

London Borough of Merton

Report and recommendations arising from a scrutiny review of Library Services

Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel

April 2007



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Foreword by the review chair



In June 2006 the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel decided to undertake a review of the library services in Merton. The aim was to look at ways to improve footfall and usage of library services across the borough but the review, once started, developed and became much wider and more in-depth than first thought. We found that local people were passionate about their library service believing libraries to be 'integral part of the local community'.

One of the key issues that arose was the diverse requirements of the service from the community in which it serves and that a balance between different user groups would need to be found if the service was to meet the future needs of the people in the borough.

We also agreed that it would be essential to 'reach out' into the community to encourage wider usage particularly in relation to young people.

We recognised that a library facility provides so much more than a place to borrow books - the importance of the library as a community hub and as a centre of learning with access to computers and online materials was acknowledged.

A large number of people have contributed to this review including members of the public, councillors, libraries staff and other local authorities. Using all the information gathered from this exercise we have developed a set of sixteen recommendations that are designed to help improve the library service in Merton, in order to cater for the diverse needs of the people in Merton.

We would like to acknowledge our thanks to all those who contributed to this review especially those members of the public who took time to contact us with their views.

On a personal note I found this review to be both interesting and stimulating and would like to thank my colleagues on the task group and council officers for all their time and valuable input.

Councillor Simon Withey
Chair of the review task group and vice-chair
of the Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Report summary

The Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel in June 2006 agreed that it should undertake a review of the library service in Merton. A task group was formed to carry out this review, which consisted of four councillors and one school parent governor representative.

We commenced with our review by drawing up terms of reference in August 2006, the review was completed in January 2007. We met eleven times over this six month period and gathered evidence from a number of sources including:

- Public consultation exercise and use of existing consultation information
- Visiting libraries across Merton
- Spoke to libraries staff
- Cabinet member and head of service for library and heritage services
- Spoke to Friends of Raynes Park Library
- Coffee morning in two Merton libraries
- Visits to other service providers including Croydon and Harrow Councils libraries service.

The purpose of the review was to look at ways to look at the services Merton's libraries provide and how to increase the numbers of people using this service. (*Appendix A for full terms of reference*).

Key issues and review recommendations

The task group agreed with the Peer Review¹ believing it important that 'we ensure the library service is outcome focused and targeted to local need and that we need to fully engage with all Merton's communities'.

A clear message that came through from the public consultation exercise was that libraries are seen as an integral part of the local community, places to gather and share knowledge - a shared space.

Using the evidence gathered throughout this six-month review we wished to highlight a number of areas in which improvements in the service could be made and have split these recommendations into four distinct areas.

Improving usage and reaching a wider cross section of the community

One of the main aims of this scrutiny review was to improve usage and increase footfall at libraries across Merton. A number of key issues were identified and recommendations made in this area, including:

- How best to encourage usage by different groups including by young people, children and families etc without alienating long-standing users was highlighted. Different people will have different expectations and requirements from their library service, some require a quiet space to read, young people may want a space where they feel they can talk and meet and families wish to bring in young children. Balancing the needs of different user groups would need to be addressed if the library service was to truly engage and encourage usage by all the community.

¹ Cultural Services Peer Review – September 2006

- We agreed with the many comments that were received from the public expressing the importance of having an area in each library that is dedicated to keeping/displaying public information from and for the community i.e.: public notice boards. Quite a number of respondents from public consultation exercise had commented upon the loss of public information areas in libraries particularly the 'sad' disappearance of the public notice boards.
- The importance of library facilities particularly in some areas like Pollard Hill is evident, providing so much more than book lending - acting as community hubs where people meet, carry out learning, access the internet and in Pollards Hill get help with completion of housing benefit and other forms.
- 'Reaching out' into the community was seen as important in order to encouraging use by different community group's, particularly young people. It was felt that the Council must involve young people more in the development of the library service and then 'go out and tell them what is on offer'. Building on links with partners in schools, the youth service and other youth providers was seen as key to encouraging usage by young people.
- Facilitating and/or contributing in community-based events were seen as a good way to bring the library service to its community. Developing or being part of local as well as national/regional initiatives would help to reach a wider cross section of the community and could include, for example, the publicising of the ten most read books each month. It should also include targeted initiatives which will encourage different groups ie: young people, children and families, people who use other language and the over 50s etc to use the libraries service. We recognised that the library service does do some work in this area including participating in celebrating age and black history week.
- The possible barriers to accessing library services were discussed encompassing physical accessibility, opening times, external signage, language and knowledge of how to use library services, including:
 - The issue of opening times was mentioned in a large number of the public comments received and included suggestions to open libraries on Wednesdays and Sundays, some evenings until 7pm and for all libraries to open over lunch periods.
 - A number of people made requests for the return of the mobile library or similar service for elderly and people who may have difficulty visiting libraries, but the task group did note that the 'home visits' library services was available to those people unable to access library services directly.
 - We considered that library direction signage in the areas surrounding libraries was very poor and believed making the library service more visible would be important in drawing in new users.

It is recommended that:

- R1 The Council carry out a review of opening hours, considering the option to open lunchtimes, Wednesdays and some later evenings.**
- R2 Further proactive investigation into ways of encouraging people to join their local library in Merton be carried out, including:**
- a) Targeting large businesses/employers in the area for sign up.**
 - b) Investigating viability of sending library membership cards out to people when they newly register in the borough for council tax.**
 - c) Encouraging/building further links between schools and library service.**
 - d) Councillors consider holding surgeries within libraries (any room charges incurred paid by council).**

- e) **Continue with initiative to encourage staff to become use and become library members.**
- R3 The council look to reach and attract a wider cross section of the community through:**
- a) **Outreach with children and young people including schools/parents, youth clubs/youth service etc**
b) **Working with young people in order to develop a service that young people want to use.**
c) **Facilitating community based events in libraries, linking with initiatives or events in the Borough (i.e.: bringing Wimbledon tennis to other parts of the borough, exhibitions and activities for Black History Month etc)**
d) **Provide/work with other organisations to provide targeted events (i.e.: young people, families, community groups etc)**
- R4 Work with focus group of young people to develop a space in their local library which they and other young people would want to use – pilot in one library initially.**
- R5 Consider zoning or providing time slots for different types of usage i.e.: quiet time, children and families time etc. (*Others can use at those times but respect timeslot*)**
- R6 Notice boards for community information be made available in all libraries across Merton.**

Providing facilities and services that people want

The library service must constantly monitor and adapt to the changing needs of its community - finding out what people want and developing the service in tandem. We therefore must have a clear vision for the future of the library service in Merton and this must be developed in conjunction with the community.

- It was acknowledged that libraries need to be flexible, comfortable, practical and inviting spaces and we were pleased with the refurbishments at Morden and Wimbledon and particularly impressed with the new facility at Raynes Park. This was also reflected in many of the public comments received although many people commented on the shelves looking rather bare – perceiving that there has been a loss of book stock since the refurbishments.
- It was recognised that many improvements had been made, in particular, the three library refurbishments but we still believe that there was some way to go with some of the other library facilities, particularly in relation to the library at Collierswood, where it was felt that the space was uninviting, the décor very dated and members were particularly concerned about the lighting.
- We would like to see refreshment/coffee facilities provided at all libraries and that consideration be given to linking the Café and library at Morden Civic Centre.
- Mixed views were received from the consultation exercise on provision of computers and new technology. Most were in favour of computer facilities in libraries, but would like to see more up to date programs and technology. Although it was strongly felt that the provision of computers should not take over from the space used or needed for books and other library services.

Providing services that people want – some comments from the public (see full consultation in Appendix B)

Why do all libraries in Merton have to close on Wednesday afternoon?

The support and attend given by the local library staff is excellent and their efforts to maintain a high standard of service is well appreciated. The same comments cannot be given to the council with regard to resourcing and the provision of facilities. The building is now approximately 30+ years old and could do with refurbishment or even replacement. (Pollards Hill Library)

Whilst I congratulate everyone on the refurbishment of Wimbledon library building. I regret I must complain. My concern is what has become of the stock? The place is half empty.

Since the refurbishments there has been nowhere to put up posters or leaflets. The boards in libraries are an important resource for the community especially for voluntary groups.

Service is first class, there is a good selection of books and other facilities like the peoples network which are excellent and very well used. Although it does seem that staff are struggling to get the books back on the shelves, huge backlogs and piles of books to be put back with little resource to clear it.

Greater use of display/theming to promote local heritage.

The internet service is too slow because equipment is not up to date.

Libraries should continue to be a focus for the community, to encourage residents to easily obtain information on local organisations and local governance for example.

I have one main comment - which is the closure of some of the libraries at lunchtime.

It is recommended that:

- R7 Linking the coffee shop and the library in Morden Civic Centre be investigated and consideration be given to providing coffee areas or facilities in other libraries (any coffee shop would sell fairtrade coffee and products reflecting the Council's and the communities commitment to fairer trade for third world countries).**
- R8 External signage outside and in the locality around libraries be improved.**
- R9 The lighting be looked at in those libraries that have not had a refurbishment recently particularly in Colliers Wood.**
- R12 Build on work with other organisations to provide community services/advice in libraries (i.e.: connexions, housing benefit, age concern, citizens advice etc)**

Marketing and publicity of services

The spending on marketing and publicity for the library service is minimal at present, with no specific financial resources allocated. It was recognised that the library service has recently been given access to the Environment and Regeneration publicity team although it still has to compete alongside other services for those resources.

We believe that better marketing and publicity of library services would improve usage and if targeted effectively encourage use by those groups that do not currently use libraries in large

numbers. We wished to highlight the importance of providing effective, professional publicity and information - giving a consistent image and message showing that libraries are a place you would want to visit. Members did note that a marketing and publicity strategy specifically for library services was currently being developed.

It is recommended that:

- R10 That a libraries 'brand' be developed, so that the look and feel of libraries, the publicity materials and the signage inside and out are clearly identifiable and consistent in all libraries in the borough.**
- R11 The library service look to improve its marketing and publicity of the library service through:**
- a) Developing and providing brighter more professional looking publicity materials (inline with branding in R10)**
 - b) Develop a good, simple generic leaflet giving details of the library service**
 - c) Continue to build on involvement in regional and national campaigns, and these are publicised consistently across all libraries in borough**
 - d) Look into ways of raising the profile of the library service in Merton locally (i.e.: advertise on council tax bills, leaflet with staff payslips, regular articles in My Merton, through website and press release).**
 - e) The marketing plan for the library service be brought to the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel for discussion.**
 - f) Developing skills and understanding marketing and publicity issues become part of staff, particularly library managers, training and development with objectives set through staff appraisals**
 - g) A contact telephone number for the library service be put onto the library membership cards.**

Budget, staffing and financial issues

A number of issues arose relating to budget, staffing and financial matters and the following observations and recommendations were made:

- We were pleased to see that seven out the ten Service Standards were now being met and would encourage continued improvement. We were also impressed with the commitment and dedication of library staff especially those they spoke to as part of this review – particularly in sharing their experience of working in libraries and expressing how they would like to see library service improve in the future.
- It had been identified from the site visits, speaking to staff and from the public consultation exercise that the service was running on minimal staffing, and this did show at times particularly in restocking shelves where it had been reported that books in some libraries are left to pile up because resources were not available to deal with them. The task group had been told that a number of posts were not currently being filled in order to make savings that will be diverted to other services in the authority.
- We thought, from the evidence received, that the authority was currently getting good value for money using the current procurement consortium for the purchase of books, but we would like the service to keep a close eye on what is happening nationally in book

procurement in relation to the Better Stock, Better Libraries procurement model² being developed by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

- The development of volunteering and 'Friends of' groups were seen as a positive way of helping to provide added value in the authorities library services. Volunteers do currently help in our libraries doing work over and above the core business of libraries and it was felt that this should be developed and encouraged.
- Generating income through sales, sponsorship and fundraising in order to improve and increase library services was discussed. Suggestions have included: local sponsorship for plasma screens in libraries, leasing of space to other agencies, piloting of games consol. We would like to see more time spent on investigating income generation possibilities. It recognised that staff in the library service were not lacking in ideas but in the resources and capacity to investigate these possibilities and to put together proper business cases to take ideas forward.

It is recommended that:

- R13 The council continue to monitor best value ways for stock purchase and follow closely the 'Better Stock, Better Libraries model currently be investigated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives council.**
- R14 More work is undertaken to investigate income generation, sponsoring and other forms of fundraising possibilities.**
- R15 Further work to encourage volunteering in libraries be carried out including looking into assisting in development of further 'friends' groups and to actively promote and encourage applicants with disabilities to volunteer and apply as library staff.**
- R16 The council when recruiting new staff in library service look to attract people with many of the 'new' skills required for the changing library environment (i.e.: experience of working with people in different setting etc)**

² Model by which local authorities develop joint buying arrangements with a large number of other authorities in order to derive large savings, currently being investigated by MLA.

