

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date: 4th November 2008
Report of: Portfolio Holder Health and Wellbeing
Title **Cross Boundary Library Usage - East Cheshire / Cheshire West and Chester**
Report No:

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report advises Members of issues relating to cross boundary library usage between East Cheshire and Cheshire West and Chester libraries after 1st April 2009.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members note the current situation for library users.
- 2.2 That Members endorse a recommendation agreeing cross boundary usage of Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester libraries for library users after 1st April 2009 and instruct officers to take steps to implement this proposal.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Libraries are one of the most highly used, highly valued and highly visible services of the authority. The initial findings of the Cheshire Community Survey 2008 show that 66% of residents in Cheshire East have visited a library at least once during the last 12 months with 57% of those who had visited, visiting at least once a month. 91% of users think libraries are very good or good.
- 3.2 The current situation is that once they have joined a library, members are entitled to use all County Council Libraries i.e. 44 static libraries and 6 mobile libraries, they have access to the stock of all those libraries, they can reserve items from any library to be delivered to their nearest library, they can borrow items from one library and return them to another library, they can reserve and renew items at any library, they pay the same fines and charges, they can search a complete catalogue of library stock either within their home library or via the Service's web pages and can reserve and renew items by this method as well. They also have access to an unrivalled suite of online information and reference sources including Encyclopaedia Britannica, Who's Who, Times Digital Archive and Kompass Business Directory. Many users borrow from libraries which, after April 1st 2009 will be in different authorities, e.g. Knutsford and Northwich, Middlewich and Winsford, Crewe and Chester. This may be because they live near one and work near another or because they live near one and have children or grandchildren who live near another.

- 3.3 The concern is that after April 1st 2009 residents will receive a diminished service and that e.g. library members in Crewe, Macclesfield, Congleton, will no longer be able to reserve or borrow material from Chester, Northwich, Ellesmere Port libraries unless they are a member of both library services and are able to make a personal visit to a library in the neighbouring authority to collect reserved items. Library users are already raising issues of this nature with frontline staff. Unless a solution is found it is likely to lead to a loss of reputation for the new authorities from day one of their existence.
- 3.4 Cross boundary usage provides a simple and workable solution. By this means members of Cheshire East Library Service would be able to use their membership cards to access library services in Cheshire West and Chester and vice versa. Membership cards would be branded as Cheshire East for those resident in that authority. The retention of support and specialist services e.g. transport, library management system, virtual reference library, on a pan Cheshire basis means that this can be achieved with relative ease and at no cost. There are other library authorities which have similar arrangements in place e.g. City of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire County Council, Denbighshire and Flintshire.
- 3.5 The Cheshire West and Chester Executive agreed to support cross boundary usage at their meeting on 15th October.
- 3.6 It should be noted that mobile libraries will have their routes altered so that from the 1st April they will not be criss-crossing the boundary as is currently the case. The Education Library Service is part of the Services agreed as being pan-Cheshire for a year so all schools will continue to be able to access that service.

4.0 Financial Implications for Transition

- 4.1 There are no new specific costs associated with transition.

5.0 Financial Implications 2009/2010 and Beyond

None

6.0 Risk Assessment

- 6.1 There are no day 1 or year 1 risks associated with this proposal. Longer term risks which would threaten the viability of cross boundary usage are identified below

Area	Risk	Comment
Support and Specialist Services	Disaggregation after year 1 review	If such things as transport, bibliographical services, library management system, virtual reference library were divided the viability of cross boundary usage might be threatened
ICT	Replacement or upgrade of library management system	If the 2 authorities chose different systems this

		would make it impossible for users to have one membership card which could be used in both places, they would need to search 2 catalogues and could no longer reserve books from or return books to any library in Cheshire
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7.0 Summary and Conclusion

Local Government Reorganisation poses a threat to the level and quality of library services residents currently receive either because they would have access to a narrower range of resources if they were only able to use the service in one or other authority or because they would be required to become members of two separate library authorities and to make a physical visit to the neighbouring authority.

If this were to happen it would be likely to attract bad publicity, cause political embarrassment and loss of reputation for the new authorities.

Allowing and facilitating cross boundary usage provides a simple solution, tried, tested and found to work in other parts of the country.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985:

Background Documents

None