

**Decision Maker:** Renewal and Recreation PDS Committee

**Date:** 10 July 2012

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent                      Non-Executive                      Non-Key

**Title:** Libraries Survey – Outcome of Consultation

**Contact Officer:** Colin Brand Assistant Director Renewal and Recreation  
Tel: 020 8313 4107 E-mail: colin.brand@bromley.gov.uk

**Chief Officer:** Marc Hume – Director of Renewal and Recreation

**Ward:** Borough Wide

---

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 This reports sets out the outcome of the consultative exercise that was undertaken across the boroughs libraries.
- 

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 That Members of the Renewal and Recreation PDS Committee note the outcome of the consultation and make any comments or recommendations to the Portfolio Holder with regard to further action.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable:
2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People Excellent Council Quality Environment Supporting Independence Vibrant, Thriving Town Centres
- 

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: N/A
2. Ongoing costs:N/A:
3. Budget head/performance centre: Libraries

4. Total current budget for this head: £4.1m
  5. Source of funding: Existing controllable revenue budget 2012/13 for front line library services
- 

#### Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 105.5ftes
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
- 

#### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
  2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
- 

#### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): There were 2,057,961 visits made to the boroughs libraries in 2011/12 which was 3.4% up on the 2010/11 figure. In the main the difference was attributable to the opening of the new Orpington Library and the continuing success of Biggin Hill Library.
  2. There were 1,702,366 books issued across all Libraries in 2011/12.
  3. The percentage of available IT time taken up across all libraries was 48.4%
- 

#### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Ward Members views were sought in the compilation of the questionnaires.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

### **3. COMMENTARY**

- 3.1 As agreed at the Renewal and Recreation Committee in December 2011, copies of the draft questionnaires were circulated to Ward Members to ascertain their views and comments. Following receipt of these comments, the questionnaires were finalised. The trade unions and library departmental representatives were also consulted and provided with a copy of the draft questionnaires for comment.
- 3.2 Given that, usage, opening hours and the range of services available differs widely between libraries, the questionnaires were developed to capture these differences.
- 3.3 Surveys were conducted with library visitors to gain an understanding of current use and views on various possible changes to the service. The specific objectives were:
- To assess current use of libraries (frequency and services used)
  - To gauge how valued the library is and how it fits into users' lives
  - To determine where the balance lies in library users' minds between making improvements to the library service against various possible cost savings:
    - Charging for use of library computers
    - No longer stocking CDs and DVDs
    - Reduced days/hours of opening
    - Possible closure
  - To gauge the likelihood of users to volunteer their time to improve library services
- 3.4 Face-to-face exit surveys were undertaken at 12 Bromley libraries (ie excluding the 3 libraries where significant changes to hours are unlikely – Central, Orpington and Biggin Hill). 150 interviews were conducted at each, except for those libraries where there may be the possibility of closure (400 at Petts Wood, 400 at Southborough, 236 at Burnt Ash). The surveys were carried out between 15 March and 24 April 2012, at different times of day (including late evenings) and days of week (including Saturdays). In total 2,386 interviews were conducted. Given that some libraries are much busier than others, the survey results are statistically weighted to reflect actual visitor numbers, and therefore to give a more accurate picture.
- 3.5 In addition to the exit surveys, a telephone survey was undertaken with 200 non-users (using random digit dialling) and 400 library users (mostly from the list of active borrowers, with some found during calls to potential non-users). The purpose of interviewing library users by telephone was to get their (more dispassionate) views about the library service in general rather than focussing on 'their library'. The purpose of the interviews with non-users was to try to determine how they might be encouraged to visit, and to gauge their views on possible closures. All the telephone interviews were conducted between 26 March and 12 April 2012.

### **4. Survey Results**

#### *Visiting the library*

- 4.1 It should be remembered when looking at these findings that they apply to 12 libraries in the borough, ie not Biggin Hill, Orpington or Central libraries.
- 4.2 Almost half those interviewed said they visited the library at least once a week, and a further 4 in 10 at least once a month. In exit interviews it is always the case that the most frequent visitors will stand the best chance of being interviewed, but the advantage is that the views of more regular visitors are captured.

The proportion of visitors saying they always or usually bring children with them is 25% (highest in Burnt Ash at 34%). This rises to one in three (33%) if children brought sometimes are included.

