

Committee	Healthier Communities Select Committee		
Report Title	Update on Community Libraries		
Date	12 December 2012	Item	3

1. Introduction

1.1. On 11 May 2011 Mayor and Cabinet:

- agreed the asset transfer of the library buildings in Crofton Park, Grove Park and Sydenham
- instructed officers to continue to seek alternative users for the New Cross building
- agreed the proposal from Age Exchange for Blackheath including the re-assigning of the lease on the library building to a third party and the transfer of the library facilities into the Reminiscence Centre, and
- agreed to deliver Community Library facilities in the affected neighbourhoods.

1.2. On 14 December 2011, the Healthier Communities Select Committee, having considered the report on the issues above, recommended:

- that thanks should be passed on to the anchor/host organisations, their staff and many volunteers for the hard work they have put into developing and providing a wide range of resources and activities for local people.
- that the Mayor and Cabinet continue to do all it can to keep all of the libraries operating fully, and continue to support the close working relationships between the anchor/host organisations and the Council's Library & Information Service.

and noted:

- that the Library & Information Service is still in transition after its recent restructure and that the community libraries are still developing. The Committee also noted that the anchor/host organisations consider they would benefit from further developing the supportive working relationships they are developing across the three organisations.

2. Purpose

2.1. This report offers an update on the performance of the Library & Information Service in Lewisham with particular regard to the provision of library services in community venues. The performance report is based on recorded measures between April and October 2012, against those in the previous year.

3. Recommendations

3.1. The Healthier Communities Select Committee is asked to:

- note the contents of the report, and
- comment on the recent performance of the Library Service

4. Policy context

4.1. Shaping the Future, the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy includes the following priority outcomes which relate to the work of the Library & Information Service and reflect the Council's aspirations for the service:

- Ambitious and Achieving – where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential.
- Empowered and Responsible – where people can be actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities.
- Healthy, Active and Enjoyable – where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and wellbeing.
- Dynamic and Prosperous – where people are part of vibrant localities and town centres, well connected to London and beyond.

4.2. The Library & Information Service also contributes to the following Council Priorities:

- Community leadership and empowerment – developing opportunities for the active participation and engagement of people in the life of the community.
- Strengthening the local economy – gaining resources to regenerate key localities, strengthen employment skills and promote public transport.
- Active, healthy citizens – leisure, sporting, learning and creative activities for everyone.

4.3. The Quirk Review of community management and ownership of public assets was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in May 2007. It found that while there are risks and practical challenges involved, there are no insurmountable obstacles to successfully transferring assets to community management and ownership. In July 2008 Mayor and Cabinet agreed an Asset Transfer Framework to provide a basis for identifying, assessing and making decisions on potential assets



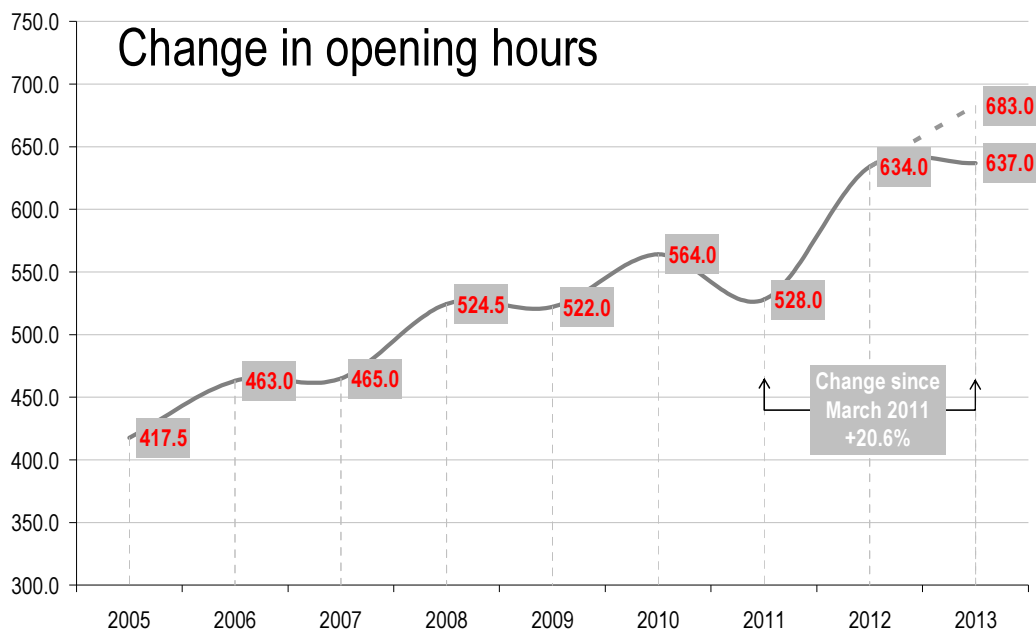
Lewisham in figures (Estimates 2012-2013)

- Population 275,885
- 12 libraries
- over 1.7 million visits
- 768k issues
- 53,000 residents (20.4%) borrowed a book
- Books gifted to 100% of under 5s
- Net Expenditure £16.25/head

where ownership could be transferred in a way that is transparent, consistent and linked to wider strategic objectives.

