ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 JANUARY 2016

PERFORMANCE OF LIBRARIES

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of the Report

1   The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a contextual review of library performance and to compare Leicestershire's position against a group of similar sized authorities, along with more detailed information about the usage of the Council's funded libraries.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2   National library performance up until 2009 was reported as part of a set of national indicators that made up the cultural score of each local authority under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime. Since the dissolution of the national indicators under the CPA there has been no framework around which performance is addressed.

3   The library performance in Leicestershire is reported on a monthly basis as part of the Adults and Communities Department's performance update. This is also included in the quarterly performance reporting of the Department to this Committee, and the position as at November 2015 is presented as a separate report.

Background

4   Over the last five years both visits and book loans, the basic indicators used to measure the performance of Leicestershire's libraries, have fallen against a national downward trend. From its peak in 2010 when physical visits to Leicestershire's libraries were 5,895 visits per 1,000 population[1] (against a national average of 4,864) overall visits have declined to 3,866 visits per 1,000 population (against a national average of 4,049).

5   Since the ending of the national library indicators in 2009, it has become increasingly difficult to provide robust comparative national data on public library performance. For the purposes of this report, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) comparative profiles have been used to highlight where Leicestershire performs well or otherwise against a set of County comparators. This is attached as Appendix A of this report for information.

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[1] Population is used as a denominator to adjust for the size of the authority.

6   CIPFA places Leicestershire in a comparative grouping of the following County authorities: Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, North Yorkshire, Suffolk, Nottinghamshire, Somerset, Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Devon and Essex.

7   For the purposes of this report, key indicators have been chosen to suggest what might be useful benchmark indicators for future library performance reporting. Generally, CIPFA reporting takes place on an annual basis. The current report details actual statistics for 2013 and estimates for 2014-15.

Network of Libraries

8   Across the cluster of 16 authorities, Leicestershire has one of the highest numbers of libraries with 56 service points (current position) and the highest number of service points per 100,000 population. This position will change over the next 18 months with the ongoing support given to local communities to manage 36 of our community libraries. By 2020, the County will fully fund 16 libraries. Guidance is being sought from CIPFA as to how reporting will be undertaken on this issue in the future.

9   Leicestershire is the seventh smallest of the comparator authorities in terms of the population size.

Usage

10   Leicestershire is in a higher quartile for numbers of active borrowers per 1,000 population (seventh out of 16 authorities) which is an indicator of how well the service engages with the public.

11   This is also true for the physical visits per 1,000 population (eighth out of 16 authorities). The County is seventh out of the 16 authorities in terms of numbers of housebound readers per 1,000 population.

12   The County is in the lower half of the comparator set for total loans per 1,000 population (eleventh out of 16 authorities), total stock per 1,000 population (fourteenth out of 16 authorities) and percentage of books supplied by request within 7 days (eleventh out of 16 authorities).

Resources

13   The Council's total revenue expenditure per 1,000 population places the County slightly below the middle of the comparator set (seventh lowest cost out of 16 authorities) suggesting that its costs are similar to the group as a whole. The overall trend continues to fall from an above average revenue expenditure of £15,918 in 2010-11 to a below average of £12,214 per 1,000 population estimated for 2014-15.

14   Leicestershire has the lowest spend on employees per 1,000 population and the third lowest total materials spend. The authority has the fourth highest support service costs.

15   Leicestershire is the fourth lowest of 16 authorities in terms of its net expenditure per 1,000 population.

16   The service cost per available hour is below the comparator average at £11.05 against the average of £13.93. (sixth lowest cost out of 16 authorities). The cost per visitor is just below average at £3.23 against a comparator average of £3.34. (seventh lowest cost out of 16 authorities).

17   Although it must be considered a factor, it is difficult to ascertain the exact impact that reductions in service resources have had on overall performance as a result of the financial challenges that the Council faces. More work is being undertaken by officers to see if there is any direct correlation.

Supporting ICT/Online Engagement

18   The service supports digital inclusion by the provision of IT for use through its network and online services via the County website.

19   The authority has the second highest number of IT stations per 1,000 population against the 16 comparator authorities and offers sixth highest number of available hours per 1,000 population.

20   However, Leicestershire has the second lowest number of hours recorded for public use of work stations which suggests that the number of stations available is too high. Clarity will be sought from CIPFA in terms of how this information is recorded in future with reference to the developing transfer of some libraries to community ownership.

21   The authority has the third lowest website visits per 1,000 population which suggest more work is needed to promote online services such as e-loans and information resources as this presents an opportunity to deliver low cost service with greater accessibility in the future.

Volunteering

22   Leicestershire records the highest number of hours committed by volunteers in supporting the service. However, it has the lowest number of volunteers across the 16 comparator authorities. This position is expected to change in the light of the transfer of some libraries to community management and will depend on guidance from CIPFA about how this information is recorded in future.

23   Since 2009-10 the number of volunteers has nearly doubled from 125 in 2009 to 200 in 2013.

Local Information

24   It is suggested that the information contained in Appendix B is reported as indicating usage of the 16 County Council funded libraries on a quarterly basis. This would be supplemented by an annual overview of the CIPFA profiles as attached in Appendix A.

Conclusion

25   Leicestershire's performance against its comparative authorities indicates that it manages a large network of libraries and whilst performing relatively well in engaging with customers, this does not translate into high loan and visit figures.

26   A move towards more targeted services at vulnerable people does not necessarily translate into high volume performance. Further work linked to the emerging strategy for the Communities and Wellbeing Service will need to be undertaken to capture outcome based evidence on the impact of the service offer.

Recommendation

27   The Adult and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the suggested performance criteria as set out in Appendix B and comment on the report. Following comments made by the Committee the officers will produce a final schedule.

Background papers

None.

Circulation Under the Local Alert Issues Procedure

None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Leicestershire County Council CIPFAstats Comparative Profile – Public Libraries

Appendix B – Suggested Performance Criteria

Equality and Human Rights Implications

28   The suggested framework is intended for general operational performance and does not involve at this stage any significant changes to how libraries operate. It is not considered therefore that an Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment is required.