Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 17 March 2020

Wards: All

Subject: Library & Heritage Service Annual Report 2019/20

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins – Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Lead member: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah – Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture

Contact officer: Anthony Hopkins – Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Recommendations:

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

1	**PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1.   The Library & Heritage Service annual report sets out the key achievements that have been delivered over the last year and highlights future projects. It also provides a summary of performance.

1.2.   Merton's Library & Heritage Service continues to be a high performing and cost efficient service. It has kept all of its libraries open and has extended the opening hours of all of them over the last 10 years.

1.3.   The main projects delivered over the last year include:

- Further development of the Library System Platform (LSP) including the launch of a new customer app and improved marketing and promotion of library events.

- The launch of Project Sense, an Arts Council England funded project, which has transformed all of Merton's children's libraries with new furniture and equipment and enhanced services for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

- Further expansion of the cultural offer in libraries through the development of the Merton Arts Spaces.

- Further work to enhance libraries as community spaces to promote prevention and to support people to live fuller and healthier lives.

- The launch of two new heritage projects to provide improved services for people living with dementia and to further enhance the SEND offer.

1.4.   The report details have been summarised under the objectives of 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries 2016 – 2021', the DCMS's 5-year strategy for public libraries in England.

2   DETAILS

2.1.   **Increased Reading and Literacy**

2.2.   *Reading and literacy are two of the most fundamental skills in life. Libraries give everyone free access to books and literature regardless of age, disability, wealth or education. This access makes libraries a catalyst for improved reading and literacy skills.*

2.3.   **Project Sense**

2.4.   Project Sense is a £94,826 Arts Council England funded project to make Merton's children's libraries even more accessible. The funding has been used to develop a comprehensive SEND (special educational needs and / or disabilities) stock and equipment offer and to ensure all library staff and volunteers are trained in better supporting children with SEND and their carers or parents.

2.5.   The project started with the transformation of Merton's seven children's libraries into themed sensory areas. A dedicated SEND arts and literature activities programme is being delivered across the libraries. It includes working with schools and partners to break down barriers and perceptions of SEND, reduce isolation and open new doors of opportunity for SEND children and their families. Over 216 events are planned for 2020.

2.6.   There is a dedicated resource library (Learn, Play, Grow Resource Library) with specialist communication technology, specially adapted toys and switches and story bag books, which can be borrowed free of charge and are used for library activity sessions. Family learning courses including wellbeing, next steps back into education and employment and self-care and personal development will be taking place later this year for parents and carers of children with SEND needs.

2.7.   **Schools and Libraries Membership Scheme**

2.8.   Merton has a unique schools and libraries membership scheme that all school age children aged 5 - 14 are signed up to. The scheme is an invaluable way of promoting reading for pleasure amongst children and the improved life chances it brings.

2.9.   The schools and libraries membership scheme has been extended to all SEND schools in the borough as part of Project Sense.

2.10.   **Reading Promotions and Campaigns**

2.11.   The Library & Heritage Service has further developed its promotions and campaigns to tie in better with initiatives such as World Book Day, National Poetry Day and Black History Month.

2.12.   An annual calendar of events and promotions is drawn together and events are promoted widely through all available channels such as social media, the libraries e-newsletter, the libraries website and the libraries themselves.

2.13.   Merton participated in the national Summer Reading Challenge for children aged 4 – 12 years. This year's scheme had 2,944 participants and an increase in participants completing the scheme of 2% to 1,726.

2.14.   **Library Connect**

2.15.   Library Connect is Merton's own pop up library solution. It is used in localities to drive up library usage and raise awareness of the offer. Over the last year 1,382 visitors attended Library Connect events, an increase of 43% from the previous year.

2.16.   **<u>Cultural and Creative Enrichment</u>**

2.17.   *Cultural and creative opportunities enrich lives. They are important in developing local quality of life, sense of place and individual wellbeing. Libraries are well placed to extend cultural engagement because of their use by all social groups and their role as inclusive cultural hubs within communities.*

2.18.   **Merton Arts Space**

2.19.   Merton has two established Arts Spaces in Wimbledon and Mitcham libraries. These spaces enhance the cultural offer through libraries and have flexible lighting, sound and stage facilities to enable professional productions in community settings. A wide range of cultural events across different artistic disciplines has been delivered.

