

## **Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 25 February 2015**

Agenda item: 6

Wards: All

**Subject: Library & Heritage Service Annual Report 2014/15**

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins

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### **Recommendations:**

- A. That the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel note progress made with the Library & Heritage Service in the last financial year and discuss key projects.
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. Merton's Library and Heritage Service continues to remain the most cost efficient library service in London with both usage and satisfaction of its library services continuing to increase. This report draws together budgetary and performance information to update the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel with the progress made by the Library & Heritage Service and highlights key challenges ahead. The report also provides information on regional and national developments.
- 1.2. The vision for the Library & Heritage Service is to provide excellent services at a low cost whilst continuing to achieve some of the highest levels of customer satisfaction across London. This is to be delivered through seven key objectives:
1. Excellent customer service in all aspects of what we deliver and being responsive to demand.
  2. Hosting an excellent core collection of stock in formats that our customers want.
  3. Providing a comprehensive information offer that addresses changes in the way people access information and is responsive to social issues.
  4. Having libraries that are modern, flexible and adaptable to enable a range of different services to be delivered at hours that are convenient for residents.
  5. Investing in technology to provide excellent and innovative online library facilities wherever you are.

6. Nurturing the love of reading at an early age by providing a focused range of services to children and families to improve literacy levels.
  7. Putting the community at the heart of all that we do by actively involving residents in service design and delivery.
- 1.3. Library services by their very nature continue to change and evolve to address ongoing financial constraints and to adapt services to meet new expectations. Increased community involvement in libraries is also radically changing the way services are delivered. Underpinning our vision are these key projects:
- a) **Making our libraries more accessible.** Reconfiguring opening hours to meet with residents needs and continuing to provide a core library offer whilst delivering efficiencies.
  - b) **Providing cutting edge technology that is responsive to customer needs.** Recognising that technology will play a key role in the library of the 21st century and that we will need to be at the forefront of technological advances. Working with our external technology supplier and IT services to realise excellence in all that we provide.
  - c) **Redefining our service offer.** Providing a broader range of services in partnership with other Council services and external providers.
  - d) **Developing our sites.** Maximising the use of library space for activities and providing services in a modern and inclusive environment.

## 2 DETAILS

### Making our libraries more accessible

#### Library opening hours

- 2.1. Since January 2014 opening hours have been extended at West Barnes and Donald Hope libraries. This has enabled our libraries to have a consistent opening hours offer across Merton and means that our libraries open more than ever before. This has been developed whilst continuing to deliver ongoing efficiencies.
- 2.2. User satisfaction with library opening hours is at its highest since records began. The Public Library User Survey (PLUS) shows that 98% of users rate library opening hours as either very good (54%), good (37%) or adequate (7%).
- 2.3. **Library Connect**
- 2.4. In order to make our libraries more accessible we also need to reach out to those who don't traditionally use our libraries or who live in areas of the borough where transport links are more limited. In order to deliver this a new initiative called Library Connect has been launched.
- 2.5. Library Connect is a high quality but low cost pop up library solution that can be quickly assembled in a number of areas. It provides the full suite of library

facilities including public Internet PC's, Wi-Fi and a range of activities in a compact solution. Library Connect has so far taken place at the Wimbledon Piazza, Wimbledon Centre Court Shopping Centre and South Mitcham Community Centre and there are plans for further events throughout this year.

- 2.6. Library Connect particularly aims to target demographic groups that use libraries less. In particular the focus is on increasing usage amongst working age and older people along with people in the Mitcham area where usage is proportionately lower than the rest of the borough. A total of 5,336 people visited the first three Library Connect events.

