

11 January 2010

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## Libraries modernisation review

### Summary

This paper provides an update on the DCMS Libraries Modernisation Review and related issues, and seeks members' views on an LGA response to the recently released consultation paper, *Empower, Inform, Enrich*.

### Recommendations

That members note the report, and take a view on an LGA response to the recently released consultation paper, *Empower, Inform, Enrich*.

### Action

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

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## Libraries service and reviews

### Background

1. Following her return to the DCMS, Margaret Hodge wrote to stakeholders outlining that she wished to take the Libraries Modernisation Review process in a new direction. The Department solicited “short think pieces on ‘how we might make libraries fit for the 21st century’”. Cllr Chris White made a contribution on behalf of the LGA.
2. *Empower, Inform, Enrich*, the modernisation review of public libraries consultation document was subsequently launched by Margaret Hodge MP, Minister for Culture, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2009. Copies of the document will be provided for members ahead of the 11 January board meeting, and can be accessed online at [http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/consultations/default.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/consultations/default.aspx).

### LGA Libraries conference – 14 December 2009

3. *Empower, Inform, Enrich* provided the backdrop to a lively conference on the future of the local library service hosted by the LGA on 14 December, in conjunction with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Officers and Elected Members from across England came together to discuss best practice, hear about groundbreaking projects and find out about the latest developments in the DCMS Libraries Modernisation Review.
4. The conference heard from leading politicians including Margaret Hodge (Minister for Culture), Ed Vaizey (Shadow Arts Minister) and Lord Graham Tope (Liberal Democrat, Communities and Local Government Spokesman), as well as the Chief Executives of the MLA, Derbyshire County Council, the British Library and UKOLN. Presentations from the day can be downloaded from the events section of the LGA website, at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/external-link.do?redirectUrl=http%3A//www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do%3FpageId%3D6398588>.

### LGA engagement with the DCMS review

5. The LGA has been involved in the Libraries Modernisation Review process since its inception in 2008, and are represented on the review steering group. Using this influence, we secured places on the five initial workstreams for local authority representatives and have facilitated a Chief Executive focus group to feed senior views in to the review process. Elected members of the CTS Board have discussed the progress and likely outcomes of the review with both the current, and previous, responsible Ministers on several occasions and, recently, with the Conservative’s Shadow Culture team. Cllr Chris White will next meet Margaret Hodge MP to discuss the development of the Libraries Review on 18 January 2010. At the same time the LGA has contributed to the All Party Parliamentary Group enquiry into the future of libraries, and has provided support to Wirral MBC during Sue Charteris’ recent enquiry.

6. Following the publication of the *Empower, Inform, Enrich* the LGA wrote to councils, via both an LGA Alert to Chief Executives and the CTS Newsletter, urging them to respond to the DCMS consultation to ensure that the voice of local councils is heard clearly.
7. Throughout this ongoing and extensive engagement with the issue of libraries modernisation, the LGA has retained a clear and straightforward policy position. We have consistently said that the future for libraries needs to be based on the principle of free information for all. Books and buildings will always be a crucial part of the service, but the emphasis needs to move away from measuring what councils put into libraries and instead measuring what customers get out of them.
8. This policy was most cogently argued in our submission to *Empower, Inform, Enrich*, where the LGA called for a new Libraries Act to replace the outdated existing legislation. Local library services now provide computer terminals, homework rooms and space for local groups to meet as well as access to books and music. They are a way the public can access a wide range of public services and advice. The LGA wants councils to be freed up to make decisions on how best to provide information services to local people without being judged according to laws drawn up half a century ago, before the arrival of the internet and digital media.
9. The deadline for responses to the questions set out in *Empower, Inform, Enrich* is 26 January 2010. Members are asked, in light of the engagement detailed above (particularly the inclusion of the LGA essay in the consultation document) and the ongoing position of the LGA as a member of the Libraries Review steering group, in close contact with the minister, whether a response to this further consultation is required.

## **Financial Implications**

10. None arising from this report.

## **Implications for Wales**

11. The Libraries Modernisation Review applies only to England.

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