2.20.   Highlights in the 2018/19 calendar year included the Attic Theatre Company production of 'The Rebellious Women of Wimbledon', a large scale production of the 'King Arthur Opera' by the Colliers Wood Choral Society and the launch of Wimbledon Bookfest with an author talk by Lionel Shriver.

2.21.   In 2018/19 an estimated 116,975 visitors were drawn to activities in the Arts Spaces. The Arts Spaces contribute to income generation when used out of normal opening hours for commercial purposes.

2.22.   **Merton Memories**

2.23.   The Merton Memories web resource continues to develop and there are now over 18,000 unique images of the borough available for residents to review. The community is continually encouraged to help identify photos and add comments and information relating to the images. Carved in Stone, Merton's digital archive dedicated to World War One, is also hosted via this website.

2.24.   **Heritage Discovery Day**

2.25.   Merton's annual Heritage Discovery Day celebrates the rich heritage of the borough and last year's event in the Heritage & Local Studies Centre was supported by 30 local heritage organisations and community groups. The event attracted over 2,500 people and was the biggest one yet.

2.26.   **Common Sense and Memory Box Projects**

2.27.   Supported through Winter Pressures funding, these projects intend to reduce isolation and offer therapeutic benefits to Merton residents with special needs by increasing access to and engagement with local heritage. Working with public health representatives, care providers and support groups, heritage staff and volunteers have been trained to recognise and

address the service needs of visitors living with dementia, visual / hearing impairments, autism and learning difficulties. Part of the Heritage Centre has been developed to host reminiscence and craft sessions for people living with dementia. Themed memory boxes combining objects, images and sensory material will be available to promote social interaction, memory sharing and enjoyment both for individual visitors and groups from local care homes. The same area has been equipped with sensory material, to support visitors with autism and special needs who may need occasional access to a quiet, safe space.

2.28. The Common Sense project has developed a sensory exhibition combining traditional displays with tactile maps / artwork, handling items, smells, sounds, touchscreen presentations and audio guides. Whilst open to all, this display is particularly designed to enable visitors with sight and / or hearing loss and special needs to fully engage with aspects of local heritage, whether independently or as part of visiting groups. Boxes containing sensory and themed activity resources will also be available for loan to day centres and residential units, enabling adults with autism and learning difficulties to engage with Merton's heritage in a familiar environment where they feel safe and comfortable.

2.29. **Merton Heritage Strategy**

2.30. Merton's Heritage Strategy is focussed around these four objectives:

- Raise Merton's profile by increasing public access to the borough's unique and diverse cultural heritage;

- Safeguard the borough's varied heritage sites and resources, protecting and conserving them for the benefit of future generations;

- Ensure that Merton's heritage provision is inclusive by working collaboratively to widen public engagement and participation;

- To recognise the important contribution of social enterprise and secure ongoing funding and investment in Merton's heritage through partnership work, external funding and sponsorship.

2.31. Merton's current Heritage Strategy (2015-2020) will shortly expire and is in the process of being refreshed with further public consultation to take place throughout the year. The refreshed Heritage Strategy is expected to be presented to Cabinet in autumn 2020.

2.32. **Improved digital access and literacy**

2.33. *Public libraries provide a trusted network of accessible locations with free WiFi, computers, and other technology. As the world becomes more digital, access to technology and the ability to operate confidently and safely are ever more important.*

2.34. *Trained library staff, supported by volunteers, help local people use online services covering areas like benefits, business, health and wellbeing. They also provide the training and support individuals need to become independent users of digital services.*

2.35. **Assisted Digital Support**

2.36. The Library & Heritage Service focusses its support on those most in need who potentially have limited access or knowledge of the Internet and other IT applications. In order to support residents, it provides a broad range of one to one and group IT support.