**Providing cutting edge technology that is responsive to customers' needs**

**E-books and e-magazines**

- 2.7. A growth area for the Library & Heritage Service is the increase in the number of people with portable devices able to read electronic books and other materials. The service has embraced this new technology and has put in place a number of initiatives to meet demand. This includes:
- Providing over 15,000 e-books that can be borrowed and downloaded for free and accessed anywhere with new title additions made every week.
  - Providing over 40 popular magazines including current and back issues that can be downloaded and kept for free.
  - Providing a loanable e-reader service as part of our Home Visits Library Service for clients with disabilities.
  - Providing on-site support from staff and volunteers in helping customers to set up their devices to download and use our e-services.
  - Running annual campaigns to promote the service. The 'Always With You' campaign is normally run in the lead up to Christmas. Partnering with retailer's gift cards can be issued as part of any present giving with instructions on how to access our free e-books and e-magazines.
- 2.8. In the last year our e-books service has seen an increase in usage of 43.48% based on year to date figures between April and December 2014.
- 2.9. The challenge to provide a more comprehensive e-book offer is part of a national challenge for public libraries. The DCMS commissioned William Sieghart to review the current e-book offer for public libraries in the face of reluctance from some publishers to release content to public libraries.
- 2.10. His findings have been formulated into four pilot projects with the outcomes of the pilots expected to be published early in 2015. As part of the pilots publishers have released all e-book content for the first time to public libraries. One of the current challenges for public libraries is that not all e-book stock is available. One significant change in policy that would enable content to be opened up would be the extension of the Public Lending Right to digital content.

### **Free public Wi-Fi and improved Internet access**

- 2.11. Since April 2013 all of Merton's public libraries provide free public Wi-Fi. The national picture is that only 40% of public libraries currently provide public Wi-Fi although the DCMS is keen to ensure that there is 100% availability in the next few years.
- 2.12. The Wi-Fi infrastructure in Merton has recently been upgraded due to a successful funding application to the GLA. Public Wi-Fi has been upgraded so that there is 100% coverage through all our buildings including in library halls and office areas. Superfast speeds now provide some of the quickest Internet in the borough and automatic device recognition means that customer's devices are automatically connected to our Internet when in a library after their first sign in.
- 2.13. In 2014 all of the public Internet computers in libraries were upgraded and provide improved speeds and accessibility as well as up-to-date versions of software packages.

### **Library website and app**

- 2.14. A library app was launched in the summer, which enables customers to be able to access the library catalogue, renew books and undertake other transactional activities on a smart phone. The library website was also upgraded and has improved accessibility options. Customers can undertake a range of transactional activities through the library website including updating their contact details so that pre-overdue notifications can be sent to renew their stock items before they incur a charge. Further updates will be made to the libraries website with a new version scheduled for summer 2015.
- 2.15. The Library & Heritage Service also uses Facebook and Twitter as key communication tools for promoting initiatives and issues a quarterly customer e-newsletter.

### **Self-Service Technology**

- 2.16. Self-service technology accounts for approximately 95% of transactions in libraries. This has been further boosted by the successful rollout of chip and pin payment services. In 2015/16 this well used technology will be replaced as it reaches its end of life and the service aims to make the technology more user friendly and to enable additional transactional services to be undertaken through them.

### **Redefining the service offer**

#### **Health and wellbeing**

- 2.17. Working closely with Public Health colleagues and 17 other health organisations in the borough a suite of health related activities are delivered in libraries from relaxation classes to support groups for people with various mental health conditions as examples. Through its volunteering scheme the Library & Heritage Service supports a number of people with various conditions to reintegrate into the wider community and to develop new skills.

#### **Literacy and numeracy**

- 2.18. Both literacy and numeracy skills are of national concern and research shows that children and young people are not developing these skills at as great a pace as other developed countries.
- 2.19. The annual 6 Book Challenge launched in January 2015. The scheme is established to support adults into improving their literacy skills and is aimed particularly at emergent readers. In 2014 109 people participated in the Challenge with 25 completing. All completers reported increased confidence in reading as a result of the scheme.
- 2.20. The National Numeracy Challenge was launched in February 2015 and Merton is one of the first borough's to pilot the scheme. It aims to reduce the number of adults in the UK with low levels of numeracy by over 1 million in the next five years. By numeracy it means 'everyday maths'; the maths that helps people to make decisions in day-to-day adult life and work. Without a reasonable level of numeracy, people will not be able to manage their money better and make more informed decisions.

### **Employability and skills support**

- 2.21. A range of activities and workshops are delivered in libraries to support people back into employment or to develop new skills. 6 partnerships are in place with organisations such as Ripe Enterprise, The National Career Service and Merton Priory Homes. The support available includes help with CV writing, interview skills, job searching as well as career advice and training.
- 2.22. The Library & Heritage Service also supports a number of the actions identified in the Adult Skills & Employability Scrutiny Panel review. Key deliverables include:
- The provision of tailored support programmes in local libraries to support writing applications, CV's and accessing online resources for interview practice etc.;
  - Supporting the councils assisted digital strategy;
  - Delivering Citizens Advice Bureau services in libraries.