London Borough of Merton – Scrutiny Review of Library Services

Volume of Evidence

Background Evidence

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Each year in Merton, key issues are identified which are scrutinised through a review process. A review aims to address areas of weakness or poor service, through making recommendations to improve outcomes for the local community. Elected Members, working together in task groups, undertake these reviews.
- 1.2. The Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to carry out the review of the library service in Merton at its meeting on 21 June 2006. A task group was set up of four councillors and one parent governor representative who is a co-opted member on the Life Chances Panel. The task group developed a plan/scope for the review which was agreed at Life Chances Scrutiny Panel meeting on 12 September 2006.
- 1.3. The purpose of the review was outlined as (for full copy of scope of review see Appendix A):

'To look at the services Merton's libraries provide and how to increase the numbers of people using the service'.

And, that the objectives of the review were agreed as:

- Develop a set of recommendations that will help to improve usage, access and stock levels in Merton's libraries.
- To increase the appeal of library services in Merton
- To contribute to strategic themes particularly sustainable communities
- To contribute to the themes of the Community Plan

- 1.4. The task group carried out its review as follows:

15 August 2006	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staffing, structure, spread and location of libraries • statutory requirements for library service • public library standards • cultural services inspection – audit commission • Accessibility at libraries
7 September 2006	Site visit to Morden, Pollards Hill and Mitcham libraries
21 September 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witness evidence from a library manager • Financial information, performance, comparative data • Stock and procurement issues
16 October 2006	Site Visit to Raynes Park and Colliers Wood libraries
17 October 2006	Customer satisfaction, promoting social inclusion and promotion and marketing issues
31 October 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Witness evidence from Friends of Raynes Park library • Budgetary information • Income generation • Review specific consultation information
14 November 2006	Task group visited and held coffee time with public at Morden and Mitcham libraries
4 December 2006	Site visit to Harrow Council library service
5 December 2006	Site visit to Croydon Council library service
24 January 2007 & 19 February 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review specific consultation results • Discuss key issues and conclusions/recommendations

2. A picture of library services in Merton

2.1. Merton has seven libraries including a local studies centre in Morden, with 99 per cent of libraries falling within one mile of residents in the borough. The Merton library service provides a number of services, some of these include:

- Electronic reference sources available through Merton's online reference and information service
- The Home Visits library service
- Wordwise collections³
- Schools library service
- Homework clubs
- Summer reading scheme
- Information service (Wimbledon library)
- Heritage centre
- Local studies centre
- Individual events at different libraries (i.e.: reading clubs etc)

2.2. Budget

The budget for library services in 2005/06 was as follows:

Item	Budget	Further information
Staffing	£1,975,510	But saving to be made so actual budget is £1,803,190
Stock budget	£380,000	
Buildings maintenance	£29,400	
IT support	£134,990	Leasing and support
Contribution to central services	£321,580	
Income target	£168,490	

2.3. Key issues identified by task group - budget

- (a) Budget cannot cover contributions towards other services such as marketing, training etc, so deficit currently picked up by other divisions, which are now finding savings in order for departmental budget to meet bottom line. (Task group 31/10)
- (b) Once all payments for areas that must be paid are accounted for, there is very little remaining for areas such as publicity/and promotion. (Task group 31/10)
- (c) Need to upgrade the library computer system – but this also brings extra revenue charges, this will have to be found from declining budgets. (Task group 31/10)
- (d) New public access PCs are to be installed this year – leasing programme pays, but it is not enough to bring in new software that has to come on stream as standard in the market place. (Task group 31/10)
- (e) Cuts proposed in library service budget for next year. Need to find 100k the service is currently covering more than that in vacancies. Could be the same next year – supporting the Community Care budget. No cuts to the book fund have been identified. (Task group 31/10)

2.3. Staffing and structure

The library service in Merton employs 69.8 full time equivalent staff, which currently stands at 101 individuals.

³ Collections of books that are suitable for people with general learning difficulties or specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia

Key issues identified by task group - staffing:

- (a) Staff paid on lower grades than elsewhere in council and other boroughs
- (b) Numbers of staff are below optimum (Task group 15/8)
- (c) Service in 2005/06 saw reduction in management team capacity therefore inability to fund project support for Development Officers or extra support to address performance issues. (Task group 31/10)
- (d) When recruiting new staff new skills are looked for as well as traditional librarian type qualifications/experience but this is difficult because of the low pay offered in Merton. (Task group 15/8)
- (e) Career structure not so good in library service, some levels to aspire to but movement at higher levels infrequent. (Task group 31/10)
- (f) Possibility of recruitment from a different sector was discussed, including from the retail sector i.e.: Waterstones, staff with different experience and are used to working in a customer focused environment. (Task group 15/8)
- (g) More success in bringing staff in at the lower scales with enthusiasm and some of the new skills, but difficult to recruit/create role models at higher levels. (Task group 15/8)
- (h) New Colliers Wood library could be over two floors, which might be difficult to staff, could consider unstaffed access to stock although this will require security. (Task group 15/8)
- (i) May be good idea to rotate staff around the libraries in Merton so that they gain a fresh perspective and gain experience of working in the smaller and larger library environments. (Task group 21/9)
- (j) People now use libraries differently, come in for information, to use internet, computers etc – library staff role particularly in the future will be information giving. (Site visit 7/9)
- (k) Librarians do exchange ideas of best practice, new ideas across the borough this, we need to ensure this continues and is enhanced. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)
- (l) May be good to include some of the 'new skills' in staff appraisals as objectives. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)

2.4. Performance and comparative data

Comparative data on library authority expenditure and performance (CIPFA estimates 2005/06):

Measure	Merton	Barking & Dag.	Croydon	Harrow	Sutton	Richmond
Population	194,200	165,000	341,200	214,400	181,000	179,200
Total net expenditure incl. Capital charges	3,030,000	3,924,782	6,257,498	5,151,090	4,640,800	5,504,800
Total revenue expenditure per 1000 population	15,458	23,320	15,752	22,740	25,535	28,283
Total spend on materials per 1000 population	1,473	2,325	1,237	2,776	2,790	3,449
Employee revenue expense per 1000 population	9,063	12,824	11,133	14,089	13,012	15,523
Employee expenditure as % of gross service spend	58.6%	55.3%	70.7%	62%	51%	54.9%

Measure	Merton	Barking & Dag.	Croydon	Harrow	Sutton	Richmond
Visitors per 1000 population 2003/4	6,192 (14 th)	4,920 (19 th)	7,229 (9 th)	8,502 (3 rd)	6,692 (12 th)	8,191 (7 th)
Issues per 1000 population 2003/04	3,795 (20 th)	5,926 (6 th)	4,887 (12 th)	7,702 (1 st)	6,937 (2 nd)	6,638 (4 th)
Active borrowers 2003/04	35,451	82,242	88,171	61,843	44,543	47,246
% of population	18%	49%	25%	29%	25%	29%
Satisfaction levels - adults	78%	87%	92%	86%	95%	93%
Satisfaction levels – under 16s	81%	91%	83%	78%	79%	84%

2.5. Services for people with disabilities or access difficulties

Access to library services for people who may have special requirements include:

- **The Home Visits library service**
Serves people who may not be able to get to a library or those who have difficulty in using a library due to physical difficulty or illness. It can provide home visits, deposit collections or talking books by post.
- **Wordwise collections**
These are available at Morden Library, Pollards Hill Library and Wimbledon Library. These are collections of books that are suitable for people with general learning difficulties or specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.
- **Wimbledon Library**
Wheelchair access to ground floor only; no access to first floor gallery; electronic security gates to required width; lighting and hearing loops and upgraded toilet facilities.
- **Morden Library**
Lift to all floors; automatic doors; electronic security gates to required width; hearing loops.
- **Raynes Park Library**
Wheelchair ramps; automatic doors; disabled car parking bay; hearing loops.
- **Mitcham Library**
Wheelchair ramps; automatic doors; electronic security gates to required width; car parking bay.
- **West Barnes Library**
Car parking bay; hearing loop, level access.
- **Donald Hope Library**
Hearing loop.
- **Pollards Hill**
Level access; Hearing loop.
All new shelving designed to accommodate easy access in terms of displacement and height. Older fixed shelving is not compliant at Wimbledon Library. Internal signage updated.

2.6. Audit Commission Inspection – Cultural Services

The Audit Commission undertook an inspection of cultural services (leisure, sport, libraries, heritage, arts and tourism) in February 2006. The inspection awarded the services a one star rating (fair), with promising prospects for improvement. Recommendations were made across the whole block as well as against individual services. The points below draw out those areas where the Library Services is reflected in a general as well as a specific comment:

Strengths

- Key strategy exists for the service following a Peer Review in the improvement Action Plan (specifically physical condition of the libraries and stock)
- Targeted action takes place aimed at young people (egg: summer Reading programmes), older people etc.
- Projects such as 'welcome to your library' aimed at refugees and asylum seekers. Stock in different community languages.
- Investment has resulted in a new library at Raynes Park, improved layouts in other libraries.
- Introduction of Friends group.
- A range of learning activities take place.
- Some services protected once external funding ceased (Open Learning Centre)

Weakness

- The library service only met 4 out of 10 public library service standards (*now meets 7 out of 10*)
- Council does not target health inequalities (*now have cross departmental Healthier Communities working group, library services is developing an action plan as part of this*).
- Library opening hours below national standard – lunchtime closures mentioned in particular. (*Argument for not attempting to meet this target, although any improvement will be welcomed*).
- Data on usage of libraries no up-to-date for diverse groups. (*In hand*)
- Outcomes of activities not measured.
- Most libraries traditionally laid out with old décor. Only one has significant learning space. *Three town centre libraries refurbished winter 05/06; potential for new facilities in Mitcham as part of regeneration project, and Colliers Wood as part of Brown and Root development. Learning space refers to Open Learning Centre at Pollards Hill; whole library is a learning space, Morden has a classroom space.*
- Little use of customer service standards and charters. (*In hand*)

Value for Money

- Spending on cultural service block is well below national average, resulting in below average satisfaction. (*Extra monies found for stock fund this year, last year monies drawn from capital fund*)
- Stock procurement delivers value for money in its consortium arrangements. (*A new round of tendering has resulted in much improved discounts*)

Prospects for improvement

- Raynes Parking library delivered increased usage of facilities
- Annual resident satisfaction survey saw a rise in satisfaction
- Plus survey saw 10% rise
- External scrutiny welcomed (i.e.: peer review)

2.7. Cultural Services Peer Review

In September 2006 Merton commissioned a Peer Review of its cultural services, included in this review was the library and heritage service.

The review concluded:

'The Review Team recognises the ambition and commitment to deliver high quality cultural services and to contribute to improving quality of life and building healthier and stronger communities. We see examples of where this is already in place and where there have been recent improvements. We are confident that the quality and scope of Merton's cultural services will continue to improve.'

The Review Team made a number of recommendations including:

- Develop the cultural strategy into a tool which directs and inspires the vision for cultural services in Merton.
- Articulate the vision to staff across the Council and to the many communities in Merton.
- Ensure organisational structures are 'fit for purpose' to deliver the ambitions for cultural services.
- Review any gaps needed to delivering cross cutting cultural services and develop proposals, as appropriate.
- Fully embed a performance management culture across the services, ensuring work is outcome focused and targeted to local need.
- Continue to benchmark and learn from best practice.
- Develop work to fully engage all of Merton's communities; particularly ensuring ethnic minority and faith communities can play a full and active part.

2.8. Library and Heritage Service - service plan 2006/7

The current focus of the service is to implement the improvement plan drawn up following the peer review and to achieve the targets in the Public Library Service Standards. The service's audience is the whole community and activity will take place to ensure the library experience across the board is improved. The initial emphasis is to put proper processes into place before undertaking service development, the priority areas for development will then be:

- Children and young people
- Older people
- Support for people with basic learning needs
- The promotion of reading
- Improvement in health inequalities

In addition to undertaking these activities, partnerships are being sought and formed for service delivery. Actions identified in service plan include:

- Improve satisfaction rates of library users
- Provide a better range of lending stock for customers
- Implement a performance management framework
- Draw up and start implementing a community engagement programme
- Budget review to be undertaken
- Strategy document set
- All libraries to achieve standard level for agreed regional/national campaigns
- Expand and develop learning opportunities in libraries
- Ensure library services contribute to service hubs

- Take forward opportunities for library developments in Colliers Wood and Mitcham
- Contribute to improving health inequalities
- Deliver extended bookstart
- Develop family learning opportunities.

2.9. CPA⁴ Inspection in 2007

The Corporate Assessment looks at how well Merton works as an organisation, and with its partners, to improve outcomes for local people. It examines:

- how clear we are about what we are trying to achieve;
- whether we have the capacity to deliver our ambitions;
- whether we manage performance to meet our targets; and
- as a litmus test, what has actually been achieved?

Our last Corporate Assessment was in 2002, and we were rated an overall 2 (out of a possible 4). The authority has improved significantly since then we are setting ourselves a target of at least a 3 in 2007.