- 4.3 On the day of the interview most people had walked to the library (55%), with most of the rest coming by car (34%). A further 8% had caught the bus, 1% had cycled and 2% had used some other form of transport. People were more likely to have walked to Penge (77%), Burnt Ash (70%), Mottingham (69%) and Anerley (68%), with all but Burnt Ash located in wards with lower than average car ownership. The car was the favoured mode of transport to Shortlands (59%), Southborough (56%) and West Wickham (48%) as might be expected in areas with above average car ownership.
- 4.4 Whatever method they used, almost 3 in 4 people (73%) took 10 minutes maximum to get to the library. The 'localness' of some of the libraries is evident here, where the proportion is even higher - Shortlands 94%, Burnt Ash 88%, Hayes 87%, Southborough and St Paul's Cray 85%, and Mottingham 84%. As might be expected, Beckenham stood out as the one library surveyed where people are more likely to travel (only 57% took 10 minutes or less), this may be explained by the distance of the library from Beckenham Town Centre and the attraction of a wider range of resources available than at other libraries.
- 4.5 How library visiting fits into people's lives varies. On the day of the interview over half of people (56%) had come out specifically to go to the library (higher in Anerley at 69%, Shortlands 69% and Mottingham 66%). This leaves an appreciable proportion (44%) who were doing something else while they were out, such as shopping or visiting (more in West Wickham at 57% and Chislehurst 55%). The experience at Orpington reflects this position where since the library was moved into the middle of the retail zone, library visits have risen by 71% implying that users combine shopping and other activities with visiting a library.

### *Awareness and use of services*

- 4.6 Awareness of the services on offer in the library is generally high among library visitors. Over 9 in 10 are aware that they can search the library catalogue, borrow CDs and DVDs and audio books, order books and other items, and use computers. Around 8 in 10 are aware that they can participate in activities and buy food waste bags. Awareness is rather lower for green garden waste stickers (50%) and the facility to download e-books (29%).
- 4.7 Awareness of library services available over the internet is much lower. Almost 8 in 10 (78%) have access to a computer at home, but of these, just over 6 in 10 know they can search the library catalogue for a particular book (62%), order books (61%) and renew books (66%). Only half of them are aware they can order other items such as CDs and DVDs (49%) or renew them (50%).
- 4.8 While 78% of visitors have access to a computer at home, this is lower in St Paul's Cray (63%), Anerley (70%) and Penge (71%). Of those visitors with a computer around one in six (18%) are aware they can download e-books. While this may sound low, only 15% of them actually have an e-book reader.
- 4.9 Of *all* visitors interviewed, a slightly lower proportion (12%) have an e-book reader but a further 17% say they would like one, suggesting that ownership will continue to rise. Those aged 70 or over are least likely to own (5%) or to want one (7%). Ownership otherwise does not vary much with age, though the desire for one is strongest among those in their twenties and thirties (26%).

- 4.10 When asked what they had done in libraries in the last 4 weeks, borrowing a book was the most common answer (given by 82% of interviewees), followed some way behind by doing some reading (30%), finding out information (29%), and using a computer (23%). Use of computers was particularly high in Anerley (37%), Penge (37%) and St Paul's Cray (36%). Less frequently mentioned were buying food waste bags or green garden waste stickers (18%), borrowing something else such as CDs or DVDs (15%), going to an activity (12%), visiting with a school or pre-school group (2%), or something else (11%). More visitors than average go to Mottingham and Burnt Ash to attend activities (27% and 20% respectively), emphasising the importance placed on the smaller libraries as centres of communal activity.

### *Views about libraries and possible changes to services*

- 4.11 Visitors feel very much at home in their library. Views were almost unanimous that their library offers a nice comfortable environment, that it's in a convenient location, and that they enjoy going (99% of visitors agreed with these). However, almost 1 in 3 visitors (31%) feel their library needs refurbishing, and half (51%) think it needs more books.
- 4.12 As might be expected, there are some differences by library. Penge visitors are least likely to agree strongly that the library offers a nice comfortable environment (69% v 82% for all libraries) or that they enjoy coming (71% agree strongly v 83% overall). Anerley visitors are more likely to feel that their library needs more books (59% v 51% overall) as well as refurbishing (42% v 31% for all libraries). Hayes scores very well on visitors enjoying going there, with 93% agreeing strongly with this compared with 83% generally, although the library is deemed to need more books by 60% of visitors (v 51% overall). Southborough and Mottingham are also considered to be in more need of books (63% and 59% respectively). Even in Beckenham, where views on the number of books are most positive, 40% feel it needs more.
- 4.13 This desire for more books is echoed in the balance of books, computers and CDs/DVDs visitors generally would like to see in their library – 33% would like more books, compared with 9% wanting more computers and only 4% wanting more CDs and DVDs. Conversely, while 30% would go for fewer CDs and DVDs, only 10% would wish to see fewer computers, and a mere 1% said they would have fewer books. While a third said they would be disappointed if CDs and DVDs were no longer available at all in the library, only 10% said they would be 'very disappointed' (22% said 'a bit'). Almost half (47%) said they wouldn't really mind, and over one in five (22%) would prefer to use the space for books or computers. This evidence taken alongside the fact that CD's in particular are a dying format would seem to support the withdrawal of this service from all but the largest libraries.
- 4.14 Views about the best balance of books, computers and CDs/DVDs can vary. The wish for more books is consistently high, and for more CDs and DVDs consistently low, across different age groups, but for computers it is those under 40 who express the strongest desire for more of them (14%) and those over 60 the least (6%). By library the differences are even more apparent, with the desire for more computers being particularly high in Penge (19%), Anerley 18%) and St Paul's Cray (15%).
- 4.15 Visitors were asked in an open question what they most valued about their library. The most frequently mentioned aspects were its convenience/location (42%), the staff (34%), the atmosphere (20%), wide choice of books (18%), being able to order books (13%), the computers (10%), community meeting place/hub (9%), the children's books/area (8%), a good place for children to learn/do homework/read (7%), children's activities (5%), and that it's a nice place to come (5%).