### **Digital Literacy**

- 2.23. At least 20% of the national population have no digital technology at home, and far more fail to make the most of what they do have. Via one to one and group IT training the Library & Heritage Service is playing an important role in improving residents ICT skills.
- 2.24. All staff are trained to be able to support customers to access a range of different services from applying for a choice based letting to undertaking a number of online transactional services such as freedom pass renewals. Staff helpfulness has been particularly complemented and the recent e-PLUS showed that 99% of users felt that staff ICT support was either good (81%) or satisfactory (18%). The survey also highlighted that customers are more likely to ask staff for ICT support than ever before.
- 2.25. The Library & Heritage Service continues to play a crucial role in supporting digital literacy particularly with projects such as Customer Contact and Universal Credit coming up.

### **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

- 2.26. All library staff and selected volunteers have been trained to provide CAB information to customers using the Advice Guide website. The benefits of libraries being positioned as CAB information centres means that residents have improved access to CAB information and can access it more quickly. Since April 2014 at least 155 customers have received specific CAB support in libraries.

### **Children and young people**

- 2.27. The range of services for children and young people and the take up of these initiatives is high. 28,245 children and young people regularly use their library services.
- 2.28. The innovative Schools and Libraries Membership Scheme has led to increased work with Merton schools. Every primary school child in the borough is now a signed up library member. Through this partnership regular class visits to libraries are conducted with the specific aim to increase reading for pleasure.
- 2.29. Research shows the crucial significance of children reading independently and enthusiastically. It has been shown to be more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002). Research undertaken by the National Literacy Trust in 2011 found that young people who enjoy reading are more likely to read above the expected level for their age.
- 2.30. The Schools and Libraries Membership Scheme is only the second in the country to sign up every school child and is held up as a national good practice example. Over the next year the scheme will be widened to include secondary and special schools.
- 2.31. The annual Summer Reading Challenge, a national initiative for 4 to 12 year olds, achieved its highest take up in 2014. 10,787 children started the scheme with 1,947 completing. This represents a 369% increase in starters and a 135% in completion rates since 2012.
- 2.32. Services to young people are also improving and the Young Creatives, a group of young people aged between 11 and 24 years old, are developing services for this important age group. In the last year the group has published a collection of short stories and organised 6 activities in libraries.

### **'Developing our libraries'**

#### **Library Sites**

- 2.33. Following positive resident feedback the Library & Heritage Service is progressing plans to develop the West Barnes Library site. Market testing is currently underway prior to a proposed procurement exercise to bring in a developer to develop the library site with improved library space and additional community facilities along with the provision of housing. The scheme is similar in scope to the successful Raynes Park library development.
- 2.34. Planning permission has also been submitted by Urb Group Property Development to develop the library site in Colliers Wood. The development

includes provision for a three floor library that increases library and community space.

- 2.35. Both proposed developments would provide improved and sustainable libraries for future generations. If developments are to go ahead at both sites then temporary library facilities would be provided in the local area using the Library Connect infrastructure.

### **Library Space**

- 2.36. Libraries are the Council's main high street presence and the way that the space is accessed and used has evolved significantly. All of Merton's libraries are used for a wide range of formal and informal learning activities and this will continue to be developed. Libraries also play a significant role in supporting digital literacy and a number of the activities mentioned above go a long way towards making our libraries vibrant hubs of the community. The usage of space will continue to be reviewed to ensure that our libraries are well used.

### **'Community Involvement'**

#### **Volunteering**

- 2.37. In 2013/14 533 volunteers contributed 37,193 hours of time towards libraries. This is the highest level of volunteering in London and similar performance figures are expected to be achieved in 2014/15. The volunteering model in libraries is now well established and continues to be used as a national best practice example.

#### **Library Ambassadors**

- 2.38. In developing the role of library volunteers a new role of 'Library Ambassador' has been created. This role assists with the promotion of our services and supports with going out to underrepresented groups to promote and raise awareness of the services that are provided. A campaign is currently underway to recruit more volunteers into these roles.

