

Questions to Communities Select Committee – 7 November 2017 from Mr Roger Miller

Question 1

In paragraph 7 of the report there are references to the numbers of visitors to the library and the numbers of issues. These seem to illustrate one of the important aspects of the service provided by Surrey Performing Arts Library (SPAL) which is that a considerable number of people benefit from each visit. I would like to ask why an adjustment should be made for multiple issues when making the comparison with other libraries. Also, is any allowance made for the fact that loans of music for example tend to be for longer periods than people might borrow a novel?

Response

As you will be aware, multiple sets, particularly for music groups, are reserved up to six months in advance and so are out of circulation for longer periods of time than general non-fiction stock. The issue figures include both multiple copy sets and loans of single items (books/DVDs on Shakespeare, dance, history of film etc) so when looking at the Surrey Performing Arts library figures, the service has to factor in several elements - longer and standard loan periods, multiple copy sets and individual general non-fiction stock.

Within the library network the service also offers other services, which are similar to the use made of SPAL by performance groups i.e. material collected by one person for use by a larger group - e.g. reminiscence professionals who borrow material for group use, and reading groups. The service recognises and understands the wider use and impact of copies by performers and on audiences, but in terms of looking at use and maintaining collections, it is important to look at the range of titles used, as well as simply the volume of copies - the unadjusted figure is included in paragraph 7 so people can see the volume of copies borrowed.

Question 2

In paragraph 10 there is a statement that Surrey is underwriting the cost of lending to other organisations by £80,000 a year which is over 53% of SPAL's net budget. Where is this represented in the budget figures in annex 2?

Response

The costs of providing the inter library loan service are integral parts of two elements mentioned in Annex 2 - namely "general expenditure" which covers the courier and related costs and "staffing". The service is administratively complex and staff intensive (SPAL staff estimate that up to 60% of their time is expended on this activity). Surrey lends to other authorities much more than it borrows, making it a net lender, and while costs of borrowing materials for customers are partially offset by the hire charges paid by Surrey residents on incoming items, the service suffers a loss from the costs of sending so many items to other authorities under the current inter-lending arrangements.

Question 3

In annex 4 there is a statement that 11.5% of those who responded to the survey were under 45 compared with 62.4% of that age group within the overall library membership. This difference is noted as a concern. Could it be that retired people who are members of groups tend to take on tasks such as acting as choir librarians rather than their fellow members who are at work? Exactly why is this 'imbalance' a concern?

Response

The survey breakdown of respondents was:-

55% group members
20% group representatives (e.g. choir librarians)
25% individual borrowers

The service does appreciate your point that older people, retired or not at work may take up administrative or support roles to their groups to relieve the burden on younger members. However, the majority of responses came from those who are members of a performance group for whom it is a leisure time activity. This suggests that SPAL serves those more mature performance groups. The service is aware of the swell and interest in a cappella and group singing (The "Naked Choir" series which has produced great groups such as Sons of Pitches and the recent Eurovision Choir of the year competition which all featured younger people and is concerned that such a groundswell doesn't seem to be represented in the SPAL membership). Given the 19% decline in use over the last five years, it would be good to see more young people's groups using SPAL and receiving the wellbeing benefits of being involved. Our reference to this "imbalance" being "a concern" was therefore not negative or dismissive - but more a marker that this statistic might require more consideration in case it was an indication that there is arts development work to be done to ensure the popularity of music across all age groups.

Question 4

Is it the plan to split up single copy items between different libraries rather than keeping them in one place?

Response

The user survey has informed the thinking about the way forward for Option 1. The single copy material relating to performing music e.g. single scores, miniature scores etc will, in all likelihood, remain with the multiple copy music sets as an entire collection, and the audition pieces and playsets are likely to remain as an entire collection.

Question 5

If SPAL is to be made cost neutral by April 2018, which will probably involve the implementation of Option 1 in the short term, how is this going to be achieved without disruption to the service and consequent disruption to the activities of groups who have made arrangements to borrow material?

Response

The service is mindful of this and will work to keep that disruption to the absolute minimum for users of SPAL in any transition.

Mrs Rachael I. Lake
Chairman – Communities Select Committee
7 November 2017

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