- 4.16 Convenience was not so often mentioned in Beckenham, but a wide choice of books was, probably reflecting the fact that people are drawn from a wider area due to its size. The libraries where convenience was most mentioned were Burnt Ash, Southborough, Shortlands and Hayes, reflecting their more local appeal, while Hayes and Mottingham received most mentions as being a hub of the community. The staff were particularly valued at St Paul's Cray, Mottingham and Southborough. The computers were especially valued in Anerley, Penge and St Paul's Cray, though in Penge little mention was made of the atmosphere/ambience in the library.

### *Using volunteers*

- 4.17 Visitors were asked their views on the use of volunteers in libraries, specifically whether the Council should allow volunteers in to help qualified library staff, as a way of improving the service in libraries. The balance of opinion was in favour (62%) although people were more likely to think it was quite a good idea (40%) rather than a very good idea (22%). Almost 1 in 3 (31%) were not in favour.
- 4.18 Of those who thought it a good idea, 13% said they would definitely volunteer some of their own time on a regular basis each week at a local library. While a further 24% said probably, experience of questions like these tells us that it is safer to assume that only those who answer 'definitely' will actually participate. (This 13% saying they are willing to volunteer equates to 8% of all visitors, though as we have seen from the profile of visitors in these surveys, this is likely to be 8% of more frequent visitors). In terms of the amount of time they would be willing to give, in general people said between two and five hours (35% said two hours, 24% three hours and 26% four to five hours). One in ten said they were willing to give more than five hours.

### *Trading off various service options*

- 4.19 As part of the objective to determine where the balance lies in library users' minds between making improvements to the library service and making various possible cost savings, visitors were asked a number of questions which traded off different service options.
- 4.20 When asked whether they would prefer the computers in libraries to remain free, or for there to be a charge of £1 an hour and then use that money to buy more new books, the response was split almost half and half, with the balance just in favour of keeping the computers free (49%) versus paying (45%). However, the responses varied considerably by library, with visitors at libraries in less well off areas generally being more strongly in favour of free computer use (Anerley 67%, Penge 60%, Mottingham 57%) and those in better off areas less so (Shortlands 28% favouring free computing, and Chislehurst 40%). It should be borne in mind that among those in favour of charging for computer use, a significant proportion do not use the computers at all and would therefore be unaffected by the introduction of charges.
- 4.21 If a charge of £1 an hour was introduced, around half of computer users said they would use them less often or stop using them completely (35% and 16% respectively). It is worth bearing in mind that computer use in libraries tends to be higher in the less well off areas (against the average of 32% of visitors overall, use in Anerley is 50%, St Paul's Cray 45%, Mottingham 44% and Penge 43%).
- 4.22 The other options tested out in both the telephone survey with library users and the exit interviews were mostly different ways of reducing hours. Visitors were given pairs of options, and within each pair asked to choose the option they thought was best. This allowed rather

unpalatable options to be weighed up against each other, rather than comparing them with the current arrangements. The question wording was simpler in the telephone survey as the questions were about libraries generally rather than about each individual library, but the findings followed the same pattern. Therefore, rather than show the full detail of both surveys, the more straightforward results from the telephone survey with users are shown below. These results are a measure of 'support' for each option (relatively speaking). For instance, in the first line of the table below 52% favour reducing the number of hours open each day, against 32% preferring to reduce the number of days open each week. The rest, ie those who do not have a preference (in this example 16%) are not shown.