2.37. As part of the development of its assisted digital offer staff and volunteers have been trained in supporting customers with Universal Credit and other government services. Libraries play an important role in supporting customers with online Council services and applications for the EU Settlement Scheme.

2.38. **Library Services Platform (LSP)**

2.39. Libraries have recently replaced their core ICT infrastructure with a new system provided by Sirsi Dynix. Working collaboratively with the London Libraries Consortium (LLC), a consortium consisting of 18 London boroughs, a new platform has been procured that provides customers with improved web services including better personalisation of customer interests. The new solution also provides features such as a customer app and better integration with online services such as the borough's e-books and online reference resources.

2.40. Over the course of the contract the platform will be further developed to include additional features for customers including the enhancement of events and activities promotion along with new customisation and personalisation options.

2.41. **Self-Service Technology**

2.42. Self-service technology continues to be an important element of the libraries delivery model and accounted for 98% of customer transactions in 2018/19.

2.43. Self-service technology will be replaced in 2021 and new features are proposed to be introduced such as the ability to enable customers to access library services when there isn't a staffed presence through new membership card recognition systems.

2.44. **Healthier and Happier Lives**

2.45. *Councils have a responsibility for their communities' social wellbeing and for public health. They increasingly focus on preventative work, helping people manage their own health to reduce both the burden on the NHS and health inequalities. By extending joint working and sharing resources with health providers, public libraries will become increasingly important partners, leading to users having healthier and happier lives.*

2.46. **Prevention services**

2.47. Collaboration has been strengthened with partners to provide better support to assist people in living healthier and happier lives. This has included the introduction of new standards of service to make our buildings more dementia and autism friendly whilst enhancing the information offer.

2.48. The prevention offer through libraries and other public spaces is a key part of the Community & Housing Target Operating Model (TOM) plans.

2.49.   **Health Offer**

2.50.   The service works collaboratively with Public Health, social care, other health providers and Adult Learning colleagues to promote a range of initiatives to link in messages around good personal health. This includes supporting initiatives to raise awareness of health matters such as healthy eating, sexual health, diabetes and smoking cessation. A year round approach to promoting healthier lifestyles through libraries is in place and links in with national and local initiatives. In January libraries run the annual 'New Year, New Start' campaign that promotes a wide range of healthy living initiatives and promotes the work of health partners across the borough.

2.51.   **Tuned In**

2.52.   The impact of loneliness is a major public issue. It is known to have a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing causing depression and increasing the risk of premature death. Merton's public health team estimate that there are over 8,000 lonely people who live in the borough.

2.53.   Tuned In launched in 2019 and is a project which aims to combat some of the issues of loneliness in the borough with funding from the Winter Pressures Fund. Tuned In works with acclaimed musician, performer, writer and London Libraries Ambassador Jah Wobble (aka John Wardle), who facilitates musical jam sessions every Monday at Merton Arts Space, Wimbledon library. The sessions share and develop musical skills and build knowledge, as well as helping individuals build social connections and friendship groups. They create an environment for people from all walks of life to come together and enjoy mutual support.

2.54.   The project targets men, particularly those in the age group 50+, where loneliness is at its highest. However, the project is open and accessible to all. The sessions work on a drop in basis and regularly see 30+ individuals attend.

2.55.   The project works with a number of partners in the borough to help promote healthy lifestyles, including One You Merton, GLL, AFC Wimbledon and Fulham Football Club. They help raise awareness of the social and health benefits of organisations in Merton and this combined with the musical jam session aims to help reduce isolation, loneliness and build social connections and communities.

2.56.   To date over 130 people have participated in Tuned In sessions. Participants are tracked through their participation and asked a range of questions on their health and wellbeing. Of participants surveyed in the last evaluation round in winter 2020 the following outcomes were reported:

- 96% of respondents reporting that Tuned In sessions had improved their health and wellbeing.

- 35% of participants have increased their participation in sports, fitness or recreational (leisure) clubs or activities.