### **'National Picture and Collaborative Working'**

#### **Independent review of Public Libraries in England**

- 2.39. William Sieghart's DCMS commissioned independent report on public libraries in England was published on 18 December 2014. The three major recommendations of the report are:
- The provision of a national digital resource for libraries, to be delivered in partnership with local authorities.
  - The setting up of a task and finish force, led by local government, in partnership with other bodies involved in the library sector, to provide a strategic framework for England, and to help in implementing the following...
  - The task force, to work with local authorities, to help them improve, revitalise and if necessary, change their local library service, while encouraging, appropriate to each library, increased community involvement.

#### **London Libraries Consortium**

2.40. Ongoing collaborative work for the London Borough of Merton includes the expansion of the London Libraries Consortium (LLC). The LLC is a consortia of London boroughs that work together to share a library management system. The consortia also jointly procures contracts for services such as stock and transport to achieve some of the best rates available in the public library network.

#### **Peer Support**

2.41. The London Borough of Merton has also been commissioned to undertake reviews of other library services across the country and support them through their change programs. This work continues to provide a useful insight into the national picture of libraries and an additional income stream.

#### **'Heritage Services'**

#### **Heritage Strategy**

2.42. The Library & Heritage Service is in the process of completing the Heritage Strategy 2015 – 2020, which is scheduled to go to Cabinet in late spring / early summer 2015. The new Strategy is more community focussed and has received substantial input from the Heritage and Design Working Group, a working group that consists of council officers, members, heritage organisations and other residents groups.

2.43. Consultation is currently being concluded with the voluntary and business sector before finalising. Four key themes have been developed:

- Raising Merton's profile by increasing public access to the borough's unique and diverse cultural heritage;
- Safeguarding the borough's varied heritage sites and resources, preserving and conserving them for the benefit of future generations;
- Ensuring that Merton's heritage provision is inclusive by working collaboratively to widen public engagement and participation;
- To secure ongoing funding and investment in Merton's heritage through partnership work, external funding and sponsorship.

#### **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)**

2.44. Since the borough was designated as a priority borough by the HLF in 2011 substantial work has been undertaken to generate new funding bids for the borough. Working closely with community organisations during this period 12 successful HLF bids have been made. The total funding drawn down comes to almost £8,000,000.

2.45. Projects that have received HLF funding include The Canons, Merton Memories, Carved in Stone and Merton Priory. A borough funding tracker is monitored closely through the Heritage & Design Working Group and highlights ongoing activities. There is close synergy between the funding tracker and the objectives set out in the new Heritage Strategy.

2.46. **Merton Memories**



- 2.47. Merton Memories is an online resource that provides digital access for the first time to over 15,000 unique images of the borough from over the last 150 years through to the present day. The project received £50,000 from the HLF to be delivered. Launched in April 2014 the website has seen an unprecedented level of interest and over 6,000 unique visits to the website are made per month.
- 2.48. Discovery Days were held to launch the initiative with a range of activities and events delivered in Morden Library. The Discovery Days delivered a range of activities in partnership with heritage organisations and other community groups. The Discovery Days had over 2,900 visits and received excellent feedback from all who attended. The next Discovery Day is scheduled for 28 March 2015 to launch the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the formation of the borough.

### Commemorative and Celebratory Events

- 2.49. The Heritage Service continues to support with a number of commemorative and celebratory events. In particular it has supported with commemorative events to mark one hundred years since the outbreak of World War One. The 'Carved in Stone' project will explore the lives of those commemorated on local memorials around Merton. This £80,000 HLF funded project has just started and will ensure that there is a lasting digital legacy of all of Merton's war dead.
- 2.50. Support is also being provided to deliver a number of activities to celebrate fifty years since the formation of the borough. Apart from the Discovery Day event a touring exhibition will take place across a range of community sites. The borough is also encouraging local communities to theme events around the anniversary with the aim of having a minimum of fifty events.

## 3 PERFORMANCE

- 3.1. For 2013/14 all key performance indicators were met. A summary of the KPI's is included below:

Service Plan #	Description of performance measure	Final 2012/13	Year to Date 2012/13	Year to Date 2013/14	Merton Target 2013/14	RAG Indicator
SP 08	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.	53,617	53,617	60,333	54,000	BLUE
SP 09	Number of visitors accessing the library service online	156,007	156,007	166,872	110,000	BLUE
SP 279	Monthly transactions - Staff and Self-service	95%	95%	95%	95%	GREEN
SP 280	Active volunteering numbers in libraries	313	313	310	180	BLUE
SP 282	Partnership numbers	28	28	28	25	BLUE
SP 287	Increase income generation to £282,570	£310,086	310,086	£305,209	£282,570	GREEN

- 3.2. For 2014/15 all KPI's are expected to be met again although there are some challenges around income collection. Improved technology has led to a reduction in fine accrual however usage of libraries has increased which may potentially offset this. Additional lettings are also helping to meet the gap.

