

13th July 2018

Member Briefing

**Re: School Library Service Notice**

I write to follow up on my briefing to you dated 5 June 2018, in order to update you on the output of the recent engagement with schools, in relation to the provision of the School Library Services

My briefing on the 5 June explained that Worcestershire County Council offers a traded Schools' Library Service (SLS) to schools across Worcestershire, who can select from a range of services to support their library provision. The service does not form part of the local authority's statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and is provided separate to the main public libraries service.

SLS is delivered by a small team of staff to schools, who subscribe on an annual basis using funding from their budgets. It has seen a gradual but steady decline in take-up and income since 200/2001. The total number of schools buying into the service has fallen from 216 to 52 and over the same period, income from schools has fallen 64% from £378.2k to £112k per annum.

As a result of this decline, the SLS funding model in place is no longer adequate to cover the overall running costs of the service. To avoid continuing strain on Council finances, a proposal had been put forward to close SLS when existing contracts with schools end on the 31 August 2018. I wrote to all schools at the beginning of June inviting them to comment on this proposal, as well as seeking feedback on a range of alternative options. Schools had until the 29 June to submit their responses.

A total of 64 schools responded to the survey. From the 64 responses:

- 38 (59.38%) of responding schools also use their local public library.
- 27 (42.19%) of responding schools would be interested in purchasing specialist library advice/consultation from WCC Library Service to help to design, manage and plan your school library provision.
- 54 (84.38%) of responding schools would be interested in buying book stock if the service were to close.
- 25 (39.06%) of responding schools wished to explore the option of a three year SLS contract with WCC, based on increasing costs, to ensure that the full cost of providing the service is met.
- 6 (9.38%) of responding schools were interested in considering a different delivery model (e.g. mutual) that involved schools directly running the service themselves.

This feedback, along with a range of comments from schools, has indicated the importance of the service to a core group of subscribing schools and a real appetite amongst those schools to explore approaches for sustaining the service.

We are therefore proposing to extend all existing contracts with schools until the end of the first half of the autumn term. This will allow time for work to be carried out in proposing a new model and costing structure for schools which we will share with schools in early September. The cost of the new package is likely to incorporate a flat

fee and a per pupil rate that are higher than current rates and which will ensure that we can offer a sustainable, high quality and fit for purpose service to schools. All schools will be invited to sign up to a 3 year contract based on the revised terms. We will be reliant on a critical mass of schools to agree to this new approach in order to break even as we cannot sustain a SLT that costs the Council money.

In addition to this, we are also following up discussions that we have had with other Local Authorities, in relation to them extending their reach and offer into Worcestershire. This is a potential fall-back position, if our new model and pricing structure is not acceptable to schools and we have to close Worcestershire's School Library Service, as it would mean that current subscribing schools would not be left without any service.

Therefore at this stage we are not proposing to stop delivering the service, just remodel and re-price. I will provide any further update early in September on the new model and the feedback we have received from schools.

Please don't hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions or queries.

Hannah Needham  
Assistant Director CFC