- 52% of participants are more aware of health services in the borough since attending Tuned In sessions.

- 83% have developed new friendships and / or relationships by attending Tuned In sessions.

- 61% have developed more satisfying friendships and relationships since attending Tuned In.

- 70% of participants feel more part of their local community since attending Tuned In sessions.

- 74% of participants now feel they have a greater network of people to ask for help.

2.57. **Stronger, More Resilient Communities**

2.58. *Libraries are open to everyone. Their staff understand their community's needs and are trusted to provide reliable guidance and support on a wide range of issues when people need help. So they're vital to help public service's reach out into communities.*

2.59. **Volunteering**

2.60. Merton's volunteering numbers are some of the highest of any UK library authority with 545 volunteers contributing 27,437 hours in 2018/19. A campaign to recruit additional volunteers continues to promote new opportunities including recruitment for support with Project Sense.

2.61. **Widening the community offer**

2.62. The library service provides a wide range of activities and events working in partnership with organisations from the community, business and health sectors. It also organises events to coincide with national initiatives such as LGBTQ Month, Black History Month, World Book Day and Dementia Awareness Week and supports borough events such as Wimbledon Bookfest and Merton Arts Trail.

2.63. **Greater Prosperity**

2.64. *The prosperity of an area is crucial for residents' wellbeing and quality of life. We want everyone to have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from this. Libraries support business to start up and grow by providing information and working with local economic development organisations to signpost businesses to sources of support and advice.*

2.65. **Employability and skills support**

2.66. Libraries provide a range of employability support services working with training providers. Examples include CV writing workshops, job clubs and other skills training.

2.67. The use of library services is integral for a number of community based courses and in a more informal way through sessions such as one to one IT support and other activities delivered by partners and volunteers.

2.68. Wimbledon Library hosts 'Wimbletech', an organisation that provides space, advice and support for start-up companies and co-workers and is part of Merton's Inward Investment Strategy. It currently has almost 200 resident members with a community digital platform scheduled to launch shortly.

2.69. **Helping Everyone Achieve Their Full Potential**

2.70. *Libraries raise people's aspirations and promote lifelong learning, supplementing formal education provided through schools, colleges and adult education. This is increasingly important given the accelerated pace of change in the workplace and the world more generally, meaning that skills and knowledge need more frequent updating.*

2.71. **Online Services**

2.72. With the introduction of the new LSP online services have been enhanced and mean that customers have improved access to resources such as e-books and online reference resources. The e-book offer has also significantly expanded due to collaboration work with other boroughs. Residents have access to over 80,000 e-book titles and around 400 e-magazines are published monthly.

2.73. **Adult Learning Services**

2.74. A range of services are provided in libraries to encourage lifelong learning and the service works closely with schools, colleges and adult learning to complement the borough offer.

2.75. Following the commissioning of adult learning services libraries are increasingly being used as venues for training. This includes a high proportion of courses in priority areas such as courses for people with learning disabilities and community based employability and language courses. Housing providers use libraries for their community training programmes too. The library setting provides an excellent environment for people to develop their skills and utilise the free resources available to them.

3 **PERFORMANCE**

3.1. The full year 2018/19 KPI (Key Performance Indicators) are summarised below:

Service Plan #	Description of performance measure	2017/18	2018/19	Target
SP08	No. of people accessing the library service by borrowing an item or using a People's Network terminal at least once in the previous 12 months	65,154	71,648	56,000
SP09	Number of visitors accessing the library service online	250,011	234,486	220,000
SP279	Monthly transactions – Staff and Self-Service	98%	98%	97%
SP280	Active volunteering numbers in libraries	293	276	230
SP287	Income generation	£361,512	£374,024	£317,167
SP480	Visitor Numbers	1,088,515	1,124,613	1,200,000

3.2. Performance has improved across most of the indicators with an increase in the number of active users of Merton's libraries meaning that Merton still retains the highest user to resident ratio of any London borough.

3.3. The only target not to be met was the library visitor figure target although performance has improved over the last year. The projects outlined in this report are expected to assist with further improvements in the performance of this indicator.

