

**REPORT TO:** Employment Learning & Skills Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 13<sup>th</sup> January 2010

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Health & Community

**SUBJECT:** Public Library Review

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 To consider how the Council might wish to respond to the national review of public libraries.

**2.0 Recommendation: That:**

- i) The Board recommends how to respond to the Government's national consultation on the public library service.**
- ii) The Board make any appropriate comments on the nature of the questions posed in the consultation paper.**

**3.0 Supporting Information**

3.1 On 1 December 2009 the Culture Minister Margaret Hodge launched a two month consultation seeking the views of a wide range of people on the future of public libraries. In practice, any comments need to be submitted by 26<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

3.2 The consultation document takes the form of 29 'think pieces' (short essays) from invited thinkers commentators and leaders in library services, as well as individuals working in retail, digital media, education, publishing and local government on how to make libraries fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

3.3 Five significant challenges are set out to be addressed. These are:

- How can the library service demonstrate to citizens, commentators and politicians that they are still relevant and vital?
- How can we reverse the current trend of decline in library usage and grow the numbers using their local library?
- How can all libraries respond to a 24/7 culture and respond to changing expectations of people who want immediate access to information?
- How can all libraries grasp the opportunities presented by digitisation?
- How can the library service cope with limited public resource and economic pressures?

The consultation paper concludes with 23 questions. These are set out in Appendix 1.

3.4 The paper, and the questions have had a mixed review from the 'industry'. There seems little new since the last review of libraries (Framework for the Future 10<sup>th</sup> February 2003) in which a vision for a national library service was set out. It does not attempt to define any national standards which remains a weakness since the removal of the national performance indicators. As such we are no nearer to defining a "comprehensive and efficient public library service" under the terms of the 1964 Act, although Wirral was deemed to be in breach of its statutory duties under the act in its proposals to close a number of libraries and re-configure its services. The professional view is represented by Fiona Williams, President of the Society of Chief Librarians, who writes: "There is no need to re-invent the public library service to make it fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It already is, what we need now is leadership and strategic thinking".

3.5 The PPB is asked to consider the questions posed in Appendix 1 and recommend how, if at all, the authority should respond.

#### 4.0 **Policy Implications**

4.1 None at this stage. The paper is for consultation.

#### 5.0 **Financial Implications**

5.1 None at this stage, although one area of the paper asks how libraries should cope with limited public resource and economic pressures.

#### 6.0 **Implications for the Council's Priorities**

##### 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Improving literacy and early years education is a particular focus for libraries.

##### 6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills**

Libraries embody open access to information and education for all. They focus on learning and skills development, digital inclusion, citizenship, business support and entrepreneurship.

##### 6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Libraries have a role to play in the health and well-being of the population, and recently have developed 'Books on prescription', 'Information on prescription' interventions from those suffering dementia, promotions of healthy life-styles.

##### 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Libraries offer a safe environment for activities and events, ICT access, community information, advice giving sessions, etc.

##### 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

Libraries have a role in the physical development of local communities and Building Schools for the Future.

7.0 **Risk Analysis**

7.1 None relating to the consultation paper.

8.0 **Equality and Diversity Issues**

8.1 Libraries help to promote equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom with a commitment of open access of information and education for all.

9.0 **List of Background Papers Under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.**

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.