The 2007 CPA will place a far greater emphasis than before on the Council's performance in the cultural arena. Culture will count for around 25% of the overall assessment.
Merton Cultural Services Peer Review – October 2006

2.10. Library Services fees and charges/income generation

Mertons advertised fees and charges for library services from 15 May 2006 include:

Item	Amount	Item	Amount
Overdue charges		Loan charges	
Adult books	17p per day	CDs	£1
Magazines	15p per day	CD sets	£1.75
CDs	20p per day	Talking books	£1.20
Talking books	20p per day	Language course	£1
Videos	£2.50per day	Lanuage course (ling.)	£8
Free Videos	15p	Music score sets	£7
DVDs	£2.50per day	Videos	£3
Children's books/tapes 0-13	5p	DVDs	£3
Teenage books 14-18 yrs	5p	Reservations	
Unwound videos	50p	Standard charge	80p
Lost items		Adults and 14 yrs +	40p conces
Lost ticket replacement	£1.50	Childrens books	Free
Books (in print)	*	Childrens spoken word	Free
Books (out of print)		Interloan system	£1.80
Adult fiction (hard back)	£16	Items from British Libr.	£5
Adult non fiction	£16	Peoples Network	
Adult paperback	£8	Use of computers	Free
Music scores	£4	Internet printouts	15p
Junior fiction/non fiction	£10	Floppy disc purchase	50p
Junior paperback	£6	Fax	
Audio (in print)	*	Sent local sheet 1	£1
		Subsequent sheets	50p
Out of print		Rest of UK sheet 1	£1.25
		Subsequent sheets	75p
Videos, cds, dvds, spoken	£10	Western Europe	£1.75

⁴ CPA – Comprehensive Performance Assessment

word, language course		Subsequent sheets	£1.25
Individual cassettes	£5	USA Subsequent sheets	£2.00 £1.50
Junior spoken word	£5	Rest of world Subsequent sheets	£2.50 £2.00
Junior story cassettes	£2	Receiving fax	£2.00
Room Hire		Advertising	
Gallery at Wimbledon	£120 month	Internal boards - to 1mth	£1
Hall at Mitcham	£15 hr (£25 out of hrs & Sunday £40)		
Hall at Raynes Park	£15 hr (£25 out of hours)		
Projector hire	£10 session		
Microphone	£ 5 session		

* Replacement cost plus 10%

2.11 Key issues identified by task group – Income generation, sponsorship etc

- (a) *Stop fines on children's books (Site visit - libraries 7/9)*
- (b) *More time needs to be spent by the authority investigating possibilities for income generation within this area. Not lacking in ideas but capacity to investigate possibilities and put together proper business cases for those ideas. (Task group 31/9)*
- (c) *Possibilities of advertising and charging for meeting rooms in libraries. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)*
- (d) *Plasma screen in Raynes Park Library – ideas for sponsorship from community business etc for this facility or similar in other libraries (could include advertising space on plasma) (Site visit - libraries 16/10)*
- (e) *There are many sources of sponsorship and fundraising opportunities out there but its about having the capacity for someone to investigate these. Professional fundraising is a skill. (Task group 17/10)*

3. National Context

3.1. Statutory requirements for library services

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires local authorities to provide 'comprehensive and efficient' library services. It indicates the range of services that could be provided but no measures are given to help define what is meant by comprehensive and efficient. However broadly speaking, the Act requires library authorities to provide free of charge, access for people who live, work and study in their area to borrow or refer to books, printed materials and pictures in line with their needs and requirements.

The Public Library Service Standards help to define a comprehensive and efficient service. They are a set of targets across core provision areas. They are not based in statute and failure to meet one or more of the standards does not necessarily signify a breach of the 1964 Act. However, failure to comply with the standards will have an impact upon the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the local authority.

In 2005/06 the library service met seven out of the ten standards, rising from four out of ten the previous year. This was due to the availability of capital funds for refurbishment and for rebuilding Raynes Park Library, as part of the capital funds went into stock, thus allowing the service to improve dramatically on the stock standards. Seven out of ten is a good result. The business plan aims for the service

to achieve eight out of ten standards (currently looking to achieve the adult user satisfaction figure as well as visitor figures). No authority achieves all ten standards.

Mertons Library Standards results are:

No.	Item	Standard	2005/06	2004/05	Met
1	Proportion of specified households living within specified distance of a static library	99% within 1 mile (outer London)	100%	100%	Yes
*2	Aggregate scheduled opening hours per 1000 population for all libraries	128	86	76	No
3	Percentage of static libraries providing access to electronic information resources connected to the internet	100%	100%	100%	Yes
4	Total no. of electronic workstations with access to the internet and the libraries catalogue avail to users per 1000 population	6	6	6	Yes
5	Requests: 1. % of requests for books met within 7 days 2. % of requests for books met within 15 days 3. % of requests for books met within 30 days	50% within 7 70% within 15 85% within 30	63% 74% 92%	60% 71% 84%	Yes
6	Number of library visits per 1000 population	8,600 in outer London	4,916	6,131	No
7	Percentage of users 16 and over who view their library as good or very good	94%	Different question asked	78%	No
8	Percentage of users under 16 who view their library as good or very good	77%	Different question asked	81.3%	Yes
9	Annual items added through purchase per 1000 population	216	506	105	Yes
10	Time taken to replenish the lending stock on open access or available on loan	6.7 years	3.8	16.6	Yes

*It is to be noted that the standard concerning opening hours is extremely difficult to meet in a small borough with a small number of libraries – even though those libraries actually provide a decent spread of hours. The standard could be met by having a larger number of outlets open at part-time hours, but it is considered that this would be spreading resources thinly and would not provide value for money.

3.2. Framework for the future – Libraries, learning and information in the next decade

The Framework for the Future is a document written by the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries an arm of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This document is and has been influential in how the library service within the England has developed. The strategic objectives within this document are as follows:

- 1 Develop and promote the role and contribution of public libraries through a clear vision supported by effective advocacy and communication
- 2 Build libraries' capacity to improve through better quality of leadership and workforce skills

- 3 Implement innovative solutions to achieve maximum impact from available resources
- 4 Achieve excellent planning and quality assurance systems to ensure sustained improvement
- 5 Promote literacy skills and an appetite for reading and learning
- 6 Widen participation and demonstrate impact of libraries in supporting learning
- 7 Provide access to the services people need through effective use of ICT
- 8 Contribute to achievement of e-government (UK online) targets for service take-up and audience engagement
- 9 Deliver an inclusive service that reflects and helps build cohesive communities
- 10 Provide library premises that meet the needs of twenty first century communities

3.3. Better Stock, Better Libraries

In August 2006 the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) published a report of a stock procurement model for public libraries. This is part of the Framework for the Future programme, the government's vision for improving public library services in England.

Currently, 149 library authorities in England buy 80-90% the same type of books and other materials. There is considerable duplication of effort. The MLA wished to reduce substantially the cost of buying books and other stock and see as much of that saving as possible re-invested in things that improve the customer experience, including books and other stock, opening hours and public access ICT and more staff helping customers.

The MLA believes this proposal will put libraries and their customers in a stronger position to influence the book supply market. This will ensure they have the best choice of books and other stock at the best prices, delivered most efficient and speedy ways. The document *Better Stock, Better Libraries* provides a roadmap for transformation and a business case for change.

Are there current examples in the UK or internationally where this is working?

'Many elements of these proposals are already working well in some library authorities, for example, joint buying arrangements, supplier selection etc. What is new is how these would be combined and applied consistently so that everyone can derive benefits these improvements can bring. Increased automation, for example in invoicing and receipting, and electronic procurement, are already delivering improvements in procurement elsewhere in the UK public sector'.

Better Stock, Better Libraries Fact Sheet - MLA August 2006

4. Stock procurement

4.1 Purchasing/procurement of stock in Merton

The procurement of library materials (books, audio-visual, newspapers etc) is managed through a consortium (Wellstoc) including Merton, Ealing and Slough.

It was felt that in 2005 the consortium was a little moribund, preparations for a new tendering round has brought out new personnel and impetus. The main thrust of the consortium is to achieve the best discounts possible. Benchmarking consortia are quite difficult to compare as they are considered commercially confidential. Some investigation of different consortia was undertaken in the autumn of 2005 (Liverpool, Stockport, and others) and the results were inconclusive as they worked in very different ways with very few actually sharing the administrative functions.

The new round of tendering was undertaken in the spring and summer of 2006 and has just come into effect. Benefits are:

- Ealing acted as lead authority and provided the resources
- Joint purchasing power attracted vastly improved discounts

Procurement of library stock is an area under investigation by MLA (Museums, libraries and Archives Council) the second stage report being published in summer 2006. Recommendations contained in this document around national procurement will require a major shift in working practices as well as huge investments to put into place, as well as a massive buy-in from all library authorities.

4.2 Selection of stock

While many library authorities still have teams of staff undertaking weekly / monthly selection duties, Merton has moved towards supplier selection, whereby the Library Service draws up a specification and the supplier provides titles against this specification. As many suppliers employ professionally qualified librarians this is a far more cost-effective way of provision.

About 60% of stock in areas of adult and children's fiction and non-fiction is provided this way for new titles. Not all areas of stock can be passed over to supplier selection, for instance where the systems are not in place with suppliers of more specific stock or where we are replacing worn stock (eg for classic authors) or reviewing subject coverage.

Provision is monitored and regular meetings are held with the suppliers. The main issue is getting our specification right and this is where stock profiles for each branch should be drawn up based on local community profiles. These are under discussion at present.

The current practice is to provide information / books on the full range of topics at each library – although the depth and amount will vary. Some examples questions/conflicting requirements in relation to this that arise:

- Wimbledon is our main reference resource, but demand is coming from some Raynes Park residents for enhanced reference stock. Proximity of Wimbledon and space - should the authority say no?
- Should we not attempt to try and cover all subjects at libraries such as Pollards Hill, and really focus on the most popular material? Then rely on town centre libraries for requests covering other topics?
- Reduce stock (unpopular) and ensure what is there works harder and maybe create space to allow for activities, particularly for teens?

5. **Improving usage**

5.1. Evidence from a library manager

A library manager attended the panel to give her views from the perspective of a library manager and individually of the library services in Merton, she also gave the panel valuable information on work that has and is being done at Morden, particularly in Morden library, including:

- Team plan has been developed giving plan of work over the year, finding it very useful and gives staff a focus.
- Put together a strengths and weaknesses document.

- Went through work done with ESOL including assessment sheets
- Work with Merton Adult Education mentioned.
- Large documents like 'framework for the future' précised for staff.
- Good to share best practice with colleagues
- Displays for emergent readers along with booklist etc
- Books on prescription initiative – doctors prescribing books to help with some conditions including depression and stress. Set up in February 06, limited information at present for how well it is doing, but monitoring project.
- Planning in advance for events important for, for example: black history month and celebrating age.
- Also do a 'what do you read once you have read...' i.e.: what after Harry potter etc.
- Book of the day stand on front desk.
- Do not have a budget for publicity – need good PR to send out a message and sell libraries.
- Visits to library from local schools/school children – show them how to use the library and look up something etc, get them to answer questions and do a short quiz so they have to use what they have learnt.
- Computer classes at the library, free and booked in advance. Very well received and used. Courses run every two months so people can put their name on the waiting list and when courses arranged they are contacted.
- Most people running computer courses are volunteers; do not have anyone at present.
- Computers get many casual users – up to one hour each.
- Pollards Hill library run a lone parents computer course.
- Run two weekly dyslexia group.
- Monthly reading group.
- Heritage events run by heritage officer i.e.: family tree tracing etc.
- Coffee mornings once a month.
- Attend open day at Merton college with stall and display to inform pupils of local library services.
- Usage and financial comparison collected through CIPFA.
- Different cultures may have different experiences of accessing libraries all over the world, for example, some people do not realise most library services are free.
- Some people require more specialist books; library staff can look wider than morden and give advice on more specialist services.
- May be a good idea to rotate staff around the libraries in Merton so that they gain a fresh perspective and gain experience of working in different environments.
- Need to find out who stopped using libraries and why, can then to some targeted publicity.
- Very important to listen to your user.

5.2. Key issues identified by task group – improving usage

- (a) Different groups of people have different requirements and expectations from libraries, this needs to be understood and addressed if we wish to attract more i.e.: young people, families with children etc. The issue of noise in the library can also be a contentious one. (Task group 15/8)*
- (b) Use school system to encourage children to use libraries. That it is important that children our future library users into adulthood are introduced to using libraries and that they find them a good place to learn and enjoy spending time, they are more likely to use into adulthood. (Task group 15/8)*
- (c) Each library is individual and success will be about knowing your customer or potential customer – finding out and understanding the libraries local community (Task group 21/9)*

- (d) *Each library has its own individual pattern of usage – dependant upon the community it serves. This needs to be investigated further to see what the 'hooks' are for improving usage in each library including more developing of links with community groups etc – outreach? (Task group 15/8)*
- (e) *There is a need to go out into the community and get people in but this is a resource issue. (Task group 21/9)*
- (f) *Outreach – librarians to visit all neighbouring organisation including schools, places of worship, railway stations, community centres, surgeries etc. Looking for possibilities to advertise, develop links, places to leave withdrawn books etc.*
- (g) *The future of libraries is about being more in tune with what people want, more community involvement and more use/examination of best practice elsewhere. (Task group 15/8)*
- (h) *No time to do outreach – need to look at each library community profile. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)*
- (i) *Pollards Hill very good at engaging the community, librarian particularly good at providing inventive activities and bringing energy to the library, understanding the community it serves. (Task group 15/8)*
- (j) *Years of under investment in libraries going back to 90's particularly in the purchase of books – resulted in visitor figures dropping. Increased spend last year of 600k. Current users notice difference but need to get back lapsed users. (Task group 15/8)*
- (k) *Different cultures may have different experiences of accessing libraries all over the world, for example, some people do not realise libraries are free. (Task group 21/9)*
- (l) *Council staff are also users/potential users of the service. (Site visits libraries 7/9)*
- (m) *Can we combine the library with other services or organisations to get people through the door, for example: citizens advice, council advice desk, Help the Aged etc. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)*
- (n) *Each library has a different profile and usage pattern, which needs to be looked at. (Task group 17/10)*
- (o) *The Peer Review of Cultural Services (Oct 2006) identified lack of focus on young people as a continuing weakness. (task group 17/10)*
- (p) *Opening times – opening times need to be accessed and looked at by library, maybe rather than one blanket set of times.*

6. Marketing and publicity of library services

6.1. Marketing of libraries as a specific concept

- A marketing plan is currently being formulated and is being looked into by the Community and Housing marketing team, it will follow the libraries service plan.
- A system of looking ahead in order to identify when press releases should be drawn up etc is now in place.
- Management teams understanding of marketing is now improving.
- Regular briefings/newsletters planned for staff, councillors and the public.

