Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Date: 24 February 2016

Wards: All

Subject: **Library & Heritage Service Annual Report 2015/16**

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins

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Recommendations:

A. That the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel note progress made with the Library & Heritage Service in the last financial year, review performance and discuss key projects.

1	PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Library & Heritage Service annual report sets out the key achievements that have been delivered over the last year and highlights future challenges. It also provides a summary of performance against all key performance indicators (KPI's).

1.2. In line with Merton's aspiration to become London's Best Council by 2020 its Library & Heritage Service continues to be a high performing and low cost service that has some of the highest levels of customer satisfaction and usage of any London borough.

1.3. Underpinning the Library & Heritage Service Plan are these key objectives:

1. Excellent customer service in all aspects of what we deliver and being responsive to demand.
2. Hosting an excellent core collection of stock in formats that our customers want.
3. Providing a comprehensive information offer that addresses changes in the way people access information and is responsive to social issues.
4. Having libraries that are modern, flexible and adaptable to enable a range of different services to be delivered at hours that are convenient for residents.
5. Investing in technology to provide excellent and innovative online library facilities wherever you are.
6. Nurturing the love of reading at an early age by providing a focused range of services to children and families to improve literacy levels.
7. Putting the community at the heart of all that we do by actively involving residents in service design and delivery.

1.4.   Key development areas for the Library & Heritage Service include:

- Making our libraries even more accessible.
- Providing cutting edge technology that is responsive to customer needs.
- Broadening the service offer.
- Maximising the use of our libraries and developing them where required.

2   DETAILS

Making our libraries even more accessible

2.1. **Library Opening Hours**

2.2. All libraries have extended their opening hours since 2011 and the offer is continually reviewed. Customers report high satisfaction levels with the current offer and the recent Public Library User Survey (PLUS) for adults shows that 98% of users rate library opening hours as either very good (54%), good (37%) or adequate (7%).

2.3. **Library Connect**

2.4. Merton's very own pop up library solution has been established for almost 18 months. During this time pop up libraries have been set up in 9 locations and have received 8,145 visits. Library Connect is designed to engage with people who are not regular users of the library service and showcase the wide range of services available. Library Connect events are usually hosted in places where there is low take up or where underrepresented user groups frequent.

2.5. **Volunteering**

2.6. Merton's nationally recognised volunteering model continues to flourish. 563 volunteers contributed over 34,952 hours of time to Merton's libraries and heritage services in 2014/15. Volunteering opportunities continue to broaden and new roles have been developed to support with marketing and promotion of the service and in further embedding user testing of online services.

2.7. The library service continues to advise other boroughs on the establishment of their own volunteering schemes along with advice on other projects. The service has also played an active role in the progression of some national projects being delivered by the DCMS commissioned Libraries Taskforce.

Proving cutting edge technology that is responsive to customer needs

2.8. **Library website**

2.9. The Library & Heritage Service website has been significantly updated this year. Pages have been rationalised so that content is easier to find and the service has further developed its use of social media. 200,529 unique customer visits were made to the website in 2014/15. This is an increase of over 20% since the previous year and visitor numbers are likely to increase again this year.

2.10. Customers can also now pay for charges through the libraries website via the newly installed online payments portal which went live in December 2015. Further work will be undertaken to develop the website over the next year and will work closely with the development of the new council website.

2.11. **Self-Service Technology**

2.12. Following a procurement exercise in the autumn replacement self-service technology has been installed in all libraries. The new machines provide improved reliability and reduced operating costs. The machines are also enabled with chip and pin and contactless payments.

2.13. Self-service technology currently accounts for 96% of customer transactions and this figure is expected to increase. The new machines will also allow customers to make bookings for public PC's and pay for printing through them. This upgrade is scheduled for May 2015.

2.14. **Carved in Stone / Merton Memories**

2.15. Following on from the success of the Merton Memories website, Merton's first online photographic archive with over 15,000 images of the borough, the Heritage Service was successful with a £81,000 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for 'Carved in Stone'.

2.16. The Carved in Stone project will build an online portal of all of Merton's combatants from World War One and will enable a number of documents to be preserved and made available online for the first time. Supporting officers are a team of 30 volunteers who are researching the combatants and adding content to the website. The new Carved in Stone pages will be hosted in the Merton Memories website and will be available to the public from May 2016. This year's Heritage Discovery Day will coincide with the launch of these resources.

