**Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 30 April 2019**

Wards: All

**Subject: Library & Heritage Service Annual Report 2018/19**

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

Lead member: Councillor Nick Draper – Cabinet Member for Community and Culture

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**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:

- Installation of the new Library System Platform (LSP) including the launch of a new customer website with enhanced features

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

- Work to make our libraries more dementia and autism friendly and the development of new services to promote prevention to support people to live fuller and healthier lives.

- Development of assisted digital services including universal credit and UK Visa Support services.

- Completion of centenary events for World War One and the women's suffrage movement.

- Further development of the schools and libraries membership scheme particularly around the offer for high schools.

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.    <u>**Increased Reading and Literacy**</u>

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.    **Schools and Libraries Membership Scheme**

2.4.    Merton has a unique schools and libraries membership scheme that all school age children aged 5 - 14 are signed up to. The scheme has been further developed this year to include a new activity programme for high school children including talks from local entrepreneurs and music and cultural activities that link to the learning and reading offer.

2.5.    The schools and libraries membership scheme is also being further developed in collaboration with SEND schools to provide a more focussed offer for them.

2.6.    Merton participated in the national Summer Reading Challenge for children aged 4 – 12 years. This year's scheme saw an increase in take up of 19% with 3,169 children participating despite there being a national decline.

2.7.    **Adult Literacy Projects**

2.8.    With Arts Council England funding the City of Stories initiative is a pan-London project administered by the London Borough of Merton in collaboration with literacy development charity Spread the Word. It has positioned libraries as a place to discover and create stories by:

- Celebrating and promoting short stories to readers across London libraries;

- Engaging London's diverse communities with telling their own stories;

- Supporting the development of London's emerging short story writers.

2.9.    Participants took part in free creative writing workshops and short story competitions; free reading events in libraries; and read new work by City of Stories writers-in-residence and competition winners.

2.10.   In 2018, 42 writing workshops took place in 21 boroughs including Merton. 313 writers participated with 21 winners and 41 highly commended writers. Their stories, along with new work from the writers in residence, are published in a new City of Stories anthology. Two writers went on to be selected for Spread the Word's PLATFORM scheme for emerging talented writers.

2.11.   **Library Connect**

2.12.   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.

2.13.    **Cultural and Creative Enrichment**

2.14.    *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.*

2.15.    **Merton Arts Space**

2.16.    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.

2.17.    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 and a £38,000 income generation saving is included in this year's MTFS.

2.18.    **World War One and Women's Suffrage Centenary Events**

2.19.    The Heritage Service commemorated the centenary of World War 1 through the Carved in Stone project. This included a programme of events, talks and exhibitions at library and community venues; guided walks of wartime sites; archive film screenings; the creation of school resource packs, a Merton at War trail and special events to film family war stories. Volunteers researched the biographies of over 600 local combatants and aspects of life on the Home Front, which have been made available via the Carved in Stone website, together with over 1,500 digitised documents. The Heritage Service also assisted Merton schools, churches and museums in staging events to honour local war dead, including the laying of memorials to two Merton VCs. Staff also helped to organise the 'Battle's Over' event on Armistice Day, combining readings, music and acts of commemoration.

2.20.    For the centenary of women's suffrage events included a public debate featuring esteemed suffrage historians; an exhibition and guided walk about the local suffrage movement; a series of local history talks; a specially commissioned touring play ('Rebellious Women') by Attic Theatre Company; screenings of archive suffragette footage and a re-enactment of a suffragette garden party. Partnering with Digital Drama on the 100 Banners project, a banner making workshop attended by Helen Pankhurst and Philippa Bilton (a relative of suffragette Emily Wilding Davison) was held. The resulting banners were featured in the 2018 March4Women and a suffrage themed gathering at the Royal Albert Hall.

2.21.    **Improved digital access and literacy**

2.22.    *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.*

2.23.    *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.*

2.24. **Assisted Digital Support**

2.25. 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.