But:

- The understanding of marketing concept amongst staff is limited.
- The challenge of deflecting legitimate areas of activity in order to focus on agreed priorities.
- Need to develop good database of management and user information to support marketing plan.
- Very limited resources available for marketing.

6.2. Publicising the library service

- New publicity emerging – design standard

- New library logo
- Regular good news stories still being sought and promoted
- New publicity boards acquired and poster being produced
- Website is receiving attention
- The focus on cultural services gives libraries another platform

But:

- Current basic publicity is poor
- Resources needed to produce vibrant, colourful publicity
- Information for regular good news stories
- The current image and perception of libraries

6.3. Publicising specific events

- Many events now identified in advance through communications forward plan.
- Marketing team involved in producing decent publicity/press releases.
- Plan to educate local staff in principles of publicity
- Some good practice example: Family Learning Week brochure because joined up approach between services supported by departmental marketing team.

But:

- Locally produced publicity rather homely, not professionally produced (resources issue)
- Cultural services consultation exercise identified that communication about, and information on events, was not good.

6.4. Key issues identified by task group – marketing and publicity

- Library service is no longer about being reactive it is about being proactive which should include more marketing. This requires staff to develop new skills. (Task group 21/9)*
- London Boroughs are generally not very good at marketing library services – need to develop these skills. (Task group 21/9)*
- Need more innovative and targeted marketing (links to changing the image section too) (Task group 21/9)*
- Lots of good practice going on but not publicised. (Task group 21/9)*
- Need more marketing and publicity but no budget for this. (Task group 21/9)*
- Need to find out who has stopped using libraries/do not use libraries and why. Very important to listen to user. (Task group 21/9)*
- Joining pack not inspirational. (Task group 21/9)*
- Maybe need to publicise all the other things libraries do, people know libraries do books. (Task group 21/9)*
- What have bookshops got that libraries haven't? (Task group 17/10)*
- Need to publicise to reach people we are not reaching now (Task group 31/10)*

7. **Customer Satisfaction**

7.1 Public Library User Survey (PLUS)

The Public Library User Survey, which took place in October, asked 2395 adult library users what they thought about the services provided in Merton libraries. Satisfaction rose by 10% to 83%.

7.2 Merton ALG Residents Survey 2006

The residents survey was conducted between July and August 2006. 1061 interviews were conducted in homes and in the street. A 1061 sample is representative of the community – quotas set on gender, ethnic origin, age, working status of women and housing tenure, set on 2001 Census.

Some headline results in relation to libraries services are as follows:

- Perceived service delivery for resident in Merton is 60% good/excellent. London average is 63%.
- Percentage of library users saying service is good/excellent is 71%. London average 80%.
- Percentage of library users (young people) in Merton is 64% saying service good or excellent, which is up 12% on last year.

7.3 Young Peoples survey autumn 2005

The base appears rather low and overall satisfaction come out as low as well.

Overall, young people's requirements in relation to cultural services as a whole are:

- A place to meet with friends and other people
- A place for music, art and drama
- A place to do homework

Some issues to be considered around attracting young people to libraries:

- Space in libraries that young people can identify with as opposed to an establishment offering;
- Issue of conflict with needs of other users e.g.: noise etc;
- Staff confidence is working with this age group rather than seeing them as a nuisance.
- The Peer Review of Cultural Services (Oct 2006) identified lack of focus on young people as a continuing weakness.

7.4 Exit surveys

Exit surveys are not currently conducted, however, Wimbledon library did undertake a straw poll of users' comments when it re-opened following refurbishment. Out of 70 people that were approached the overwhelming majority were pleased with the result.

7.5 Refurbishments Consultation

Merton Library and Heritage Service recruited an external consultation team (*Book Communications*) to consult with users and non-users of Wimbledon, Morden and Mitcham libraries in order to inform the development of these libraries and to help create a vision for the future of the Library Service. The consultation took place between August and November of 2005 and was conducted through face-to-face interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. Through the consultation process the following points were highlighted:

- **Focus on Core Services**

The majority of individuals consulted felt that the focus of the public library 'offer' should be books and information. This was a view held by young children, people working with teenagers and older and more established users. While not everyone consulted was pleased with the delivery of this core service they all subscribed to the value of it, if not for themselves then for others. The need for other services was acknowledged, but mainly as tools to more effectively deliver core services.

- **Quality of Core Services**

The range of views on the quality of the core services delivered reflects the very different situations of those consulted. Established users who felt confident in making demands on the library service were often critical of the poor book stock and its ineffective promotion. Users who were less demanding, perhaps because they were

not so convinced of their rights of access, were generally much more positive about the library service.

- Quality of Layout and Environment

Beyond improving the quantity and quality of stock, the greatest concern of those consulted was the poor layout and environment. The suggestions for layout and environment often mirrored an idealised view of home life, particularly from children, but added to that the value of the library as a socialising space and a space beyond the constraints of home, work or school. This reflected a strong sense of ownership of libraries by many people consulted. Although it is beyond concerns of layout and environment, the location of libraries was considered very important.

- Range of Library Users

There was a general understanding that libraries served a broad range of users and that this multi-usage would cause pressure at times. Perhaps surprisingly, several people consulted were concerned not about the behaviour of others in libraries but about their own behaviour, fearing that they might transgress whatever real or perceived rules of library etiquette were in use. This suggests that there is still a lack of understanding of how a library should be used, which was echoed by a lack of knowledge of some recent new services such as the internet and even storytelling for children. The value of libraries as a means of improving an individual's economic or social situation was emphasised. While many people were content to see libraries as a leisure destination.

- Demand for Change

There was a clear demand for change although not everyone who wanted change felt strongly about this. The physical ambience of libraries was a major area for change and was the most popular single improvement. A greater focus on core services was also wanted along with a better quality of delivery of those services. There was also some demand for staff attitudes to change and for libraries to better engage with individuals.

7.6 Key issues identified by task group - customer satisfaction:

- (a) Following on from refurbishments, complaints/comments made on lack of space for community information, arrangement of stock and some around the reduction in stock (task group 17/10)*
- (b) Little seems to be done to disband/change old library image through publicity etc. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)*
- (c) Need to create something for the future. Think about libraries in 5 or 10 years time, i.e.: more image conscious, maybe more like a shop feel, coffee facilities. (Task group 15/8)*
- (d) The look of a library makes a huge difference, will need libraries to be clean and modern if we want to attract new people. (Task group 15/8)*
- (e) Refurbishments at Mitcham and Morden good and new facility at Raynes Park excellent but consideration needs to be given to space and environment particularly at Colliers Wood and Pollards Hill. (Site visit - libraries 16/10)*
- (g) Entrance, lighting and environment at Collier Wood library an issue. (Site visit 7/9)*
- (h) To encourage young people need to create a space where they can contribute to how it is kitted out and work in conjunction with them to provide facilities. Maybe could be considered when developing new library facilities in Colliers Wood. (Task group 31/10)*
- (i) Many people still perceive libraries as old, dull, dusty places where you cannot talk or make a noise – need to change this perception. Need to make them accessible, vibrant, interesting places where people want to spend their time. (Task group 15/8)*

8. Views from the Public (specific to this review)

8.1 The task group wished to publicise the review as widely as possible asking for people to contact scrutiny with their comments and views. In order to do this the following activities were carried out:

- Articles in My Merton and on internet webpages
- Press releases in local papers
- Posters put up in all Libraries
- Coffee Time with Councillors at Morden and Mitcham Libraries on 14 November 2006

A total of 74 responses from the public were received between September 2006 and January 2007.

Some of the common themes highlighted include:

- Library important part of the community, integral – seen as important community resource.
- Opening hours – would like to see libraries open:
 - on Wednesdays and Sundays
 - some evenings later than 7pm
 - lunch time opening
- Refurbishments
 - Many very pleased with refurbishments
 - Perception that there has been a loss of stock – empty shelves, not enough selection
 - Loss of some items i.e.: specialist books, cd's, stamp catalogues etc.
- Comments on the way books are stored/shelved, particularly the move away from Dewey system.
- Requests for the return of mobile library or similar service for elderly and people who have difficulty getting to libraries.
- Computers
 - Varied response - some saying too many and/or that they take up too much space etc while others feel that more computer facilities are needed.
 - Some wanted more up-to-date computers with not only internet access, availability of different programmes i.e.: word etc.
 - Perception that books are being replaced by internet therefore space for books is less and less books purchased
- A number of passionate responses with regards to the disappearance of notice boards/information areas in libraries.
- Charges
 - Children's books – issue of late return fines
 - Charges to small groups for the use of meeting rooms/halls at libraries
- Investment in library services

- Lack of books/more investment in books
- Lack of storage space for books and historical materials
- Some building needing more investment including toilet facilities
- Staff shortages, resulting in books piling up etc

8.2 Views from Friends of Raynes Park Library

A representative from the Friends of Raynes Park Library attended a task group meeting on the 31 October 2006 to give views and discuss how the service could be improved. Some of the issues that arose from this meeting include:

- Friends of Raynes Park library a success - rising spontaneously in the community as a result of the closure of the old library. Community support for libraries is important.
- Volunteers great but can only be used to do work over and above the core business of a library, can work side by side with staff. For example: library staff often too busy to run a reading group but this would be of benefit if done by volunteers.
- 'Friends' often start things going with a group giving initial impetus then given over to groups to manage themselves with support.
- Would like to increase role for volunteers but need to identify the areas they can help.
- To encourage young people need to create a space where they can contribute to how it is kitted out and work in conjunction with them to provide facilities. Maybe could be considered when developing new library facilities in Colliers Wood.
- Need to publicise to reach people we are not reaching now

9. **Looking at what others are doing**

9.1 Harrow Council library service

The task group took a site visit to Harrow Council's library service on 4 December 2006 the following information was discussed/raised:

- 2 central libraries in borough plus 11 medium libraries
- All of Harrow Libraries offer a wide range of services including:
 - Books for adults and children
 - Internet and computer facilities
 - Films on DVD
 - Internet and computer services
 - Newspapers and magazines
 - Items in other language, inc. books, films or newspapers
 - Large print books
 - Books on tape and CD Language courses
 - Maps
 - Black and white photocopying facilities
 - Children's activities – such as storytime, chatterbooks etc
 - Music collection at two libraries
 - Reading groups
- Main library opening times are:

Monday	9:30 am - 8:00 pm
Tuesday	9:30 am - 8:00 pm
Wednesday	9:30 am - 8:00 pm
Thursday	9:30 am - 8:00 pm
Friday	9:30 am - 5:30 pm
Saturday	9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Sunday

Closed

Smaller libraries closed on Wednesday. All libraries open through lunchtimes.

- Starting opening lunchtimes recently – employ staff to work and specifically lunch times. Also look at more flexible hours with staff i.e.: shifts etc.
- Did opening hours survey – preference was for one set of opening hours rather than different at each library – consistency.
- All DDA accessible apart from one.
- All on good bus route, near a tube – in very good locations.
- Demographic of the area – relatively affluent and well educated
- BME communities make heavy use of libraries in borough
- Location is key – one library is small not so nice but next to Sainsburys so well used.
- One library moved location just across the road, visitor numbers have doubled – location is so important.
- Another library shares space with other 3 other agencies forming a sort of hub.
- Thought about having libraries in schools but need to look at balance between users and children
- Sign posting very important
- Only 2 libraries with no toilets
- Don't like libraries to look to sterile, always have lots of community posters etc.
- Book stock fund – buy multiples of some popular books to draw in new users. Also participate in promotions both locally and nationally run.
- Fines on children's books – only on over 14 years
- 40 PC's in central library
- Do targeted events to increase usage: i.e.: cooking, football book promotion etc. – sometimes target particular groups i.e.: young people
- No 'Friend of' libraries in borough.
- Use same consortium as Merton for stock procurement.
- No current consistency in signage/labelling of shelves/areas in libraries at present, working on this – agreeing categories etc difficult.
- Income generation – no large amounts – usual DVD fees etc
- Coffee/refreshment and setting are – there are none in borough at present but if looking a refurb or new library would definitely look into.
- Coffee shop in Morden civic centre discussed – outside top floor of library, was open right through when refurb was happening? Could be security issues.
- Sponsorship – usually companies want to sponsor something across a large area so often look to sponsor national or larger promotions etc.
- People/customers do not see the artificial boundaries around boroughs – so need to work closely with neighbours.
- Marketing: do not have sufficient funds/budget to do this fully only 10K. They do: leaflets, articles in local press and other local publications, posters in doctors surgeries etc. They have just produced a signature leaflet – introducing the service in a simple and easy to understand format. Has been distributed along with their community newsletter to all households in borough. Also developing website.
- To attract people you need to overcome some potential barriers i.e.: providing toilet facilities, adequate parking, accessibility etc.