- 3.3. Usage levels are at an all-time high with 62,587 having used a library where a library card needed to be presented (i.e. to borrow a book, use a public Internet computer or access our online services) in the last year. This figure is based on December 2014 performance information and equates to at least 31% of the resident population regularly using their libraries. This is an increase of 13% in usage since 2008.
- 3.4. Whilst online visits continue to see a significant increase physical visits to public libraries are also on the increase. There has been a 3% increase in physical visits based on year to date figures (April to December 2014).

## **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

### **Working age and older people research project**

- 4.1. One of the key shifts in library usage over the last 10 years has been the significant increase in usage by children and young people. Usage amongst working age and older people has broadly remained static. A research project is currently underway to ascertain views on why some people no longer use their libraries and will be used to assist with any future redesign of library services. Satisfaction with library services, even amongst non-users, is high so the research project will seek to understand some of the underlying issues regarding non usage. Part of the project will also ascertain knowledge of current service provision.

### **Annual Residents Survey (ARS)**

- 4.2. The 2014 ARS results show an increase by 1% to 81% satisfaction with library services amongst users. This is against a picture of declining satisfaction with library services across London and has moved Merton further into the highest quartile of satisfaction with libraries. Libraries satisfaction levels are 10% above the London average.

### **Public Library User Survey (PLUS)**

- 4.3. This years PLUS focussed on electronic services and showed an increase in satisfaction with services. 99% of customers rated the ICT services in libraries as either good (87%) or satisfactory (12%). Substantial training has also been put in place to improve staff ICT skills and this was reflected in the survey results with 100% of customers rating staff knowledge as either good (84%) or satisfactory (16%). The report also showed increased demand for staff support using ICT with 47% of respondents asking for support.

### **West Barnes Library**

- 4.4. Consultation has been undertaken regarding the development of the site. Between 12 September and 24 October 2014 an online and paper consultation was undertaken to seek resident's views on the development. The consultation along with a briefing paper was also issued to all households in the West Barnes ward. Further consultation also took place at local resident and community forums.
- 4.5. 421 residents responded to the consultation. The key findings were:

- 79.86% of respondents reported that they were more likely to use the library if it was developed.
- Soft seating, activities for adults and books were the things that respondents would like to see more of in the new library.
- The 3 most important things identified in the new library are book stock, public toilets and the children's area.
- In terms of additional facilities not currently provided the highest responses were for coffee shop facilities and public toilets.
- Of the free text comments submitted the vast majority were supportive of the development and the levels of service currently available. 28.42% of the free text comments wanted the development to happen as soon as possible.

## **5 TIMETABLE**

- 5.1. The Library & Heritage Service Plan 2015-19 highlights key projects and timescales. This plan was reviewed by Cabinet on 16 February 2015.

## **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. The Library & Heritage Service budget for 2014/15 is £2,493,580. An underspend of £14,939 is currently being reported, which is mainly attributable to some short term staff vacancies and an underspend in the media fund.
- 6.2. Savings proposals for 2016/17 and 2017/18 were reviewed at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 8 January 2015.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The Council is required to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service, addressing the 'needs of adults and children', according to the Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964. Local authorities have a statutory duty to make provision for a library service but may decide on how this is to be done.
- 7.2. Certain aspects of the service must be provided for free including free lending of books, free access to information and free library membership.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. Libraries hold a unique place within the community as a public space that is open to all. Where customers cannot make it to libraries a Home Visits Library Service provides books and other materials to people's homes.
- 8.2. Residents from BAME backgrounds make the most effective use of libraries with high proportions in particular of Asian and Black British people regularly using libraries. Under representation is at its highest within White British

communities and in particular in the Mitcham area. A targeted outreach plan has been constructed to focus on increasing usage amongst under used groups.

**9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. None identified.

9.2.

**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.

**12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. None included.