2.26. 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 also play an important role in supporting customers with online Council services and are part of a national project to provide support for UK Visa applicants.

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

2.28. 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 16 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.

2.29. Over the course of the contract the platform will be further developed to include additional features for customers. The platform will also be able to better promote the broad range of activities and events delivered in libraries.

2.30. **Self-Service Technology**

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

2.32. Self-service technology is being enhanced to enable customers to pay for photocopying and printing via card payments or via Apple or Android pay. Wi-Fi printing is also being introduced so that customers can print documents from their own devices via a new solution called Princh.

2.33. **Healthier and Happier Lives**

2.34. *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.*

2.35. **Prevention services**

2.36. 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 and enhancing the information offer. Other examples include the opening of Merton's first fully dementia friendly library at Colliers Wood and a new sensory children's library in Morden.

2.37. 'Tuned In', a facilitated music project held in the Wimbledon Arts Space takes place every Monday evening. The project engages mainly with men over the age of 50 to improve social integration and health outcomes of participants. Health and exercise advice are provided by project partners such as GLL, One You Merton and the Fulham Foundation.

2.38. **Health Offer**

2.39. The service works collaboratively with Public Health, 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.

2.40. **Stronger, More Resilient Communities**

2.41. *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.*

2.42. **Volunteering**

2.43. Merton's volunteering numbers are some of the highest of any UK library authority with 545 volunteers contributing 27,437 hours in 2018/19. Whilst numbers remain high a campaign to recruit additional volunteers is underway to promote new roles to further support with the delivery of services.

2.44. **Widening the community offer**

2.45. 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.

2.46. **Greater Prosperity**

2.47. *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.*

2.48. **Employability and skills support**

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

2.50. 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.

2.51. 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.

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

2.53. *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.*

2.54. **Online Services**

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

2.56. 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.

2.57. **Adult Learning Services**

2.58. 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 most recent 2018/19 KPI performance is 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 | Increase income generation* | £361,512 | £360,086 | £317,167 |
| SP480 | Visitor Numbers (year to date comparison with 2017/18 figures) | 1,088,515 | 1,124,613 | 1,200,000 |

3.2.

*SP08, SP279 and SP287 are YTD February 2019 performance information. All other indicators are end of year figures*

3.3. Performance has remained stable across the service with a significant 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. All other targets apart from the visitor figures target are either the highest in London or represent top quartile performance.

3.4. A new KPI for visitor figures has been included this year and whilst the target has not been met there has been an overall increase of 3% on previous year's figures and work continues to improve performance.

**4          CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. **Merton Library User Survey**

4.2. The last Library & Heritage Service customer survey was undertaken in October 2016 with the next survey to be completed later this year. The responses showed high levels of customer satisfaction with:

- 99% of respondents feeling that libraries are a safe place.

- 97% of respondents rated the choice of books as very good (36%), good (43%) or satisfactory (18%).

- 99% of respondents rated the information provision in libraries as very good (39%), good (48%) or satisfactory (12%).

- 99% of respondents rated the events in libraries as very good (33%), good (44%) or satisfactory (22%).

- 54% of respondents required staff support with 100% of those requiring support rating staff support as very good (71%), good (25%) or satisfactory (4%).

- Taking everything into account 100% of respondents were satisfied with the service with 60% rating it as very good, 34% as good and 6% as satisfactory.

**5          TIMETABLE**

5.1. The Library & Heritage Service Plan 2019/20 outlines key projects to be delivered and was presented at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on 9 January 2019.

**6          FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. The Library & Heritage Service has a controllable budget of £2,187,000. It has one savings objective for this year to generate £38,000 of additional income through use of the Merton Arts Spaces.

6.2. 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. There is a pause in the West Barnes Library redevelopment proposals to allow for further consultation to be completed regarding Cross Rail 2 as it has an impact on potential plans to redevelop the site.

**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. 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.