2.17. **E-Services**

2.18. The annual 'Always With You' online campaign finished on 6 January 2016. The campaign has been established to raise awareness to residents of the many free online resources now available to customers. Both the free e-book and e-magazines services have recorded record levels of usage. 7,862 customers have used the e-book service this year, an increase of 34%. 7,961 customers have used the e-magazines service, which is an increase of 346%

2.19. Further work is currently being undertaken to make accessibility to e-services easier and this will include the ability for customers to directly download content from the libraries website. Currently customers are directed to a third party website content. This new service will also mean that the service will have greater flexibility to use different e-book and e-magazine providers to give residents greater choice.

2.20. **Public Wi-Fi**

2.21. On top of the line upgrades conducted in 2014/15 with funding from the GLA a further upgrade to the public Wi-Fi lines was completed in January 2016 and provide library users with some of the fastest Wi-Fi speeds available in a public environment in the borough. Public Wi-Fi accounts for approximately 40% of customer usage of the Internet in libraries.

Broadening the service offer

2.22. **Partnerships**

2.23. 62 partnership agreements are in place with a range of providers who provide services in libraries that cover subjects such as health, employability, basic skills, children's activities and ICT. A piece of work is currently underway to consolidate the current partnership arrangements and to ensure that they are delivering against the objectives of the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) Universal Offers. The Universal Offers are segmented into five areas, which are:

- **Digital offer:** The development of digital services, skills and access in libraries. As a baseline every public library service should provide free Internet access, clear and accessible online information and with staff trained to help customer's access digital information online.

- **Health offer:** It includes a commitment to provide a range of services including public health information and promotion, sign posting and referrals as well as creative and social reading activity.

- **Information offer:** The focus of the offer is on libraries' role in supporting people to access information and services online in life-critical areas such as careers and job seeking; health, personal financial information and benefits. Central to this offer is helping people to use vital government online information services.

- **Learning offer:** Sets a framework for providing free resources for study and learning, study/learning spaces for all, information about free and low cost local learning opportunities and developing places where communities and individuals can develop and share ideas and learn together

- **Reading offer:** Is a strategic planning framework which enables libraries to develop, deliver and promote reading services. The offer sets out what public libraries will offer in order to provide a modern reading service within a local community.

2.24. **Assisted digital support**

2.25. Further assisted digital support is now undertaken through libraries in Merton. The established Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) information service continues and new services supported by libraries include the Freedom Pass renewal service for older people and support with Universal Credit applications. Further assisted digital support work is expected to tie in closely with the development of the Customer Contact project and the further rollout of Universal Credit.

2.26. All libraries provide one-to-one ICT support provided by staff and volunteers and the provision of ICT support in libraries is continually expanding through our partnership work.

2.27. **Schools and Libraries Membership Scheme**

2.28.   All 44 primary schools are signed up the scheme, which aims to work with schools to support them with improving the literacy levels of children and in particular to develop reading for pleasure. All Merton primary school children are now library members and a termly program of visits is in place with each school.

2.29.   Since the scheme has been running 26 of 44 primary schools in Merton have reported demonstrable improvements in children's reading skills measured through Key Stage 2 results.

2.30.   This project is only the second of its kind developed in England and has received national interest. The Libraries Taskforce that has been set up as a result of the DCMS commissioned 'Independent Report of Public Libraries in England' *(William Sieghart, December 2014)* is reviewing the Merton model with a view to rolling a similar scheme out nationally.

2.31.   **Health and wellbeing**

2.32.   Of the 62 partnerships established 25 of these partnership arrangements are with various health and wellbeing organisations that include support sessions in libraries for people with mental health conditions, smoking cessation and managing your diet as a few examples.

2.33.   Collaborative work between libraries and Public Health continues to expand. A recent example is the pathway recovery work undertaken with providers to encourage people recovering from drug and alcohol addictions into volunteering opportunities in libraries.

2.34.   **Employability and skills support**

2.35.   All libraries have established job clubs working with partners such as the Job Centre Plus and Merton Priory Circle Housing. CV writing workshops and other skills support is also provided. Along with our free ICT support offer this is helping to reduce unemployment figures in the borough. Resource is particularly focussed in areas where unemployment and skills gaps are at their highest.

Maximising the use of our libraries and developing them where required

2.36.   **Use of space**

2.37.   Linked to broadening the offer the service has maximised the use of its space and hosts a number of partner services in libraries. The service is currently undertaking market testing for bringing in a coffee shop provider. The coffee shop service was identified in the 2015 consultation with non-using working age and older people as an added service that would make people use libraries more in the future. The service will also bring in income from the provider and is identified in MTFS savings for 2018/19.