5. Background

- 5.1. Library services across the country are experiencing substantial challenges as a result of the reduction in resources available to local authorities.
- 5.2. There is still some confusion in relation to the provision of library services in Lewisham, following the major changes introduced in the last two years. Some reports in the professional and popular press continue to refer to library “closures” and poor performance. There have in fact not been any library closures in Lewisham and the Council continues to provide library facilities and services in all twelve libraries. In the community libraries however the management and development of the buildings themselves have been transferred to community organisations.
- 5.3. In the last year, Lewisham has joined the London Libraries Consortium, introduced a new Library Management System, introduced SmartSM, a new piece of software that will analyse Lewisham’s collections of stock comparing them to those of the rest of the country, and restructured the service. At an operational level, the library service has continued to support the development of the community libraries, decommissioned Wavelengths Library and opened the new Deptford Lounge. Overall, this intensive programme has led to a 20.6% increase in library opening hours, 10% increase in online reference enquiries, and 400% increase in eBook loans.



6. The Service – Staffing

- 6.1. The reorganisation of the library service has substantially changed the way in which it is structured, introducing a flatter structure, generic and flexible job roles and increasing front line capacity whilst maintaining key professional roles.
- 6.2. The structure of the service allows for flexibility and growth, to support developments through increased collaboration with other library services, other council departments, and with community groups.
- 6.3. The Service is divided into two teams, the Business Development Unit and the Business Delivery Unit. The first works to develop products, programmes and audiences, the second to deliver them to customers including the ongoing peripatetic support of the community library service.

7. The Service – The Community Library Model

- 7.1. As part of the Council's £88 million savings programme, Lewisham Council decided to withdraw from the management of five "library buildings", to pursue the option of transferring them to the community and to reorganise the remaining provision. In Blackheath it was decided to surrender the lease of the building and find an alternative site for a community library provision. By transferring the buildings to the community the Council saved ca. £240k on upkeep and maintenance, and by reorganising the service it saved ca. £755k on salary costs. Including the reduction in costs on IT maintenance and software, the service contributed ca. £1m of savings.
- 7.2. This approach created an opportunity for community groups and organisations to acquire the former library buildings for alternative uses at minimal or no rent, as long as they committed to maintaining the building and keeping them open to the community. Crucially, the community library model also meant that the Council could still provide Council library services from the building, even after it had been transferred.
- 7.3. The Council is responsible for the books, for the shelving, for the self-service terminals and the library catalogue. It maintains the stock to the standard it applies to all its collections. It promotes reader development programmes and trains the staff and volunteers at the community libraries.
- 7.4. The Council has not transferred its statutory responsibility to deliver library services to third parties (i.e. volunteers). The community library provision is the responsibility of the Library & Information Service as is any other outreach programme it delivers. However, the Service benefits from the commitment of the anchor / host organisations to promoting books and reading and offering access to library services in the buildings they are responsible for. The host organisations have developed a range of complementary services which enhance to library offer.

- 7.5. In May 2011, the Council transferred four library buildings to community groups and relocated one to a community venue. Crofton Park, Grove Park and Sydenham have been leased at no cost to Eco Computer Systems, a social enterprise that works recycling technology and delivering training. Age Exchange, a charity based in Blackheath, was grant aided £200k of funding to match over £500k of money they had raised to support the refurbishment of their Reminiscence Centre. A group of local residents, New Cross Learning, joined with the social enterprise Bold Vision, to run the New Cross building.
- 7.6. In all cases, the third party, as well as signing a lease or funding agreements with the council, committed to supporting the provision of library services in their buildings at no cost to the council.
- 7.7. The Service is working with Axiell UK and all the Community Libraries to roll out OG Touch. This is a new and bespoke IT solution which will allow volunteers restricted access to the Libraries' database and enable them to more fully support users in accessing services (e.g. searching the catalogue, placing reservations). Lewisham and Axiell UK are developing OG Touch, which is gaining interest from other authorities keen to adopt a system for similar use.

8. Performance

- 8.1. Overall, the service is looking to encourage reading and reader development through online activity and access to books as well as book issues at the library buildings.
- 8.2. The disruption inherent in the transformation, and the subsequent impact of this on the staff and public resulted in a temporary, if marked, decrease in performance. However, between April and October 2012 performance at the seven libraries has improved when compared to the previous year: Issues increased by 10.1% (despite substantial closures at Catford Library due to unexpected maintenance work) and Visits increased by 3.5%.

- 8.3. Deptford Lounge is particularly successful contributing averages of almost 28,000 visits and over 10,000 issues per month. This library issued 160% more books than the former Wavelengths branch, and visits are up 197% since April, when compared to the previous year. The availability of Wi-Fi has made this building particularly attractive to younger users, and its links to the Albany Theatre has made it into a key local cultural venue.