Visit to Wealdstone Library

- Two years old, in old supermarket space, share building with 3 other agencies.
- Very good location, in city centre, lots of passing footfall, bus stop outside doors.
- Issues have doubled since refurb.
- Signage on shelves very clear, large print and consistent through library.

- Sell a few items like: cards, children's posters and key stage work books and stamps.
- Large meeting room, can be hired out at a fee but also let many local groups use for free.

9.2 Croydon Councils library service

The task group took a site visit to Croydon Council's library service at the Clocktower in Croydon on 5 December 2006 the following information was discussed/raised:

- 1 central library and 12 smaller branch libraries
- Footfall of 1m people per year.
- Central library at Clocktower:
 - Lending and reference library
 - Very large over 3 floors
 - Library shares space in the building with a café, community arts, Croydon museum and the David Lean cinema.
 - Tourist information centre based inside library
 - Exhibition space on entrance to library – usually for 3/4 months at a time
 - Higher education enrolment point inside library
 - Story writing competitions – recently Doctor Who
 - Youngest baby to join competition
 - Participate in London wide reading promotions i.e.: RAW
 - Large music and DVD collection
 - Homework help club – very well used
 - Archive – local studies library – local history of Croydon reference area
- Income Generation:
 - Overdue charges, DVD's etc.
 - 500k income per year but 187k of this is from selling travel cards and oyster cards in Tourist Information area.
- Marketing:
 - No budget as such, so do leaflets, targeted postcards, articles in community newspaper (my Merton equivalent), press release etc.
 - No monies for large scale advertising
 - Tend to go along with national and regional promotions
 - Do have a family liaison co-ordinator who does outreach work. So work with her and use/work with council departments i.e.: family liaison week etc.
- Outreach, some of the work the community liaison officer does includes
 - Reading groups
 - Work with looked after children
 - Work with BME groups
 - Surgeries for community police
 - Goes out to residential care places
 - Bookstart and schools
 - Work with groups who english is not first language
- Opening hours:
 - Did open on Sundays for 4 years but had to stop due to funding, footfall was quite high.
 - Open until 6pm most evening, 7pm one evening a week and open until 5pm on Saturdays.
 - Larger libraries open at lunchtime
 - Opening hours tricky, so many options, not that busy after 6pm.
 - Would if could open all libraries Wednesday PM

- There are 'Friends of' Croydon libraries – friends of all libraries in Croydon rather than individual libraries. 80 members, do fund raising, arrange events like adult authors talks etc.
- Balance of users:
 - Do focus groups with young people
 - Young people want a welcoming environment, refreshment facilities, comfy seating space, bright colours and books and CD's they enjoy.
 - Home work clubs – very good at attracting young people
 - Zoning discussed – i.e.: area for under 5's, older users, older children and young people etc. Difficult with limited space but if building completely new library might consider.
- Procurement – use CBC (central buying consortium) is similar to the consortium Merton uses.
- Currently meet stock 'standard' but budget reduced so may not in future.
- Work with Dyslexia groups
- Signage – there are staff to assist on each level, guiding on top of bays etc
- Use local disabilities groups to do sweep of the building identifying issues On limited budget need to prioritise what is important to the community i.e.: children and young people – next generation of users
- Visitor number have improved mainly due to: public access to PC's and work with children, young people and their families.
- No fines on children's books – want to encourage young to read
- Don't currently include hits on library web pages as footfall but maybe in future – many services online therefore usage.
- Staffing budget adequate to provide service as is but if want to do more i.e.: different/longer opening hours, this would need to be addressed – it's about targeting resources.

9.3 Love Libraries

The task group looked at the love libraries website, particularly looking at the Love Libraries Guide to Great Libraries⁵ – *detailing what you should expect from your local library service* - including:

- Free books to browse and borrow
- A wide range of reading resources
- To connect with other readers through reading groups etc
- Modernised, customer friendly services, right for the community
- Internet access
- 24 hours access to online services
- Expert, helpful staff
- Free, independent information
- Events programme including activities for readers, author visits etc
- Family activities
- A place for young people
- Help with learning
- A well maintained and equipped building

9.4 Desk based research

The task group also looked at the Library position statements and standards reports, the Audit Commission inspection reports and webpages for library services in Bexley, Richmond and Westminster.

⁵ Love Libraries was created by The Future Libraries Partnership, a unique alliance of private and public sectors.

10. Community and other services at libraries

10.1 The library service currently do work with the community in a number of areas including:

10.2 Help for people with different needs

- Computer with aids assisting disabled users available in each library.
- Dyslexia group in Morden library
- Collections promoting books for emergent readers (basic skills)
- Learndirect services in Morden and Wimbledon libraries delivered by private partnership. Learndirect facility also to be installed in Mitcham library in partnership with Merton College.

At their best, libraries are true community hubs that act as catalysts for regeneration and increased economic activity. Library services have a long tradition of engaging with local communities, for example, through the long-established mobile library network, or in the homes of the housebound or other users with particular needs.

Other outreach services can be aimed at particular community groups and locations. Advances in digital technology, coupled with the increasing number of on-line services, means that many users can access their local library 'virtually'.

The best library services encourage a feeling of ownership and engagement within local people. They consult users on a regular basis and ensure that provision matches local need. Engagement can be encouraged through Library Friends groups and by offering opportunities for people to volunteer. Such engagement should supplement, not replace, existing provision. *Department for Culture, Media and Sport – Libraries Working with Communities*

10.3 Diversity

- Community languages
- Events/displays aimed at celebrating other cultures and different faith festivals
- Some contact with mosque library in Morden
- Black History month

10.4 Older people

- Coffee mornings (open to all but mainly attracts older people)
- Silver surfer sessions on computers
- Participate in celebrating age event

10.5 Children and young people

- Bookstart scheme
- Children's storytime/s
- Work with Surestart
- Homework clubs

10.6 Open Learning Centre

- Lone parents ECDL sessions
- Laptops@home project for carers

10.7 Key issues identified by task group - Community and other services at libraries

- (a) *The library service has had some difficulty disposing of old books but have a solution of these, putting some withdrawn books in Raynes Park Station for people to take – has been very successful. (Task group 15/8)*

- (b) *Libraries fulfilling a much wider role than just books, more of a community venue and community support especially at Pollards Hill Library. (Site visit - libraries 7/9)*

11. Appendices

- Appendix A Scope and timetable of the review
Appendix B Comments and views received from the public
Appendix C Financial implication of recommendations

Bibliography

Cultural Services in Merton - Audit Commission Report June 2006
Better Stock, Better Libraries Factsheet Aug 06 – Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)
Framework for the future, Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade – executive summary – MLA
Library and Heritage Service – service plan 2006/7
LBM Peer Review of Cultural Services – final report Oct 2006
Public Library Service Standards – MLA
Statutory Requirements – www.culture.gov.uk
Merton Business Plan 2006-9
Merton Community Plan 2006-15
Merton library service web pages
Guide to Great Libraries – Lovelibraries website
Merton ALG resident survey 2006
Merton PLUS survey 2006
Merton refurbishment survey results

As at: 27/03/2007

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SCRUTINY REVIEW SCOPING TEMPLATE

Review: Review of Libraries

Task Group Members: Councillors Simon Withey (*Chair*), Nick Draper, Rod Scott, Patrica Lewis and parent governor representative Ravi Kurup

Title of Review	Review of Libraries
Outline purpose of Review	<p><u>Where do we want to get to?</u></p> <p>This review will look at the services Merton's libraries provide and how to increase the numbers of people using the service.</p>
Expected Timescale (possible no. of meetings?)	The scrutiny review criteria states that a review should aim to be concluded within 6 months. This review is an agreed review for the first half of 2006/7 Municipal Year (starting in July 2006 to be completed by December 2006)
Key areas of enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational issues effecting Merton Libraries • How the Merton library service complies with Public Library Service Standards • Usage of library service, including: usage by different groups ie: children, elderly & English not first language etc. • Customer satisfaction • Library refurbishment and associated service improvement • Levels of stock, procurement and investment in Merton libraries • Accessibility of library service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ of libraries physically including building and opening hours, and ○ via web, mobile libraries, virtual library, books elsewhere, home visits library service, schools. • Library service role in supporting community cohesion • Income generation within library service • Promotion and marketing of libraries service • Partnerships with internal and external partners • To investigate best practice
Terms of Reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine the effectiveness of the library service in the following area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Usage ○ Accessibility ○ Stock levels and procurement

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify best practice from elsewhere • To gain a better understanding of what the public want from a modern library service. • To look at how the library service works with its partners and other organisations • To assess the capacity for further developments in the library service • To develop a set of recommendations to help improve usage, accessibility and stock levels.
What will be excluded from review	
How review could be publicised	<p>Article in My Merton Press release – local press Article on website Staff bulletin, intranet, plasma screens in civic centre Poster/leaflet in libraries Ward councillors</p>
Possible witnesses (for written or oral evidence) e.g. council officers, individual residents, partner organisations, other interested stakeholders, other external organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate best practice - other local authorities • Speak to relevant officers of the council • Speak to cabinet member/s and local MP's • Speak to the public: users and wider community • Talk to partners orgs, voluntary groups and stakeholders • Speak to staff: front line, general staff usage etc • Look at results of surveys completed in past year including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any exit surveys/previous consultation ○ Residents survey • Take site visit to libraries in Merton – ie: mystery customers, talk to staff and users • Visit other local authority library services • Item on agenda at area forums
Potential barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in assessing why some people do not use libraries • Difficulty communicating with hard to reach groups
Expected Outcomes (all linked to Merton's vision and strategic objectives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set of recommendations that will help to improve usage, access and stock levels in Merton's libraries. • A increase the appeal of library service in Merton • Contributes to strategic themes particularly sustainable communities • Contributes to the Community Plan

<p>Possible Sources of Information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Commissions Review of Cultural Services at Merton • Breakdown of libraries budget and how spent • Libraries position statement and action plan for future development • Service performance information • Customer satisfaction information • Benchmarking information (how we do in relation to other LA's) • Statutory/legislative regulation • Current service provision, services available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Services available to children and young people ○ People with disabilities /accessibility ○ Initiatives etc • Consultation exercises – refurbishment consultation • Current Business Plan/objectives • Community plan 2006-2015 • Merton libraries website information <p><u>External Influence documents:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Requirements (Dept for Culture, Media and Sport) • Public Library Service Standards (Dept for Culture, Media and Sport) • Framework for the Future – Libraries, Learning and Information in the next Decade (Dept for Culture, media and Sport) • Better Public Libraries 21st Century Libraries – Changing forms, changing futures (2004 Building Futures) • Any other documents useful to the review.
<p>Scrutiny Officer</p>	<p>Michelle Roberts (Lead Scrutiny Officer)</p>
<p>Lead Officer from Department</p>	<p>Ingrid Lackajis (Head of Libraries)</p>

Summary of comments from the public

Listed below are the comments received from the public throughout the review of library services as a result of:

- Articles in My Merton
- Press releases in local papers
- Posters put up in all Libraries
- Coffee Time with Councillor at Morden and Mitcham Libraries on 14 November 2006

72 responses from the public received.

Some of the common themes include:

- a) Library important part of the community, integral – seen as important community resource.
- b) Opening hours – would like to see libraries open:
 - on Wednesdays and Sundays
 - some evenings later than 7pm
 - lunch time opening
- b) Refurbishments
 - Many very pleased with refurbishments
 - Perception that there has been a loss of stock – empty shelves, not enough selection
 - Loss of some items i.e.: specialist books, cd's, stamp catalogues etc.
- c) Comments on the way books are stored/shelved, particularly the move away from Dewey system.
- d) Requests for the return of mobile library or similar service for elderly and people who have difficulty getting to libraries.
- e) Computers
 - Varied response - some saying too many and/or that they take up too much space etc while others feel that more computer facilities are needed.
 - Some wanted more up-to-date computers with not only internet access, availability of different programmes ie: word etc.
 - Perception that books are being replaced by internet therefore space for books is less and less books purchased
- f) A number of passionate responses with regards to the disappearance of notice boards/information areas in libraries.
- g) Charges
 - Children's books – issue of late return fines
 - Charges to small groups for the use of meeting rooms/halls at libraries
- h) Investment in library services:
 - Lack of books/more investment in books
 - Lack of storage space for books and historical materials
 - Some building needing more investment including toilet facilities
 - Staff shortages, resulting in books piling up etc

Actual comments received from the public

- a) More PC's, at present there are so few of them compared with internet access only so always more booked than other machines, causing problems for users. Can internet access machines be adapted or, enhanced for full PC services? Also install more larger size keyboard for visual difficulties. Look at these ideas across all libraries especially the busy Wimbledon branch.
- b) Why do all libraries in Merton have to close on a Wednesday afternoon?
- c) Mrs Unwin attends Mitcham library with her toddler daughter, she thinks the refurbishment of the library is excellent and that the consultation exercise carried out beforehand was also very good. The new facilities are great and the librarian is great with her little daughter. The only this is she thinks that it would have been a good idea to have included the putting in of a toilet with the refurbishment, because it is difficult to go out and try to find a toilet while in the library especially with a small child.
- d) I read with interest the recent correspondence in The Wimbledon Guardian on the Wimbledon library refurbishments and have visited the library a few times to acclimatise myself to the change and to moderate my shock at what seemed to be a huge loss of stock in the name of 'updating'. I feel the reactions to the refurbishments are likely to vary significantly between the generations. For young people, I suspect that the change is very welcome. At last there is a dedicated computer room where they can access the web (and presumably produce their own documents) in peace without the inevitable talking and book shuffling and stamping to which they were exposed when the work-stations were in an open area near the issue desk. What appears to older people as a 'loss of stock' probably doesn't worry them at all, because all they need to get any information they require is a computer terminal.