2.38.   The Library & Heritage Service has been successful in applying for a £65,000 grant to Arts Council England to convert the back space in Wimbledon Library into an out-of-hours performance and artist space. The funding will enable the space to be easily adapted from a library to a performance space overnight and an impressive programme of theatre, art, poetry and musical activities are scheduled to take place in the space. Organisations such as Wimbledon College of Art, Wimbledon Community

Centre, Attic Theatre Company, Wimbledon Bookfest, ACAVA and Merton Arts Development will be playing a key role in programme delivery. An initial year programme of events is being finalised with events due to start from July 2016.

2.39.   Being free and openly accessible libraries play an important role in bringing communities together and enable a wide range of activities to take place. Developing the use of library space has enabled new initiatives to take place in libraries such as Wimbletech and a range of activities for older people including the Tuesday Rendezvous Club at West Barnes Library.

2.40.   Wimbletech, based in Wimbledon Library, has been a particular success and is part of the council's inward investment strategy. Using underutilised office space Wimbletech provides space, advice and support for start-up companies and co-workers. In a little over 2 years it has almost 200 members and its members have raised over £115,000,000. It also delivers free coding clubs to young people on Saturdays and is currently in the process of being rolled out amongst other local authorities.

2.41.   **Colliers Wood Library**

2.42.   Temporary services are currently being provided at the Merton Vision - Guardian Centre, Clarendon Road whilst the new library at Cavendish House is built. The new library is scheduled to open in summer 2017 and will have increased floor space, community meeting/learning rooms and a coffee shop housed over 3 levels. The next round of consultation is scheduled to start soon with residents regarding the internal layout and design.

2.43.   **West Barnes Library**

2.44.   Work is underway to redevelop the West Barnes Library site. Public consultation in autumn 2014 indicated strong support to develop the library. Initial soft market testing has indicated that there is a market to develop the site. Officers are currently finalising recommendations on the development approach including determining whether the work could be undertaken through a council commissioned development company. Further announcements are scheduled shortly.

National Picture of Public Libraries

2.45.   The DCMS commissioned William Sieghart to conduct an independent review of public libraries in England. His findings were published on 18 December 2014 and focus on 3 key areas:

- The provision of a national digital resource for libraries, to be delivered in partnership with local authorities;

- The setting up of a task and finish force, led by local government, in partnership with other bodies involved in the library sector, to provide a strategic framework for England, and to help in implementing the following:

- The task force, to work with local authorities, to help them improve, revitalise and if necessary, change their local library service, while encouraging, appropriate to each library, increased community involvement.

2.46. Merton's Library Service has proactively engaged with the newly formed libraries taskforce and its Chief Executive Kathy Settle visited Merton on 16 November 2015. The development of the national digital resource for libraries links in with the work that is currently being undertaken by the London Libraries Consortium (LLC). The LLC is a consortium of 18 boroughs who share their library management system and stock. Merton and the LLC are currently exploring new options around technological platforms with the view to going to market in the next year.

2.47. Other notable national documents that have been produced regarding public libraries in the last few years include:

- 'Envisioning the library of the future' *(Arts Council England)*

- 'A New Chapter: Public library services in the 21st century' *(CarnegieUK)*

- 'Library Closures *(House of Commons: CMS Special Committee)*

2.48. CIPFA published its national statistics for public libraries in November 2015. Since 2011 it is estimated that 120 public libraries have been closed with a further 146 being transferred to community management *(source: Public Libraries News).* A number of authorities have also reduced the opening hours of their existing libraries. In the same period Merton has extended the opening hours of all of its libraries and has not closed any of them.

3 PERFORMANCE

3.1. In year performance of the Library & Heritage Service recorded in November 2015 shows that all KPI's are expected to be met. Of the 6 KPI's presented 5 of the 6 are at record levels.

Summary of Performance | Nov-15

Service Plan #	Description of performance measure	Final 2014/15	YTD 2014/15	YTD 2015/16	YTD Target 2015/16	RAG Indicator
SP08	No. of people accessing the library service by borrowing an item or using a People's Network terminal at least once in the previous 12 months.	63,592	59,561	66,219	55,000	BLUE
SP09	Number of visitors accessing the library service online	200,529	130,191	151,342	112,000	BLUE
SP279	Monthly transactions - Staff and Self-service	96%	93%	96%	95%	GREEN
SP280	Active volunteering numbers in libraries	320	307	320	200	BLUE
SP282	Partnership numbers	62	41	62	30	BLUE
SP287	Increase income generation to £316,080	£287,241	178,325	£236,756	£210,720	BLUE
-	Visitor Numbers (year to date comparison with 2014/15 figures)	1,159,430	780,358	786,740	-	-
-	Issues & Renewals by Item Category (YTD comparison with 2014/15 figures)	830,950	512,861	538,430	-	-

3.2.