4   CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.1.   **Merton Library Customer Survey**

4.2.   The Library & Heritage Service Customer Survey was undertaken in October 2019. The responses showed high levels of customer satisfaction. The survey was conducted in two parts with a survey constructed for users of the library aged 16 and over and a separate survey for children and young people aged under 16.

4.3.   The library customer survey for users over the age of 16 reported the following headline figures:

- 95% of respondents rated the service overall as very good or good, an increase of 2% compared to the last survey, with 100% of respondents satisfied.

- 96% of respondents said they would recommend the service to someone else.

- 93% of customers rate library opening hours as very good or good and 100% of respondents are satisfied with the current opening hours offer.

- 99% of respondents regarded libraries as a safe space.

- Book borrowing remains the most popular service with 63% of respondents saying they had borrowed a book in the last year.

- 94% of respondents rated the overall customer service experience as very good or good with 100% satisfied with their experience.

- The biggest improvement area in terms of results was in the difference that libraries have made to people's lives with 75% of respondents saying using the library had made a difference to their lives; an increase of 5% compared to the last survey, with:
  - 53% of respondents saying the library had improved their confidence, a 15% increase since the previous survey;
  - 34% said it had helped them get better at reading, an increase of 9% since the last survey;
  - 30% saying it had improved their social life, an increase of 12% since the last survey;
  - 19% said they had improved their relationships as a result of using libraries, an increase of 7% since the last survey;
  - 14% said that using libraries had improved their health, a 4% increase since the previous survey.

4.4. The library customer survey for children and young people under the age of 16 reported the following headline results:

- 100% of respondents were satisfied with their library experience with 97% of respondents rating the library as very good/good, a 4% increase on the previous survey.

- 100% of respondents were satisfied with the overall customer service they experienced with 97% rating it as very good/good, a 4% increase since the previous survey.

- 95% respondents rated the inside of the library as very good/good, up from 91% since the last survey.

- 100% of respondents considered Merton's libraries to be a safe place with 95% of respondents rating the safety of the library as very good/good, an increase of 4% from the previous survey.

- 83% of respondents rated the choice of books as very good/good, a 6% increase in satisfaction since the last survey.

- 100% of respondents were satisfied with staff helpfulness with 96% rating it as very good/good, a 2% increase from the previous survey.

- 88% of all respondents said that the library had helped them in some way, a 20% increase since the previous survey.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. The Library & Heritage Service Plan 2020/21 outlines key projects to be delivered and was presented at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 6 February 2020.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The Library & Heritage Service has 7 libraries and a Heritage & Local Studies Centre based on the second floor of Morden Library. All libraries have either seen significant redevelopment works or new libraries have been built since 2005 apart from West Barnes Library.

6.2. There has been a pause in redevelopment proposals for West Barnes Library whilst Cross Rail 2 development options were considered by Network Rail. Officers are currently undertaking renewed work to move forward with the redevelopment proposals for West Barnes Library.

6.3. The Library & Heritage Service has a controllable budget of £1,701,000. It has one savings objective for this year to generate £38,000 of additional income through use of the Merton Arts Spaces, which is projected to be delivered.

6.4. A savings proposal in the MTFS has been proposed to deliver £60,000 of savings in 2022/23 through the reduction of the current security guard contract (£45,000) and an increase in income generation at the new library proposed at West Barnes Library (£15,000).

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. The Council is required under section 7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service, addressing the 'needs of adults and children'. Local authorities have a statutory duty to make provision for a library service but may decide on how this is to be done.

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

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Libraries hold a unique place within the community as a public space that is open to all. Where customers cannot make it to libraries a Home Visits Library Service provides books and other materials to people's homes. Increasingly Library Connect is also used as a way of engaging with underrepresented groups.

8.2. Residents from BAME backgrounds make the most effective use of libraries with high proportions in particular of Asian and Black British people.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None identified for the purpose of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

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

- None included for the purpose of this report.

This page is intentionally left blank