People like me, educated in the age of the book, have viewed paper resources, rather than computers, as their routes to learning for the best part of our lives, so it's hardly surprising we experience a shock when we walk into our newly refurbished library to find it apparently half empty! Wondering what had happened to the excellent collection of classical CDs the library used to have, I asked the librarian at the issue desk what had happened to them. There were a few on the shelves, he pointed out, but most were 'in boxes upstairs' waiting for someone to decide which ones should be kept. If there were anything I particularly wanted, someone would do his or her best to find it for me. In the pre-refurbishment days I loved to look through the CDs and let serendipity have its way. I might pick a composer I'd never listened to or a piece I never heard of. "The magic has gone," I said to a friend around my own age. Hopefully another magic will reveal itself.

- e) It was with interest that we read of your intention to survey local organisations/users for their opinions on the public library services in the borough of Merton.

The Longthornton Ward, in which we primarily operate, is served principally by the Pollards Hill library. The nearest alternative library branch is located in London Rd, Mitcham. We submit the following comments for your information.

- The library service is generally highly regarded by the majority of local residents in our experience as it is the main council service with which many residents have a direct, personal and continual contact. The support and attention given by the local library staff is excellent and their efforts to maintain a high standard of service are well appreciated.
- The same comments cannot be given to the council with regard to resourcing and the provision of facilities. The building is now approximately 30+ years old and could do with refurbishment or even replacement.
- The primary purpose of the libraries has always been to make available a wide selection of books to the general public that they would not otherwise have access to. This principle, well established since Victorian times, has been the constant feature that has

led to our public libraries being used as an exemplar for imitation by other countries. Alas, this seems to have been sadly neglected by a number of previous local council administrations. Pollards Hill is no exception. The library stock is only slowly replaced or added to. Some sections, particularly non-fiction, are short of material while others have stock that is rarely updated. The reference library section is poor.

- We appreciate that the internet has enabled many immediate queries to be resolved concerning general enquiries on subjects but even this aspect is not entirely satisfactory. Pollards Hill has a 'learning centre' and a small number of PC's available for general use. The PC's for general use have limitations (even Merton's own website cannot be fully accessed as pdf files cannot be opened as no Acrobat file program is provided for in this section). There is supposed to be a degree of security provided to monitor who is accessing the network at any time and this appears to be sadly lacking. Secure 'logging-on' facilities were supposed to be introduced over 2 years ago. They are still awaited.
- Similar comments can also be made concerning the availability of books from other branch libraries in the borough. The catalogue system has now been computerised but it is not always very satisfactory from an enquiry viewpoint as a good cross-referencing system (a well defined relational database system) is essential. The present catalogue system appears to be poorly prepared and not very efficient. The availability of books via other borough branches is not well publicised i.e. no notices are displayed.
- There is, at present, a project in hand to redevelop the site of what was Rowan Rd High School, Rowan Rd, London SW16. While the need for housing is appreciated there has been interest by local residents in the future use of the Rowan High School building for adult education facilities including a new public library facility to replace the now old Pollards Hill branch library. Adult education facilities in the eastern part of the borough are almost non-existent. It is hoped that this proposal will enable the local library service to be enhanced and the school to become a local community facility offering continued educational and community related facilities well into the new century.

- f) I have read with interest the articles in My Merton. I agree that the renewed libraries are very good, pleasant and cover a wide variety of interests. I would, however, like to ask if one change could be made. We seem to have lost the easy Dewey system for looking for non-fiction books. It is really difficult to find perhaps Poetry, biography etc., within their own numbers. I am sure there must be a reason for this but it is certainly not helpful for many of your readers, including myself. I have spoken to many who find this difficult. I realise titles can be looked up on computer but I am afraid many of us are hopeless at that. Is it possible that this shelving system could be reverted to the old way please, it would be much appreciated by many of your readers.
- g) Miss Keen would like to make a plea for the return of the mobile library service. It was marvellous for older people – she is 87- whole find it difficult to get to the library. The service that ran up until 2-3 years ago was excellent, not least because of the man who ran it. It came round every week and it was easy for people to pop out and get some books. She thinks that it was stopped because of cost issues, but feels that services that are so useful and important to people who can't get out and about should not be cut for financial reasons.
- h) Mrs Wilson lives in a flat in a retirement complex. Whilst the estate is very good, there is no close public transport. She would like the task group to look at reinstating the travelling library to allow residents who are not very mobile to use the library service.
- i) As an OAP one of the few pleasures I find is in stamp collecting. And as a member of Mitcham library for over seventy years, I find it difficult to attain up to date catalogues, I have to order them from Wimbledon library at a cost of 80p each and wait for several weeks for them. Mitcham library have not held new catalogues since 1987 this I think is unfair. I believe there are 4 or 5 libraries in the borough, I cannot understand why Mitcham library should not have current catalogues once in every five years. I know many thousands of pounds have been spent on ramp and electric doors recently. After the re-opening I found there no catalogues at all. When I queried with a member of staff they told me they had not enough room for them and they were expensive. I then phoned Crown House and

complained. They said what they had said was untrue and some would be installed. These turned out to be the 2003 ones.

- j) Further to your item in the local paper regarding library services I must first congratulate the service on its new look. However, a victim of this makeover has been the 'information corner' where there used to be a constant supply of information in leaflet form. I wrote when the library reopened after its makeover, pleading for the re-instatement of this corner and was rewarded with a notice board with certainly contains information but only in a limited form. An example given recently with the 'Open House' which occurs annually in London. I went into the library for the information booklet that details buildings and times open etc.

Nothing near the front desk but the librarian sent me to the desk at the back of the building and a cupboard was opened a box removed and an information booklet given to me. I knew above the open house weekend so was able to ask for the booklet – but there was no way anyone without this knowledge could have found this. It was through the library that I first found out about open house and have blessed it ever since, not only for that but for all the other information I have acquired. Otherwise, the library is wonderful and the staff efficient and helpful.

- k) In answer to your request for comments on the library service in Merton. With reference to the new library at Raynes Park, it is a fabulous building and a first class service. What a pity the so called street planners did not cater for the disabled by having a disabled bay at the front instead of a great wide footpath which could get a bus and car on side by side. The nearest disabled parking lot is one only on Gore Road. This is variably taken up by a resident.
- l) I am pleased to read a group of councillors are to look at library services. The Wimbledon library is now of a very low quality with regard to the number and type of books available. The previous arrangement allocated more space and shelf room for books. The present shelving is too low in height and extra row of shelves above the present would help enormously. In the old arrangement vertical freestanding four sided shelves displayed paperback books, many of good quality – these are no longer used. There seems to be very few if any new books. I have visited the library with a list of six authors and have found no books of any of them to be available. The staff also seem to be very slow in replacing returned books to the shelves. One suspects that moneys have gone to computers and at the expense of books, which should be the main purpose of a library. Books in the french language (previously available) seem to have disappeared. There are however too many 'trashy' books still lining the shelves.
- m) I am a regular user of the local libraries and have recently found out that there is a children's fine on late returns. I appreciate that library items go astray but if we want to encourage reading in children this is not the best move. If parents have to incur fees, they would discourage their children from borrowing books. 5p mounts up. Can this be reviewed and was there any consultation? On the whole the upgrading of libraries in the borough is refreshing. The London Rd and Wimbledon is very nice. When will you do the Pollards Hill library? Although I do not live in the area but the library is very useful on my way to and from work, it is a library that has a good number of children daily, no matter why they may be there!
- n) I have always been very satisfied with Wimbledon library, but since the modernisation a few months ago, I am not at all satisfied, because:
- The staff have too little room to do their job properly.
 - The public do not know where to go to renew; ask for advice; reserve a book; or get a book stamped because one small reception area is over-crowded with machines and people.
 - The returned books are not put back on the shelves and there are so many of them left on a shelf.
 - I do not know where to go to find the books I want, so I have to queue to ask.

- I used to enjoy visiting the library but now it's a very unpleasant place to visit.
 - The staff do their best, all the time, but I do not know where the planners got the notion that the new library will be better for staff and the public, because it's a big disappointment.
- o) Mrs Joseph phoned to share her views regarding Wimbledon library (the only one she and her husband visit). They visit the library once a week. She is not happy with the refurbished Wimbledon library as there are now hardly any books in the library - the book section has diminished greatly. There are some so-called 'popular' books at the front of the library but if you want any other books you have to order them in. There used to be a large modern languages section featuring European languages, but now the French language section only has about ten books and a number of those are 'GCSE study guide' type books. The reading section is now laid out in an unhelpful way: the yellow pages and telephone books are difficult to get to and are inaccessible. The library has been 'dumped down' and is now trying to be more of a social area. A library means books and Wimbledon library does not feel like a library any more.
- p) We use our local library a lot. As a parent of young children I am very surprised that you have now introduced fines on children's books. I think this is a bad move at a time when you are trying to encourage more people to use library service.
- q) I use the central Library within the Civic Offices on a fairly regular basis with my 4-year-old daughter. I was impressed by the space provided for the children's section of the library and the huge number of books available given how limited and cramped this provision had been in the temporary library. I had not used the library prior to this so am not able to compare further. I also like the seating provided, although this is fairly limited. However, I feel that an area that could be greatly improved is in the presentation of the books to children. The vast majority of the books in the 0-5 age range are housed in big long bookcases that make it very difficult for them to be viewed without pulling lots out in one go. There does not seem to be any rationale for how or where the books are located within the cases. There is one freestanding display case and a circular chair with integrated shelving which are both excellent ways for small children to access books. I was informed by one of the library staff that it had been planned to have more of the small free standing display cases but that lack of money has not made this possible. I think that this is a terrible shame and a missed opportunity to engage young children in the joys of reading. Young children are visually stimulated and need to be able to instantly see and access a variety of books that catch their eyes. I also wonder if having the books crammed in together leads to a higher incidence of damage as there is not much room within the bookcases.

My daughter and I also attended an afternoon story telling session at the central library which was very good. However, it took me quite some time to establish where and when the session was as there was no literature on it available at the time (although I understand now that there is a small flyer) and many members of staff thought that they may be a session but had no further knowledge of it. They referred me to the member of staff responsible for it - who happened to be off sick. Why not have some colourful posters advertising the activity?

- r) I have one main comment/complaint which is the ridiculous lunchtime closure of some of the smaller libraries such as West Barnes and Raynes Park. Why do they need to close as surely the librarians could have staggered lunch breaks? Or else employ some part-time staff to cover for this lunch break. E.g., There were three staff at West Barnes the other day, surely one could have lunch whilst two staffed the library, and then take it in turns, why do they need to all have lunch together and close the whole library down to customers for an hour? Often people will want to visit the library during their own lunch break (or any time) and these closures are inconvenient. I also think closing for the whole day on Wednesday is somewhat inconvenient to customers and outdated.
- s) Just a few words about books – noise in your two libraries often children are seen making noise while people are still reading some mothers do not tempt to control them. Books written

in foreign languages i.e.: french spanish, italian are very few on your shelves. Access to computers - most members of staff do not know how to use the scanner. If one of them does then you are given only 10 minutes to learn how to use the scanner which is in my opinion a very short period of time to learn. I am a regular user of your libraries.

- t) I write in answer to your invitation to do so in the Wimbledon Guardian and indeed after a recent visit to Wimbledon Branch Library. It is with regret that I find I must complain. Whilst I congratulate everyone on the refurbishment of the building, my concern is what has become of the stock? The place is half empty.

I am a professional musician and as many in the arts, rely on my local library for materials, periodicals, scores and recordings. The score stock used to be quite good for a non-specialist library, but now it has been pillaged to such an extent it is an embarrassment of a section and really hardly warrants being called a Music Section at all. The only substantial score stock remaining seem to be Study scores. and alas now with Music no longer a core subject on the National Curriculum, I am left wandering just for whom the proliferation of study scores are aimed.