Reduce the number of hours open each day	52%
Reduce the number of days open each week	32%
Close at 5pm on Saturdays	50%
Close half an hour earlier in the week but stay open till 6pm on Saturday	33%
Open an hour later in the morning	76%
Close an hour earlier in the evening	12%
Open an hour later in the morning	75%
Close for lunch between 1 and 2	13%
Open an hour later in the morning	55%
Reduce late night opening from 8pm to 6pm	29%
Close for lunch between 1 and 2	33%
Reduce late night opening from 8pm to 6pm	51%
Close for lunch between 1 and 2	31%
Close an hour earlier in the evening	50%

Therefore the best options suggested by the research are:

- Reduce the number of hours open each day rather than the number of days open each week
- Continue to close at 5pm on Saturday rather than extending to 6pm
- Open an hour later in the morning
- Do not close at lunchtime (any other trimming of hours is preferable to this)

4.23 Not surprisingly, people's views gauged in the exit interviews differed according to what time of day they visited. While opening at 10.30am seemed a better alternative to closing at lunch time, those interviewed between 9.30am and 10.30am were much more in favour of closing at lunch time (61%) than opening at 10.30am (33%). To a lesser extent they also favoured no late nights (47%) to opening at 10.30am (39%).

4.24 On the other hand, those interviewed between 6pm and 8pm were much more in favour of opening at 10.30am (72%) than no longer having late nights (28%).

4.25 Given the overall relative acceptance for opening at 10.30am compared with eliminating late nights, and the fact that late visitors are keener on retaining late nights than early visitors are on retaining 9.30am opening, the best option of the two would still be to move to 10.30am opening.

4.26 When asked directly in the exit interviews whether closing at 6pm rather than 8pm on late evenings would be inconvenient or whether it would not make much difference to them, only

17% of visitors said it would be inconvenient. This was much higher among regular late visitors (74%), ie those who claimed to visit the library after 6pm at least once a month. Setting the closing time at 7pm on late nights reduced the feeling of inconvenience, but half of regular late visitors still felt this was inconvenient (51%).

- 4.27 Given the relative support for late evenings from visitors generally and from late visitors, but at the same time the small numbers of people observed to be visiting the library then, the research would suggest a better option than changing the closing time from 8pm to 7pm might be to reduce the number of late nights to one per week (where there are currently two).
- 4.28 As already stated earlier, lunchtime closure is the least favoured option of those tested. The exit interview findings suggest that at Hayes and Shortlands consideration should be given to opening at lunchtime – even though visitors to these libraries are used to them being closed at lunch time, they too have expressed a preference for opening an hour later in the morning than closing at lunch time, although this would of course not result in any savings.
- 4.29 In Petts Wood and Southborough visitors were asked additional questions about a possible merger of the libraries, locating the one library at one or other existing site. In both cases visitors expressed a very high preference for retaining the library at their site (95% at Petts Wood, 94% at Southborough) and for the vast majority of visitors the preference was a strong one (at Petts Wood 87%, Southborough 88%).
- 4.30 At Petts Wood visitors were asked which library or libraries they would be likely to visit in the future, if the chosen location was Southborough. The most common response was Southborough (44%), followed by Orpington (33%) and Bromley (18%). Some (8%) said they would not go to any library. Around half (55% of those who selected a new location) felt that they would go there less often. The main reasons given for not selecting Southborough were that it was too far away/too far to walk, awkward to get to, it is easier to combine with doing other things in Bromley, there is not much else nearby, not been there before, and preferring a bigger library. When presented with three possible options for the future, only 3% elected to sell Petts Wood library and use the money to improve other libraries (including Southborough) and buy a lot more books, while over a quarter (28%) elected to sell Southborough library; most people instead chose the option to reduce the opening hours of both libraries (66%).
- 4.31 When Southborough visitors were asked which library or libraries they would be likely to visit in the future, if the location of the merged library was Petts Wood, the main sites chosen were Petts Wood (44%) and Bromley (39%) with only 5% selecting Orpington. The proportion saying they would not go to any library was similar to the picture in Petts Wood (6%). Again, similar to Petts Wood, about half (47% of those who opted for a particular library) felt that they would go there less often. The main reason given for not selecting Petts Wood was the difficulty with parking. Other factors mentioned were that it was too far away, awkward to get to, rarely go to Petts Wood, and that it is easier to combine with doing other things in Bromley. When presented with the three possible options for the future, the results were almost a mirror image of Petts Wood (1% sell Southborough, 24% sell Petts Wood and 73% reduce the hours of both libraries).
- 4.32 At Burnt Ash the questions about opening hours and possible options were asked in a different way, as the current opening hours are already quite restricted (open three days a week and closed at lunch time). When asked which days of the week visitors would prefer the library to open, the most popular were Saturday, followed by Monday, and then Thursday (which are the current days of opening). If opening times were condensed to 14 hours a week the preference expressed was for the library to be open for three shorter days (64%) rather than for two longer ones (25%). Within this, the most popular option was for two mornings and two afternoons, rather than any other combination of mornings, afternoons and evenings. Saturday opening is



