

Scrutiny Committee

29 June 2016

Provision of library services in Suffolk

Summary

1. This report describes and demonstrates how library services in Suffolk, delivered by Suffolk Libraries Industrial Provident Society (IPS) Ltd, are commissioned, delivered and monitored so as to fulfil the County Council's duties as the statutory library authority, support wider strategic priorities and provide a library service suitable for the 21st century. It seeks to address the Committee's enquiries about the performance of specific aspects of the service as it is at present, and plans for future services and savings.

Objective of Scrutiny

2. The objective of this scrutiny is to consider how the County Council is delivering its statutory responsibilities in relation to library services, and the current opportunities and challenges faced by Suffolk Libraries IPS Ltd.

Scrutiny Focus

3. The scope of this scrutiny has been developed to provide the Committee with information to come to a view on the following key questions:
 - a) What are the statutory responsibilities of the County Council in relation to the provision of library services?
 - b) What is Suffolk Libraries IPS Ltd contracted to provide?
 - c) What is the service model?
 - d) How does the service in Suffolk compare with others?
 - e) How has use of the library service changed since 2011?
 - f) How has the Suffolk library service developed since 2011 to adapt to these changes?
 - g) What is the current model and costs for the operation of the mobile library service?
 - h) What services does the mobile library service provide and how well are these used?
 - i) What savings has Suffolk Libraries IPS Ltd made to date and how has this been achieved?
 - j) What further savings are required?

- k) What are the options being considered in order to achieve these savings and how is this likely to impact upon the current range and quality of services provided?
- l) What further opportunities exist for the library service to contribute to the achievement of wider public service priorities in Suffolk?
- m) What consultation will take place on any proposed changes to the provision of services?

How does this relate to County Council priorities?

4. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council’s corporate priorities as indicated below. All scrutiny items should consider how well they are delivering against the County Council priorities and Suffolk’s Community Strategy.

| Suffolk County Council’s Corporate Priorities | Link to this Scrutiny |
|--|-----------------------|
| Raise educational attainment and skill levels | ✓ |
| Support the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to increase economic growth | |
| Maintain roads and developing Suffolk’s infrastructure | |
| Support those most vulnerable in our communities | ✓ |
| Empower local communities | ✓ |

5. Having considered the information, the Committee may wish to:
- a) make recommendations to Cabinet;
 - b) make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Communities;
 - c) make recommendations to the Corporate Director for Children and Adults Services;
 - d) seek to influence partner organisations;
 - e) request further information.

Contact details

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Background

- 6. In 2011 Suffolk County Council recognised that, faced with an increasing need to make significant savings whilst keeping libraries open and at the heart of communities, a radical approach would be required for the future.
- 7. The recommended approach was to move away from an “in-house” provided service to a model of an Industrial Provident Society (IPS) for the future provision of the libraries service. This was agreed by Full Council on 15 December 2012 and Suffolk Libraries IPS Ltd was established by the Council in January 2012.
- 8. Contract negotiations took place between January and June 2012. Through negotiation it was agreed that the contract would be for 5 years, renewable for a further 5 years by Suffolk Libraries. This means that Suffolk Libraries has the

right, but not the obligation, to have its contract with the Council extended for a further term. Suffolk Libraries began delivering the contract on 1 August 2012.

9. On 18 March 2014, the Audit Committee considered information on the divestment of Suffolk's libraries, the various stages of the process, decisions and outcomes and the arrangements for the contractual management of the outsourced service. The Committee heard that the Council was now able to run all of its libraries at a saving of almost a third of the previous cost. The service was being monitored by the County Council and the performance satisfied the Council's statutory obligations. There had also been some developments, particularly those associated with IT, community governance and support for the service that the council would not have been in a position to introduce had the service remained in-house. The council had retained ownership of the buildings, stock and IT equipment, safeguarding its ability to take the library service back in-house should this become necessary. The Committee also noted that in the last year, approximately 82,500 hours of voluntary work had been performed in Suffolk's libraries, including the work of volunteers on friends groups and the Board. The Audit Committee agreed it was satisfied with the contractual arrangements in place.
10. On 26 November 2015, the Scrutiny Committee undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the County Council's 2016/17 budget. The Committee was informed that, for library services and archives, a saving of £0.65m was proposed over 2016/17 and 2017/18. The Committee was informed that discussions were underway with Suffolk Libraries IPS about how the Council could continue to maintain its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service whilst still achieving the 10.21% level of savings required from the contract cost over 2 years. The Committee heard that various options would be explored within the framework of the "Access" model for libraries set out in the 2011 review. The Access model described where libraries should be located, and the strategy for mobiles and community outreach longer term. Potential options included reviewing how libraries serve rural areas through mobile libraries and other community outreach services, the opening hours of some libraries, and reducing the spend on the library stock. In order to get the views of stakeholders the Committee was informed it was likely a series of local/county wide consultations would take place with the aim of mitigating any impact of the final delivery of the savings.
11. Following consideration of the evidence the Scrutiny Committee recommended to the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Director of Resource Management, that in the light of the social and economic value created, and the reliance upon the voluntary and community sector for the Council's overarching strategy, that the proposals relating to reductions in grants to libraries, arts, culture, sports and the voluntary and community sector should be reconsidered and funds found from reserves to negate the proposed savings.
12. The response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendation was set out in the final budget proposals presented to, and agreed by, Cabinet on 26 January 2016 and County Council on 11 February 2016 - *"It is recognised that the reduction in grants to voluntary and community sector organisations will be challenging for these organisations to manage but due to the financial situation that the Council faces it is not feasible to protect these budgets. These savings remain*