I was informed by the duty staff that the main body of music stock has been moved to Morden library. This has left me incredulous. Since when has Morden been the Artistic and Musical epicentre of the Borough of Merton? In Wimbledon we have 3 theatres...New Wimbledon Theatre and its studio and also the particularly important Polka Children's theatre and indeed negotiations have been afoot for some time now to replace the concert Hall facility in the town. We have Wimbledon Choral Society and Symphony Orchestra and a very varied selection of high quality amateur music making in the borough. We also have the Cannizaro Festival. I realise Morden is in need of regeneration, but surely not at the cultural expense of Wimbledon. Also with the demise of the mobile library service in our area it is not always easy to travel to Morden by public transport. I do not have a car.

- u) A few years ago we (Wimbledon Light Opera Society) used to be able to deliver posters and flyers for our productions to the central library and they would then be distributed to the local libraries where the public could pick them up. Now not only are there only 2 libraries left in the Wimbledon area (Raynes Pk and Wimbledon) but both have very limited space for flyers so it is very difficult to get information about our productions to the general public. I was interested that staff in both these libraries agreed that it was a great shame that they no longer could display a wide range of information on local activities.
- v) I have been an active user of the Merton Library service for almost 30 years. I have been dismayed by the decline in the service over the past several years, which seems to be still continuing through the policy of replacing stock with open, wasted space and computers.

My firm opinion is that the service is not interested in providing a first class service for its existing users. It is much more fun for the management to be creative in following either political correct dogma or the most recent library fashion, than in ensuring that the book and other media stock is both wide and deep. The pretence is the desire for bringing non- users into the libraries, but I have never seen any proof of success in this direction.

To add insult to injury the new regime has gone overboard onto the "bookshop" model of library design – few books and empty spaces (on the floors and shelves). It was bad enough when this was done at the new Raynes Park (at least it was better than no library at all) but there was really no need to impose it on the main town libraries as well.

I was truly dismayed this week to see that the vandals seem to be moving into West Barnes as well! As usual one suspects that this "scrutiny" will endorse the new policy despite the feeling of the users. I really find it insulting that the changes will be declared as a success through selective and misleading statistics – egg comparing current use to when many libraries were closed or stating high spend on new books without considering the huge disposal of stock at the time of the closures.

No one can object to some degree of environmental improvement, but despite the fig leaf of the "consultation exercise", nobody asked them to wipe out the stock in favour of open spaces and still more computers.

w) I think the new library renovations make each library look cleaner, brighter and more attractive. However I feel that to some extent the baby has been thrown out with the bath water, in that:

- There is now more space than books. The number of books seems to have deteriorated, both in fiction and non fiction
- The system of filing is now mystifying. Before there was a very good system. Each book was filed according to its authors name in fiction, and using its code in non-fiction. It was therefore reasonably easy, so long as the book had been filed in the right place, to find most books via the library catalogue. Now that has been abandoned. Fiction books are just filed under categories of crime, historical, etc. I have found the same series of books filed under 3 different headings in different parts of the library.
- Books are suffering at the expense of the internet. Although the internet is useful, it is only a non-fiction tool. It cannot replace taking out a book and reading it.

I would like to see more money invested in the provision of books and other media which can be taken out of the library. I would also like to see the internet side split away from the book browsing area. Perhaps the provision of reading rooms where people can browse the internet, read a book, listen (on ear phones) to a piece of music, read a newspaper, do their homework, interrogate the books that are not allowed to be taken away, etc. And lead the rest of the area for people to choose books, music, films, etc which they want to take away.

x) You asked for the public to give views on Merton's libraries. Here are my views:-

- Range of books available

As far as I know fiction books are selected centrally by a panel of librarians and then provided by book dealers. I know of no dissatisfaction with this system. Presumably it is the most cost effective system available. The situation is I feel different where technical books/items are concerned. The level of knowledge required to select books on technical subjects cost effectively is not likely to be held by librarians. If it is it must surely be a hit and miss affair, in itself unsatisfactory. More use should be made of knowledgeable members of the public when selecting technical items.

- Accessibility

The libraries in Merton are readily accessible from all parts of the Borough. In fact I think there are too many libraries. There are problems of accessibility to all parts of some libraries. These have been overcome in general through the flexibility, and willingness to be as helpful as possible, of staff. To generalise, staff have been able to overcome the shortcomings of the buildings used.

- Effective Community Space

The Libraries and additional facilities are underused, dirty, and give the appearance, at best, of making the best of a bad job. I understand Merton employs no caretakers/site managers and the use of Halls is consequently restricted or, at best, an imposition for Library staff. If caretakers were necessary until recently why are they no longer so? Why do so few Groups use them? I have even seen the library manager at Wimbledon mopping up the public toilet so that it might be used by a desperate member of the public straightaway!!! The Libraries and halls in Merton are the most obvious 'face of the Council' throughout the Borough and should be prioritised as such by the Council and not be treated, as it appears at present, as the poor relation of Council services.

- The Future

Given the ever increasing demands of local authorities from all and sundry I feel that a speedy rationalisation of Library services is necessary throughout the Borough. Do we need so many libraries? For instance Motspur Park, Raynes Park are both a few minutes away from Wimbledon through excellent public transport links. Why not use the total staff/resources to provide an up to date comprehensive service at Wimbledon? Similarly with Morden, Mitcham, Colliers Wood and Pollards Hill. I feel that Two large libraries [Morden, Wimbledon?] with possibly Pollards Hill as an 'outstation' for geographical reasons, would give the opportunity to provide modern facilities, longer opening hours and the necessary trained staff to operate a satisfactory service at all times.

It is certain that the library services required today are more wide-ranging than those of a few years ago. To do nothing is in my view to accept inevitable decline. And why should anyone accept that services provided by a Council must be inferior and inadequate?

- y) On the whole the service is satisfactory, the Library I use (Merton) is clean and cheerful and pleasant to visit. My main difficulty is the limited opening times. As I work full time and have a long commute I can't use the library during the week, so am restricted to Saturday visits – this effectively makes using the library inconvenient and means I don't use it as often as I would like. This is compounded by the fact that there is no out-of-hours 'drop-off' for books, so I tend not to borrow items in case I have difficulty returning them on time.
- z) Living in Wimbledon I am impressed by the re-vamp in Wimbledon. However the help desk at the back is undermanned at times. Could staff be centralised at reception so they can help each other.
- aa) Not happy with the refurbishment at Mitcham Library, feels there are not enough books anymore, very disappointed with the book selection.
- bb) I use the library services a great deal because I have two children aged 8 and 10 and are a secondary school teacher myself. Provision for children is in my experience very good.
 - library staff are knowledgeable and keen to help
 - project books are readily available
 - the summer reading scheme is enthusiastically promoted and my children participate every year with enjoyment.
 - the refurbishment of Morden library provides a very pleasant environment, particularly in the children's section.
 - homework clubs seem to provide an excellent service and staff support the children well (we do not use them ourselves, this is based on observation when using the library after school)

I have two areas I would like to raise for consideration.

1. Introduction of fines for overdue children's books

- I do not think that this was adequately publicized. I found out because a librarian told me but I do not recall seeing any posters or notices. Infrequent library users were caught out by hefty fines that they were unaware of, although I think staff used their discretion sensibly in such cases. Please could you consider how to publicize important changes such as this more fully in future.
- I fear that the introduction of fines on children's books could discourage library use by the families which would most benefit from it. I have not been deterred by the introduction of fines but our family values reading highly and can afford the occasional fine without worry.
- If we have to pay fines on overdue books for children the costs can easily spiral since children tend to take out a large number of books at one time. Reminder letters about overdue books were abolished several years ago because of cost. I sympathise with the need to keep costs down and I am also aware of the environmental cost of yet more paper! Could email be promoted as an alternative reminder system?
- I now use your website to renew our books. Could this service be promoted with a specific poster?

2. Some older hardback books have disappeared from the shelves, no doubt because they did not look appealing next to new books with modern designs. When buying books is there a policy of buying new copies of children's classics and 'old-fashioned' books to replace these tired looking old copies? I do appreciate that they go in and out of fashion and in and out of print and so may not always be available. Those I personally like include, for example: Laura Ingalls Wilder, Dorothy Edwards, Jack London, Rosemary Sutcliff. There are others! Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope these comments are helpful.

- cc) I use Pollards Hill Library and find the facilities good and the staff excellent- enthusiastic and helpful. I would like, for personal taste, more crime fiction to be stocked.
- dd) I have lived in Raynes Park for 35 years. As a child I used to go to the library to supplement my homework studies, then as a teenager and an adult I used to go regularly to find something interesting to read. As a new mother, short of money, it was a pleasure to pop down to the library and take out a few books, which I could enjoy free, and return them when I had finished them. As my children started growing up I would take them to the library and encourage them to develop their literacy skills - enjoying looking at books without having to buy them and encouraging them to make their own choices about the books they read. Then, the library was pulled down and a new glitzy one put in its place with hardly any books. I wanted to weep last summer when I took my primary school age children to the library, so that they did some reading over the holidays. I don't have the money to buy them a couple of books a week, but their teachers and I would like them to read at this speed. The reading scheme is all very well - BUT THERE ARE NO BOOKS - WHERE HAVE THEY GONE? The reference section is appalling - there are about 20 history books for children. Forget about trying to find out about the romans- you are lucky if you can find the century they are studying. Do you really see the school children of Raynes Park using Raynes Park library to do project work - which they are regularly set- when there are 20 books for the whole 5-16 schools population?
My 6 year old is learning to read - we could not find 1 suitable book for someone of his level - it is either preschool picture books, or Harry Potter type texts.
the library appears to have a policy of positively discouraging young children from using books. There are computers - but how do these kids learn to read in the first place - is Merton not going to support the development of its children's literacy?
I was so upset by the new library - obviously we don't go there anymore- I wrote to the teachers at my children's school. You are really doing Merton's young people a disservice. I only wish the old library had never changed. But of course, money had to be made - so the flats were built, the hall is gone and so are the parking spaces. If you don't have money in Merton - ie you can't buy your children the books you need - too bad.
- ee) Since the refurbishment there has been nowhere to put up posters or leaflets. The boards for boards etc in libraries are an important resource for the community especially for voluntary groups. If notice boards are no longer going to be kept in libraries then there needs to be another place for them in a prominent place in community.
- ff) He says he has always been impressed with Wimbledon library, staff are always courteous, helpful – service is first class, there is a good selection of books and the other facilities like the peoples network are excellent and very well used. Although he did say over the past few weeks it seems that staff are struggling to get all the books back on the shelves, huge backlog/piles of books to be put back with little/or no resource to clear it. He is very happy with the refurbishment, he now takes his grandchildren there to storytime, thinks it is a much friendlier environment for children and young people. He also said the reference room is very good.
- gg) I am an avid reader and am very upset and disappointed at what happened to Wimbledon library. A great amount of money has been spent on refurbishing the premises, the result is that on the surface it looks very pleasing but to try and find a book to read is impossible. The returned books lie unsorted in a pile. The last time I went, there must have been a hundred books stacked in a corner. When I complained, I was told this is due to shortage of staff. The

shelves as a result are half empty. Finding a book is like looking for a needle in a haystack. The travel section and the reference section, which used to be excellent, are now very poor. Lots of books have been disposed prior to the refurbishment programme and obviously not replaced. I do not mind buying the odd book, but for day to day reading I with many other people relied on the excellent library system.

hh) I wish to bring your attention to the noise level in Wimbledon library. What has happened to the revered peace and quiet of libraries? They should be a place to concentrate and read and study or just enjoy some peace and quiet. During the summer, there was a children's story read out loud so we had to listen to that plus the cries and screams of the children and babies attending. Afterwards they sang Yellow Submarine. There is no notice taken of people talking on mobile phones or mothers with noisy children. I go in and out as fast as I can as I do not find it a relaxing experience.

ii) I write with a few comments on the library services as follows:

Raynes Park Library – Local residents are delighted with the new library but staff shortages mean it is closed daily at lunchtime just when many people have time to visit. Many people would enjoy being able to use the library on Sunday if it were open.

Raynes Park Library Meeting Hall – The local residents association would like to use the meeting hall for 2 or 3 events each year but cannot justify using funds raised by subscription to pay for the hire of the hall. The charges are very high and should be reduced for the local community who would then use the meeting hall more.

Information Centres – Libraries should continue to be a focus for the community, to encourage residents to easily obtain information on local organisations and local governance for example. Many people do not have computers at home and rely on the library service. However, more space is needed so that local organisations can put up temporary displays.

jj) Comments from Merton resident:

Staff shortages

Library staff are very thin on the ground in all libraries. These shortages appear to be endemic. Most noticeably this is so in Wimbledon reference library, where one librarian only is often to be found on duty, he/she will be coping with every conceivable enquiry thrown at her/him: whether on how to use the library photocopier, how to find local history, requests for back numbers of newspapers/journals and including many questions requiring considerable time and exercise of research skills etc. Apart from any other consideration, what about safety of staff? Working alone in this way, is a highly visible, vulnerable way should not be tolerated: this is quite apart from the stress levels involved in working alone in a very demanding job. I trust that something will be done to rectify this. In Morden library in the dept. to which reference enquiries are most often referred, the library is simply left unstaffed for much of the time. Which does absolutely nothing for the readers with reference enquiries.