crucial – if none of the three days was a Saturday then they would prefer to go for two days a week if one of those days was a Saturday (77%). When presented with the possibility of the library closing around 7 in 10 visitors said they would go to Bromley (69%) and only 11% chose Downham. A further 17% said that they would not go to any library, higher than at Petts Wood or Southborough. Much higher than at Petts Wood or Southborough was the proportion who said they would visit their chosen library less often (70%). The main reasons given for not choosing Downham were not knowing where it is, and it being too far away. Some people mentioned that it was awkward to get to, and not on a direct bus route; others said they never went near there, while a few just mentioned that it was in Lewisham.

- 4.33 In the exit interviews questions about possible closure were only asked at three libraries. In the telephone survey with library users interviewees were asked more generally about possible closures, so as to get a view that was less to do with their own library and more to do with the whole library service. Here interviewees were given the option of closing two libraries (improving the others, keeping the opening hours as now, and buying a lot more new books) or keeping all libraries open (on reduced hours, buying the minimum number of new books, and not making improvements) - only 30% chose the option to close the two libraries. A second option was also asked: close one library, which would necessitate a reduction in hours, or keep all libraries open. The proportion selecting closure only rose to 36%, suggesting that it is the principle of closing any libraries that people are against.

### *Non-users of libraries*

- 4.34 The main reasons given by non-users (defined as those who claim to visit a library less than once a year or never) for not using libraries is that they buy books (16%), do not read much (15%), are too busy (15%), get information from the internet (14%), own a lot of books already (9%) or are just out of the habit (9%).
- 4.35 Awareness of various services available in libraries was generally fairly high, but lowest for being able to download e-books (21%), buy green garden waste stickers (45%), buy food waste bags (60%) and activities (61%). When assured that all the services listed were available at Bromley libraries, 12% said they were very likely to visit a library in the next 12 months.
- 4.36 Those who have a computer at home were asked if they were aware of various things they could do via the Council's website e.g. searching the library catalogue, renewing books etc. Awareness for all the aspects listed was low (highest for searching the library catalogue at 54%), and lowest for downloading e-books (at 23%). Bearing in mind that it was possible to do all the things listed, 14% felt they were very likely to access library services from home in the next 12 months.
- 4.37 Therefore to encourage non-users to start using libraries there does appear to be some mileage in promoting the less well known services, and those available via the internet.
- 4.38 Non-users were also asked how they felt about possible closures. Despite being non-users, only 1 in 4 claimed they were not very or not at all concerned about the possible closure of two of the smaller libraries (and merging their resources into the remaining 13 libraries). 43% said they were quite concerned, and 31% very concerned, again demonstrating the strength of feeling that exists for libraries and the wish to have the reassurance of libraries being available should they be needed in the future.
- 4.39 Elsewhere on the agenda there is a report raising the issue of options around amalgamating Penge and Anerley Library. One of the recommendations that have been agreed is to commence consultation with existing library users at both Penge and Anerley. The responses

to questions to the consultation exercise in this report will assist to drafting the questionnaires for this follow up piece of work.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The compilation of data through questionnaires is entirely consistent with the Councils objectives around vibrant and thriving town centres.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, should members decide to pursue further work, depending on the nature of this work, there may be financial implications that arise from it.

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are a number of pieces of legislation that affect the authority's decision making on the deliver of library services, in particular:
- 7.2 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires the authority to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service, although 'comprehensive and efficient are not defined within the Act. The Act requires local authorities to provide free of charge access for people who live, work or study in their area to borrow or refer to books or other material in line with their needs and requirements.
- 7.3 The Race Relations (Amendment Act)(2000), Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the Equality Act 2006 further place a duty on a public body to carry out equality impact assessments as soon as a new policy, function or service is being considered.
- 7.4 The Local Government Act and Public Involvement in health Act 2007 and the new Statutory Guidance for the Duty to Involve as it places authorities under a duty to consider the possibilities for provision of information to, consultation with and involvement of representatives of local persons across the local authority area.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Libraries Update – Renewal and Recreation 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2011 DRR11/133