further information to help the Secretary of State decide whether the Council's plans are consistent with their statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service. This is only the second time the Secretary of State has used these powers to intervene at the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> Taking Part Survey 2006/07 – 46% of the adult population use a public library. Recent data indicates a drop in attendance with fewer young adults and the elderly visiting. There is also a statistically significant drop in the number of adults from white ethnic backgrounds visiting as well as those from the lowest income brackets. There has been an increase in the proportion of adults stating that there is no need for them to go to a library.

7. The terms of reference of the inquiry were to “gather information and provide advice in order for the Secretary of State to assess whether, in taking the decision to implement the proposed changes to their library service, The Wirral is in default of their statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, including the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service.”

## **Financial Implications**

8. The financial implications of this work can be managed from existing resources.

## **Implications for Wales**

9. Libraries are a devolved service, and the Libraries Modernisation Review applies only to England.

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