Issues

Apr to Oct		
12 libraries last year	7 libraries last year	5 libraries last year
458,838	394,119	64,719
12 libraries this year	7 libraries this year	5 libraries this year
478,215	433,947	44,268
Change	Change	Change
4.2%	10.1%	-31.6%

Visits

Apr 2012 to Sept 2012		
12 libraries last year	7 libraries last year	5 libraries last year
1,003,014	895,977	107,037
12 libraries this year	7 libraries this year	5 libraries this year
1,062,038	927,298	134,740
Change	Change	Change
5.9%	3.5%	25.9%

- 8.4. The five community buildings are also thriving both as local hubs and as libraries. The anchor organisation, Eco

Computers, completed important repairs to the roofs, the outside and the interiors of Crofton Park, Sydenham, and Grove Park.

- 8.5. These new partners are attracting new activities into the buildings. Some have set up work clubs helping residents back to work and providing business start-up advice. Amongst other activities, they are delivering computer training to residents as well as offering sit down exercise classes for the elderly.
- 8.6. The Council has introduced self-service throughout all five buildings. Negotiations on the lease for New Cross are at a final stage and should be concluded before the end of the year. The Reminiscence Centre reopened on 22nd November 2012 following the complete refurbishment of the building, which now provides a new community library service for Blackheath.
- 8.7. In the first seven months of this year, Visits to the Community Libraries have increased substantially (+25.9%) but Issues have decreased (-31.6%). The Library Service believes that this is mostly due to the loss of Blackheath's contribution – which should now be replaced by a thriving provision at the new building. Over the 12 libraries, however, performance on Issues has increased by 4.2%.
- 8.8. The refurbishment of the Reminiscence Centre building meant that the library provision in Blackheath has been in temporary premises since the Summer of 2011. In the final stages of the building work the provision was totally suspended with an attendant drop in usage. The Service experienced similar drops in performance in relation to the closure for refurbishment of Downham (2006), Forest Hill (2007), Manor House (2008), and Torridon (2011).
- 8.9. The programme of transformation demonstrates the Borough's continuous commitment to providing a quality library service to residents, while improving its efficiency. The community library provision is to be expanded to include an additional service point in the North of the borough at the Pepys Resources Centre. Self-service technology is being introduced there, which will link the building to the main library service, making it a sixth community library for Lewisham.
- 8.10. As well as investing in the Community Libraries, Lewisham has reorganised its budget to release additional resources for the book fund (+14%) and has acquired the SmartSM software for the analysis of its collections. These strategic choices will ensure that the quality of the offer in Lewisham's libraries continues to improve.
- 8.11. Stellar Libraries – the nationally acclaimed reader development agency – have been offered free office space at Crofton Park Library from where, this year's City Read will be coordinated. City Read is a pan London reader development programme with buy-in from all London boroughs.

- 8.12. Anchor/host organisations have helped a number of their volunteers into work and continue to provide opportunities to develop their skills.
- 8.13. The Library & Information Service continues to how best it can support the anchor/host organisations, by identifying link staff at each 'hub' library to provide assistance with library-related issues as they arise. In addition, the Service is exploring how it can work together with the anchor/host organisations to dispose of withdrawn library stock, thereby raising additional revenue for the local hub and for the Service.
- 8.14. Among the most conspicuous achievements of the anchor/host organisations, it is important to mention:
- Eco Computer Systems repaired the roofs of the three buildings it is responsible for. They have not re-decorated Grove Park, introduced a new café in Crofton Park, and are working to introduce a café in Sydenham.
 - Age Exchange has reopened the refurbished Reminiscence Centre and community library.
 - Bold Vision has been successful in securing a grant of £60,000 over two years to help New Cross Learning establish itself as a separate and sustainable entity, which in time will take over the New Cross building.
 - The four anchor organisations continue to work co-operatively across the five buildings, trading expertise and information in particular the development of working partnerships with other local third sector organisations.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There are no specific financial implications to this report. The community libraries use the book stock purchased by the Council and occupy their premises rent-free but otherwise receive no financial support.

11. Equalities implications

- 11.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

12. Crime and disorder implications

- 12.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

13. Environmental implications

- 13.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

14. Conclusion

- 14.1 This report updates Members on the progress of the Library & Information Service and the provision of community library services in particular, following the major service changes implemented during 2011/12. The performance trends are positive throughout.

Background Papers

1. May 2011 Report + EIA:

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=1443&ISATT=1#search=%22library%22>

2. Mayor and Cabinet Report from HCSC 18 January 2012

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=7306>

3. HCSC report 14 December 2011

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=6983>

4. Mayoral response to the comments of the Healthier Communities Select Committee on the Library & Information Service

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s8101/Response%20on%20Community%20Libraries%20to%20Healthier%20Communities%20OSC.pdf>

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