3.3. Following the publication of the 2014/15 CIPFA statistics before Christmas there has been national interest in declining visitor and issue figures. The figures for Merton are bucking this trend and in both areas there is an in year increase.

4 **CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. **Working Age and Older People**

4.2. Results of a consultation exercise with non-using working age and older people were published in November 2015. The results found that even amongst non-users libraries were held in high value and the majority indicated that they would use libraries again in the future.

4.3. The main reason for non-usage was a lack of time due to other commitments. Awareness of the current service offer was also low amongst some groups and further marketing and engagement will be undertaken to raise awareness.

4.4. The findings of the consultation report have led to three projects being identified:

- The implementation of coffee shop facilities in libraries;
- Increase marketing of services to underrepresented groups;
- Increase soft seating in libraries.

4.5. **Library Redevelopments**

4.6. Consultation is ongoing regarding the development of Colliers Wood and West Barnes libraries.

4.7. **Annual Residents Survey**

4.8. The last Annual Residents Survey was run in 2014. The survey reported record satisfaction levels with services in Merton and significantly above the London average. 82% of residents rate library services as good to excellent.

4.9. **Public Library User Surveys (PLUS)**

4.10. Whilst providing useful information future user surveys will be undertaken in house rather than being commissioned to CIPFA. This has been identified as a future financial saving and will enable the Library & Heritage Service to make more effective use of technology and reduce administrative costs. It will also mean that the survey can be better customised to ask users service specific questions whilst still retaining the core set of benchmark questions.

5 **TIMETABLE**

5.1. The Library & Heritage Service Plan 2016/17 outlines all key projects to be delivered and was presented to the Sustainable Communities Committee on 7 January 2016.

6 **FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. The Library & Heritage Service has a controllable budget of £2,219,000. It is currently reporting a £90,000 underspend due to reduced operating costs whilst the new Colliers Wood Library is developed along with some short term staff vacancies. The service has the lowest operational budget of any London borough.

6.2. Agreed MTFS savings for the Library & Heritage Service are:

Description	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Total
Deletion of all administrative support	£26,000			**£26,000**
Reduction in activities program	£2,000			**£2,000**
Withdrawal from annual CIPFA public library user survey	£3,000			**£3,000**
Reduction in volunteering contract	£20,000			**£20,000**
Reduction in Media Fund	£45,000			**£45,000**
Implementation of self-service libraries at off peak times		£90,000		**£90,000**
Deletion of Projects & Procurement Manager post		£22,000		**£22,000**
Additional non-frontline staff savings		£38,000		**£38,000**
Shared Library & Heritage Service management team across two boroughs		£130,000		**£130,000**
Completion of shared management structure			£25,000	**£25,000**
Introduce a coffee shop franchise across libraries			£30,000	**£30,000**
TOTAL	**£96,000**	**£280,000**	**£55,000**	**£431,000**

6.3. Two new lines have been included in this year's MTFS for the sharing of management structures across two boroughs. A £130,000 saving has been identified for 2017/18 with a further £25,000 the following year. Negotiations are ongoing with other authorities and are expected to be completed shortly.

6.4. The Library & Heritage Service has 7 libraries and a Heritage & Local Studies Centre based on the second floor of Morden Library. Proposals to redevelop the Colliers Wood and West Barnes library sites are underway.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The Council is required to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service, addressing the 'needs of adults and children', according to the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964. Local authorities have a statutory duty to make provision for a library service but may decide on how this is to be done.

7.2. Certain aspects of the service must be provided for free including free lending of books, free access to information and free library membership.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Libraries hold a unique place within the community as a public space that is open to all. Where customers cannot make it to libraries a Home Visits Library Service provides books and other materials to people's homes.

8.2. Residents from BAME backgrounds make the most effective use of libraries with high proportions in particular of Asian and Black British people regularly using libraries. Under representation is at its highest amongst White British communities of working age. A targeted outreach plan has been constructed to focus on increasing usage amongst under used groups and is supported by Library Connect events.

9   CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1.   None identified.

10   RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1.   No specific issues identified in this report. A risk register is maintained for projects detailed in the Library & Heritage Service Plan.

11   APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

None included.