

Lobbying on libraries

Summary

This paper supports further development of the LGA's lobbying position, following the DCMS Modernisation Review, on the future delivery and reform of library services.

Recommendations

That members note the paper and provide a further steer with regard to the issues it raises.

Action

Following members' comments, officers to reflect the board's position in on-going lobbying efforts.

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Lobbying on libraries

Background

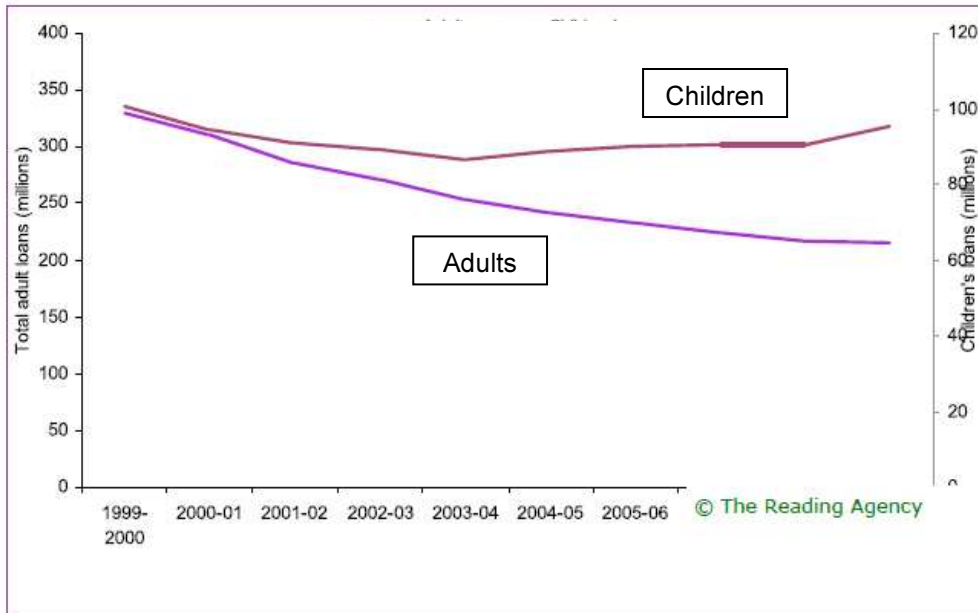
1. At its meeting on 29 March, the Board discussed the DCMS Libraries Modernisation Review, which had been published on 22 March.
2. Members were disappointed with the proposed creation of a Libraries Development Agency, and expressed concern over the prospect of further regulation from central government on locally delivered libraries services.
3. Members felt that the goal, set out in the review, of ensuring wider digital access was positive, but that the scope of the review focussed too heavily on this. Councils had proven themselves capable of delivering innovative and modern library services that respond positively and flexibly to local demands – acknowledgement of this was not sufficient in the review.
4. Members were in agreement that much within the review was a retrograde step, and that potential expansion of the MLA role should be opposed.

Recent data releases

5. On 12 May, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants released its public library statistics for 2008-09. These show that, in 2008-09, English Library Authorities revenue spend (excluding capital charges) on the library service was approximately £0.9 billion (down from £1.154 billion in 2007-08), of which an average 55% was spent on staff costs. The equivalent figures in Wales, which has the same statutory framework for libraries as England, were £50 million in 2007-08, down 6%, to £47 million, in 2008-09. Of this, an average 54% was spent on staff costs.
6. The CIPFA data also shows that visits to libraries in England are down by 1.4%, from 280 million in 2007-08 to 276 million in 2008-09. Visits to libraries in Wales are also down slightly, from 14 million in 2007-08 to 13.5 million in 2008-09.
7. Also on 12 May, the Reading Agency (a charity funded by the MLA and Arts Council to encourage more people to read more) issued a press release that “hail[ed] the success of libraries’ modernisation effort”. The release noted that overall book lending in UK libraries had increased for the first time in ten years, although an increase of 5% in lending to children masked a 1.8% fall in lending to adults (see figure 1). In total there were 310,776,757 loans made in 2008-09, up from 307,571,000, although members should note that this was the national

year of reading, and many additional campaigns were run to encourage children to read.

Figure 1 – Book loans to children and adults in UK libraries (2008-09)¹



Next Steps

- Members are asked to comment on the future direction of the LGA's lobbying position and provide a further steer with regard to the future delivery and reform of library services.

Financial Implications

- None arising from this report. Several recommendations in the DCMS review, such as banning councils from charging for internet access, could have a significant impact on local authority finances.

Implications for Wales

- The provision of libraries in Wales is a devolved matter, although it is governed by the same statutory framework as English libraries, the 1964 Public Libraries Act. Data relevant to Welsh libraries is presented at paragraphs 5 and 6.

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¹ Taken from Reading Agency statistical release, 12 May 2010. Data prepared by LISU (Loughborough University). Available online @ http://www.readingagency.org.uk/media/press-releases/The%20Reading%20Agency_LISU%20charts.pdf