Libraries as information centres

Libraries, if properly staffed and stocked should be the focal points to which the public naturally gravitate to find out more on many matters, on local organisations, or their rights as citizens, on how their council works. Included should be every aspect of the town council who the councillors are, how to contact them, when and where meetings are held, whether public or not etc. I am pleased to read that Councillor Withey referred to libraries as 'community information centres'. Do Merton's libraries match up to this description?

Freedom of Information Act

I have seen nothing in our libraries publicising the public's 'right to know' as conferred by this act of Parliament in 2000. Posters, bookmarks, leaflets could and should be readily displayed and available in our libraries, even if nowhere else.

Raynes Park Library

Newly re-opened is enormously popular. It suffers from the staff shortages already mentioned. Result: It is closed for one hour daily at mid-day. Yes this lunch hour is the peak time for library use. At this hour of the day users are turned out onto the street. Raynes Park is a busy expanding shopping, business and residential area. It is the centre for people coming in from a wide radius, including by train and bus. Moreover new businesses, flats, shops are opening the whole time – on both sides of the railway.

Raynes Park Library meeting hall

The charges for using the hall are quite extortionate. Local groups cannot afford to pay them. The question is why these high charges? If community means anything, then people need to meet locally, frequently, and at affordable prices. Once would think that may bookings at a more reasonable rate might well generate the same amount of income as does the current high charging system, and fewer bookings.

Libraries Opening on a Sunday

There are hundreds of students in the borough, including language students from abroad. It is know that many young people have little space or incentive to work at home. Sunday opening of one or two reference libraries could be a great help to many of these – perhaps to adults also. Sutton and Wandsworth councils have for many years opened one or two libraries for at least a part of Sunday.

- kk) Last year I completed a course at SCOLA to obtain teaching qualifications. At the start of the course we were given a list of textbooks to buy, or take out from the library.

Several of the books were listed at my local library but they had received a request from Wimbledon Library and had sent all the books there, even though all were listed as available there already. I contacted the other library within easy reach and their copies had also been sent to Wimbledon.

Wimbledon Library had no copies available of any textbooks on the course list, and could only say that they had been misplaced. It would appear that the books at Wimbledon were "lost", requested from my library, "lost again", requested from the next library, "lost" until all copies had gone from the borough. I could obtain no confirmation from Wimbledon Library that any of the books had been re-ordered, or that any attempt had been made to retrieve the lost volumes, although it is impossible to order a book from another branch without leaving a name and address.

All the students on my course that lived in Sutton obtained books from their libraries; all students from Merton had to buy their textbooks. I have lived in the area for over 40 years, and think our library system is wonderful - perhaps if I lived near the Black Hole of Wimbledon Library I would think differently.

Is it possible to instigate a system which will prevent a library replacing it's losses at the expense of the other libraries - I would happily donate my new textbooks to my local branch if I was confident that they would remain safely there.

- 11) I am surprised and perturbed by the number of books in the several libraries I use that while shown on the system infact prove to be 'missing' when I try to borrow them! While a few seem to have been misplaced the majority are apparently just not returned and I have to request them as interloans. I wonder if the fines are too high and mean people feel it better to just hang onto them? Should there be more amnesty? If I am a typical borrower then this is a very big problem.
- mm) Merton resident called Silvia Knight who complained about the lack of noticeboards in libraries. She said that it was difficult to advertise and find our about events in the borough. Beyond numerous complaints to the council she finally received a letter on October the 13th

stating that due to demand Notice boards would be erected. However, as of 11/12/06, this has not been completed.

- nn) Raynes Park library – I am just writing to say that although the above library is terrific and improving daily and use it extensively, I feel it is a great that that it is closed on Wednesdays and daily for lunch hours. I would be grateful if you would reconsider this.
- oo) Book fund and book selection
It would be very informative for ratepayers and communities to receive regular information on what the borough spends on books, periodicals, tapes, CD's etc for our libraries. Is this information readily published – and if so where can it be found? As far as book selection is concerned, what are the criteria used in spending what must necessarily be a fairly limited budget and how does expenditure compare with other boroughs of a similar size. Is there a mechanism by which people can suggest titles or books they would like to see on shelves.

Local publicity and display of leaflets

I noticed recently when visiting Morden library that a young women asking staff whether she could have some leaflet put on display about a local activity and was told that the library no longer accepted such leaflets. What is the thinking behind this? I would have expected libraries to be the natural medium through which all local activities are publicised. This is a denial of one of the libraries most practical functions: disseminating information about what is going on locally.

- pp) The Committee of Wimbledon museum are concerned that the Local Studies Centre appears to b a Cinderella of the Library Service, having both its space and its staff diminished over the last few years. There are several aspects of concern:
- The lack of specialist staff. Where there were a time several knowledgeable professional staff, there is now only one person who has to cover both the local studies centre at Morden and the Heritage centre at Mitcham. As a result arrears of cataloguing, and older materials are not be conserved.
 - Lack of space for collections
 - The lack of storage suitable for the adequate conservation of material that are unique and irreplaceable
 - The free availability of material without adequate security.

In addition, Merton is almost the only London borough without either a council-run museum or an archives department; even the Council's own archives are not preserved locally. While both museum and archives functions are to some extent dealt with by other bodies, Merton must at some time take on board these responsibilities.

Comments/opinions gathered at Coffee Time with Councillors on 14 November 2006

- Raynes Park Library - Very helpful staff, good disabled access, very useful as a community centre, would prefer lunchtime opening and staying open late at least once a week.

Wimbledon Library - Not very good at all – narrow aisles, unsuitable for disabled, no disabled access at all to reference library, computers dotted all over the place, but no help at hand, should be more access to computers for older customers.

Morden Library - Disabled access at Morden is dreadful.

- Greater use of display/theming to promote local heritage.
- More rigorous application on no mobile phone rule.
- Full screening of Internet access so that inappropriate sites cannot be visited.

- Books not being sorted quickly enough.
- Morden library generally good but the internet service is too slow because equipment is not up to date.
- Aged 12 – Morden Library.
Likes the library, there are all the books you need. Just got books on Queen Elizabeth for her homework – staff helped. Uses computers a lot at home and a bit in the library. Is currently reading Moby Dick with her family.
- Morden library is generally good, visit a lot, but computers are a bit old.
- Stop using Mitcham library for 5 years but have started coming again recently. Staff very helpful and useful. Mainly use library for books and CD's. Believes library is integral part of the community.
- Have been using Mitcham library for 10 years, come a lot with daughter maybe once a fortnight. Easier to find what you are looking for, library important part of the community. Library seems much more spacious now, labelling clear and books easy to find. Staff are very helpful and friendly. Activities in the holiday period.
- Have been using Mitcham library since 2000, generally for borrowing books and internet use. Things are ok since the refurbishment of the library eg: cleaner, more computers, better lighting and better labelling. Would like wider choice of books generally and toilet facilities for library users.
- Used Mitcham library since 1933:-
 - Very limited range of books available
 - No directories or yellow pages
 - Too few reference books, too few non fiction books in proportion to novels available
 - Signposting of the books not clear, poetry under literature.
 - Accessibility to buildings – Mitcham no problem.
 - Feels that older people are being marginalized in the use of libraries
 - Should be no eating and mobile phones in libraries

Morden Library – much less neighbourhood focused. Bigger, better selection of books.

- Useful number of PC's used for daughter to do homework, disappointed in CD's, good selection of reference books and staff are helpful.
- Use of computers should only be allowed to members of the library with cards.
- Been using libraries for about 2 years, changes are good: more computers and lots of newer books. But would like to be able to use the computers until closing time.
- Internet facilities – would like more programmes eg: Microsoft office and work. Good idea about 'touch in and touch out' system.
- Not enough books, library space taken up by computers/internet. Would like to see a wider range of books.
- Following the refurbishment at Morden library – is more space, feels more spacious. Always found service good, ie: not long queues before being served. Helpful staff. Range of books a bit limited, maybe more of the space could be used for more books.

- Age 11 years – been using library for a couple of months, library good but would like to be able to watch videos – can watch in Pollards Hill. Staff helpful. Use for homework and borrowing books. More black history books for youngsters age 11. Would like to watch videos.
- Pollards Hill library – need more resources, bigger budget for business books and programmes for computers like graphic design. Idea of small business centre – ‘sponsorship’.

As at: 21/12/2006

Scrutiny Review of Library Services – Cost implication of recommendations

Rec no.	It is recommended that:	Cost implication
R1	The council carry out a review of library opening hours, considering opening lunchtimes, Wednesdays and some later evenings.	Undertaking review: no cash costs, just staff time. Opening more hours: to be costed according to option chosen.
R2	<p>Further proactive investigation into ways of encouraging people to join their local library in Merton be carried out, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Targeting large businesses/employers in the area for sign up. (b) Investigating viability of sending library membership cards out to people when they newly register in the borough for council tax. (c) Encouraging/building further links between schools and library service. (d) Councillors consider holding surgeries within libraries (any room charges incurred paid by council). (e) Continue with initiative to 'join up' Merton staff. 	<p>Staff resources mainly, possibly postage and leaflet costs, but minimal.</p> <p>Staff resources</p> <p>Staff resources</p> <p>No cash costs, potential income.</p> <p>Staff time.</p>
R3	<p>The council look to increase footfall and attract a wider cross section of the community through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Outreach with children and young people including schools/parents, youth clubs/youth service etc. (b) Working with young people in order to develop a service that young people want to use. 	(a) and (b): Focus on young people in 2007/08 agreed for the Service. Targeted publicity £1000 . Otherwise staff resources.

	<p>(c) Facilitating community based events in libraries, linking with initiatives or events in the Borough (i.e.: bringing Wimbledon tennis to other parts of the borough, exhibitions and activities for Black History Month etc)</p> <p>(d) Provide/work with other organisations to provide targeted events (i.e.: young people, families, community groups etc)</p>	(c) and (d) : mainly staff resources, but supporting publicity - £500
R4	Work with focus group of young people to develop a space in their local library which they and other young people would want to use – pilot in one library initially.	Development work would require staff resources. Any requirements rising out of the project would require cash resources for equipment (potentially £1000) to refurbished area (potentially £3,000)
R5	Consider zoning or providing time slots for different types of usage i.e.: quiet time, children and families time etc. (<i>Others can use at those times but respect timeslot</i>)	Mainly publicity: £300
R6	Noticeboards for community information be made available in all libraries across Merton.	Notice boards recently provided along with display boards for on-off promotions.
R7	Linking the coffee shop and the library in Morden Civic Centre be investigated and consideration be given to providing coffee areas or facilities in other libraries (any coffee shop would sell fairtrade coffee and products reflecting the Council’s and the communities commitment to fairer trade for third world countries).	Investigation of opening up library to coffee area = staff time. Coffee machines in libraries = £5,000
R8	External signage outside and in the locality around libraries be improved.	External signs with new opening hours, app £7,000 Local signposting £500

	R9	The lighting be looked at in those libraries that have not had a refurbishment recently particularly in Colliers Wood.	Lighting at Colliers Wood Library improved Feb 07 - £2,000 .
	R10	That a libraries 'brand' be developed, so that the look and feel of libraries, the publicity materials and the signage inside and out are clearly identifiable and consistent in all libraries in the borough.	New brand design in hand for publicity – see R11a
	R11	<p>The library service look to improve its marketing and publicity of the library service through:</p> <p>(a) Developing and providing brighter more professional looking publicity materials (inline with branding in R10).</p> <p>(b) Develop a good, simple generic leaflet giving details of the library service.</p> <p>(c) Continue to build on involvement in regional and national campaigns, and these are publicised consistently across all libraries in borough.</p> <p>(d) Look into ways of raising the profile of the library service in Merton locally (i.e.: advertise on council tax bills, leaflet with staff payslips, regular articles in My Merton, through website and press release).</p> <p>(e) The marketing plan for the library service be brought to the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel for discussion.</p> <p>(f) Developing skills and understanding marketing and publicity issues become part of staff, particularly library managers, training and development with objectives set through staff appraisals.</p> <p>(g) A contact telephone number for the library service be put onto the library membership cards.</p>	<p>(a) and (b) Welcome pack in hand - £10,000</p> <p>Mainly staff resources, some publicity costs (£500)</p> <p>Investigation is staff time, no cash costs.</p> <p>Agreed. No cash costs.</p> <p>Staff time</p> <p>£2,000</p>
	R12	Build on work with other organisations to provide community services/advice in libraries (i.e.: connexions, housing benefit, age concern, citizens advice etc)	Staff resource – Outreach resource to cover issues such as R2a, R3, R4 and R12 medium-term temporary resource app £25, 000 p.a.

	R13	The council continue to monitor best value ways for stock purchase and follow closely the 'Better Stock, Better Libraries model currently be investigated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives council.	Monitoring and further investigation = staff time.
	R14	More work is undertaken to investigate income generation, sponsoring and other forms of fundraising possibilities.	Staff time
	R15	Further work to encourage volunteering in libraries be carried out including looking into assisting in development of further 'friends' groups and to actively promote and encourage applicants with disabilities to volunteer and apply as library staff.	Medium-term post to be appointed to draw in and manage a volunteering programme (£25,000 p.a.)
	R16	The council when recruiting new staff in library service look to attract people with many of the 'new' skills required for the changing library environment (i.e.: experience of working with people in different setting etc)	No cash costs to implement this.

As at: 27/03/2007