unchanged in the proposals but the Cabinet will continue to seek ways of mitigating the impact in 2017-18.”

13. In January 2016, Suffolk libraries published the outcomes from its latest customer survey, showing that customer satisfaction levels with the service had improved since the last survey in 2013. Nearly 1700 people had replied to the survey compared to 1500 in 2013. Headline results included:-
 - 66% of customers said they visit a library at least once a week (compared to 60% in 2013).
 - 94% rated staff as excellent or very good which is also an increase from 2013
 - Nearly 49% of people said they thought the service had got better since Suffolk Libraries took over (the figure was 39.42% in 2013) and only just over 3.6% said it had got worse. Nearly 48% said it was about the same. This is very positive considering the library service budget is currently £2.5million less than before the service transferred to Suffolk Libraries.
 - 89% of people rated the new IT facilities (new computers and Wi-Fi) as excellent, very good or good.
 - 93% of people felt events and activities at the library were excellent, very good or good.
 - 91% of people said the choice of books and information was excellent, very good or good.
14. 89% of respondents rated the choice of free downloads (ebooks, eAudio, music and magazines) as excellent, very good or good.
15. The purpose of this Scrutiny is to examine the opportunities available to, and options being explored by Suffolk Libraries in order to meet this financial challenge, whilst maintaining a good range of quality of service provided.

Main body of evidence

Evidence Set 1 and associated appendices have been provided by Stephen Taylor, Development Manager, Libraries, Information and Culture, Suffolk County Council, and are appended to this report.

Supporting information

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021; Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-2021/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-2021>

County Council (11 February 2016) Agenda Item 7 - Revenue Budget 2016-17 and Capital Programme 2016-19 Available from:

http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/searchResult.aspx?qry=c_committee%7e%7eCounty+Council%7c%7cc_date_of_meeting%7e%7eThis+Date+Only%7c%7cf_c_date_of_meeting%7e%7e11-02-2016%7c%7ct_c_date_of_meeting%7e%7e%7c%7ctitle%7e%7e%7c%7cc_doc_type%7e%7e%7c%7cFreeTxt%7e%7e%7c%7c

Scrutiny Committee (26 November 2015); Agenda Item 5: Pre-Cabinet Decision Scrutiny of 2016 -17 Revenue and Capital Budget; Available from:
http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=09002711819f9e82&qry=c_committee%7e%7eScrutiny+Committee

Audit Committee (18 March 2014); Agenda Item 9, Suffolk Libraries Divestment and Appendix 1 Available from:
http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=09002711811501ac&qry=c_committee%7e%7eAudit+Committee and
http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=09002711811501ad&qry=c_committee%7e%7eAudit+Committee

Cabinet (8 November 2011); Agenda Item 5, Library Services for the Future; Available from:
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/LoadDocument.aspx?rID=09002711804df1c6>

Cabinet (19 July 2011); Agenda Item 5, Library Services for the Future; Available from:
<http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=19/07/2011&c=The%20Cabinet>

Further information about Suffolk Libraries can be found at:
<http://suffolklibraries.co.uk/>

Glossary

ACS – Adult and Community Services

CIPFA – Chartered Institute of Public Financial Accountancy

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport

IPS – Industrial Provident Society

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

LDFs – Local Development Frameworks

NN – Near Neighbour

SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprises

UCS – University Campus Suffolk

