

Agenda item:

**Title of meeting:** Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

**Subject:** Southsea Library Development

**Date of meeting:** 11 October 2013

**Report by:** Head of City Development and Cultural Services

**Wards affected:** All

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**1. Requested by:**

The Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Sport

**2. Purpose**

- 2.1** To inform the Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Sport of the review and evaluation undertaken in Spring 2013 of services, layout and performance at Southsea Library. Also, to identify the subsequent changes implemented in response to the process.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** Southsea Library opened to the public on 29 July 2011 offering enhanced library facilities and additional services not available at Elm Grove Library which it replaced. The book stock was larger than at Elm Grove, with more depth and breadth of content. There was more space for all services, an increased IT offer for public use, a separate IT Learning zone, a meeting space, customer service centre delivering Council information, a café, toilet facilities and a buggy park. The services, space and layout were developed following consultation with the public, including members of disability groups and professionals from the various service areas.

From the outset the building was extremely popular in terms of visits, issues, new membership and attendance at activities. The initial surge of new memberships which saw over 6,000 individuals join in the first part year from July 2011 to March 2012 has now settled but visitor numbers and issues have continued to increase. Visits have increased from 13,000 per month in 2011/12 to 18,000 per month in 2012/13. Issues have always been high at Southsea and from the first month it became the branch issuing the largest number of fiction books in the city. In 2012/13 it has improved on this position and outstripped Central as the library issuing the highest percentage of fiction books in the City. Southsea issues 20% of the city total, with Central delivering 17% and the next largest branch, North End delivering 14%. This highlights the changing use of libraries which is seeing

recreational and family use move to larger branch libraries, particularly those in popular areas of high footfall, associated with retail offers. The role of Central is moving towards information provision, with increasing emphasis on specialist sources including the History Centre, local and archive collections, patents and business information, local authors and the services to support health and wellbeing.

### **3.2 Review Process**

Review and feedback from customers and members of staff have been on-going and it is inevitable that with such a busy library some pressures and concerns have been identified and addressed. The key areas of immediate concern had been a perception that Southsea had been provided with very little book stock and concerns regarding the upkeep and maintenance of the toilets. Considerable funding was put into additional stock in the months following the opening of the library, but the high use of the service continued to create shortages in the short term. This has been addressed following several adjustments to stock proportions and an acceptable balance has now been reached. There were also concerns regarding maintenance of the toilets and overall cleaning issues. These have been addressed by an adjustment in the cleaning budget and the scheduling of half yearly deep cleans which include the carpets.

Fifteen months after opening a formal review process was undertaken to reassess the fundamental decisions taken when the building was designed and populated with library stock and equipment. The review considered the layout of the building, patterns of flow through the building by customers, equipment and service priorities.

This was an opportune time to reassess these issues as the Customer Service team had decided to withdraw their service to concentrate their offer at the Civic Offices. A free use PC and phone was installed at the front of the building by the staff desk for residents who do wish to contact the team or access information independently. Customer Help Desk (CHD) withdrawal left space and two PC's in the front aspect of the building which could be used differently.

The Review team was led by the Library Service Manager and included all members of the Library Management team, the Southsea Branch manager and all staff working in the building including the café and customer service staff. The process also sought formal and informal input from service users, partner organisations that engage with the building and local retailers. The process began in January 2013 and concluded in April 2013, agreeing a list of findings and actions to improve the service and layout.

### **3.3 Findings of the Review**

The key concerns identified were:

- An overall perception that the front half of the building was very quiet and underused, while the back section was frequently very noisy and busy, with conflicting areas of activity.

- Insufficient space to shelve existing adult fiction stock and no opportunity for further expansion
- Crowds gathering at the self-service kiosk at the front of the building waiting to use the service and causing blockages
- Children's activity and the physical presence of active young children causing concern for adults using the café and public access PC's
- Requirement for children's space which could be used without the constraint of unrelated adult activity close at hand
- Need to supply two children's PC's away from the adults area
- Requirement to display DVD offer front facing to improve access.
- Install a heat curtain over the door at the front of the building. This wasn't included in the original specification and has been the subject of many concerns from customers and staff.
- On-going feedback about the need to deep clean the carpets on a regular basis

### 3.4 Actions Implemented

In order to respond to the findings identified at 3.3, the Library closed to the public from Sunday 2 to Tuesday 4 June. A staff team worked on the building and additional contractors were brought in to deal with electrical and cleaning matters. The following actions were taken:

- Move the lending stock so that the adult fiction area and multimedia occupied all the shelving in the back section. This proved a better fit with the adult PC's as the customers borrowing and browsing were less distracting to the customers using the computers. This also provided more space for the growing fiction section and has permitted a much requested expansion of the crime fiction section.
- Move the Children's Library to the front section of the building. This has slightly increased the overall footprint of the children's area, moving them away from the adult PC's and the café. The move has balanced out the quiet and noisy areas and enabled the children's library to take advantage of the two PC's, vacated by Customer Services.
- Move the adult non-fiction to the front of the building. This is a better fit for the space available and allowed more of the more popular titles to be showcased and displayed.
- Purchase a front facing display stand for the DVD collection in line with customer feedback. This was purchased using the existing library budget.
- Purchase and install a second self service kiosk at the front of the building. This was purchased from remaining capital from the RFID spend to save funding.
- The electrical work was achieved to support the installation of the heat curtain, supported from AMS budgets. However the parts were unavailable at the time of the closure and this work is still required
- The carpets were cleaned and a deep clean undertaken during the closure.

### 3.5 Response to the changes

The public response to the changes has been extremely positive, particularly to the greater availability of space around the café and fiction areas. There is less crowding and queuing around the kiosk at the front of the building and the staff report better flows through the building and less dispute and irritation around the public access PC's and café area.

A concern that some parents wishing to use the café facilities would be out of sight of their children, has been addressed by placing a table and chairs in the children's area. More adult fiction stock has been added and the children's stock has also increased to facilitate the delivery of the summer reading challenge for July to September 2013. Approximately 620 children have taken part this year.

One resident has become very concerned about the excessive height of the new DVD display stand, although there have been a number of compliments. The stand is slightly taller than the paperback stand which previously held the collection. Staff have been made aware of this issue, so they are alert to the needs of any customers who may have trouble reaching or viewing the stock.

The cleaning has received a very positive response and it has been identified that carpets will require at least twice yearly cleaning in the future.

### 3.6 Future Development

Feedback and consultation with staff and customers will be on-going at Southsea and all other Libraries in the city. It is likely that further change will be required. The library satisfaction survey carried out in June/July 2013 has already started to capture responses going forward. However the changes made this summer represent very significant adjustments that had become apparent when the public began using the space and it was possible to observe the flows around the building.

The work around the heat curtain is still on-going and there is still some work to be resolved regarding the staff and external doors at the back of the building. This is currently in the hands of contractors.

Work is also underway to develop the first floor space as an archive store with space for volunteers to work on the collections. When complete this will create an integrated building, maximising use of staff and space in a very popular location in the heart of Southsea. The changes implemented in summer 2013 have added to the popularity of Southsea Library and its ability to deliver successful, flexible services, in the future.

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Signed by:  
**Stephen Baily**  
Head of City Development & Cultural Services

**Appendices:** None

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Location</b>
Library feedback forms	U:Drive
Minutes of the review process meetings	U:Drive