



London Borough of Lewisham

Consultation: Proposed changes to Lewisham Libraries Service

November 2018

Part 1 – About this Consultation

Topic of this consultation

1. This consultation is asking for your views on proposed changes to the way in which the council provides library services.

Audience

2. The consultation is aimed at people who live, work or learn in Lewisham whether current library users or not. We are also interested in hearing from other organisations that may be impacted by our proposed changes.

Duration

3. The consultation will be open from 30 November 2018 until 28 January 2019, this is the deadline for responses.

How to Respond

4. There are several ways to respond to this consultation:
 - By e-mail to: libraries.consultation@lewisham.gov.uk
 - By post to: Libraries and Information Service, 2nd Floor, Laurence House, 1 Catford Road, London SE6 4RU
 - By attending a consultation meeting

There will be consultation meetings on:

TO BE ADDED 3 public meetings one in Deptford, Lewisham and Downham

After the Consultation

5. Once the consultation has closed all responses will be considered and a summary of responses will be included in a report going to the meeting of Mayor and Cabinet on 27 March 2019. This report will seek a decision on the future plan for library services.

Part 2 – Background

Background

6. Lewisham believes in the fundamental role that the public library service and the library buildings play as a bridge between the local authority and its residents, as public spaces that encourage communities to get together, and as portals to information, learning, and culture.
7. Since May 2010 the council has cut £165 million from its budget. This reflects the impact of public sector austerity following the financial crash of 2008. The scale of change means that government funding for local authorities will have decreased by 63% over the decade from 2010 to 2020. At the same time as managing these reductions, Lewisham has been faced with growth and pressures from taking on additional devolved responsibilities, a growing population, and general inflation. **Two** of these pressures – funding reductions and rising costs of services – are expected to continue into the 2020s.
8. Lewisham Council anticipates needing to make a further £30 million reduction to its controllable budget over the next two years. For this reason the council has been undertaking a fundamental review of all its budgets including the Library and Information Service.
9. **The Lewisham Library and Information Service** operates through 4 hub libraries (Catford, Deptford, Downham, Lewisham,) and through 9 community libraries **that operate in buildings that** are managed by third-sector organisations (Blackheath, Manor House, Forest Hill, Torridon, Crofton Park, Grove Park, New Cross, Sydenham, and Pepys). In the buildings that are run by others, the service is run on a peripatetic basis, fundamentally relying on a self-service infrastructure. The Lewisham Model is different from other “community library” solutions in that the council owns and manages the stock and the systems that allow residents to access the library service. The library service that is delivered in partnership with the community libraries is therefore fully integrated with the rest of the service.
10. Each year, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA) compares Lewisham to 14 similar authorities. The last comparison shows that Lewisham has the third highest number of libraries in the group, has almost twice the average number of volunteers contributing twice as many hours as the average in the group and has the third highest number of library visits in the group. However, the number of books issued is the third lowest, suggesting that people are using our libraries for things other than borrowing books.
11. Beyond traditional services such as borrowing of books, reading promotions, information services, libraries provide room hire, access to computers and Apple Macs, Wi-Fi, digital content (newspapers, magazines, reference material), eAdmissions, parking permits, and

support to registrar services. The service also includes the Home Library Service that supports residents who cannot visit a library building, the Archives, and the Local History Service

Rationale for changing the library service

12. The Mayoral Commission on Libraries and Adult Learning that was published in 2009 set some principles that hold true today. Mainly they define this statutory service as the one that offers “unbiased access to information and works of the creative imagination” and one that relies on open, trusted, public spaces available to citizens. From this, two concepts are critical to interpret the function of the service:
 - a) the first pertains to ‘the public library **service**’. This is the function that interprets the right – enshrined in law – to access books (and other services) free at the point of use. The way in which this is delivered should be “comprehensive and efficient” to satisfy the law governing the service
 - b) the second pertains to ‘the public library **space**’, the buildings that are interpreted and experienced as libraries by the public. These play a critical role in people’s lives
13. Lewisham’s approach to the delivery of Library and Information Services embraces these principles and the change to the service in 2011 that saw the introduction of community libraries was shaped by them.
14. The Council is very proud of the library service, the way it has transformed since 2011 and the dedication of staff, community partners and volunteers. It recognises the importance of the service and library buildings to residents’ lives across a number of areas including well-being, education, employment, digital inclusion, social cohesion and access to books, information and culture. However, the financial constraints that the council is working under, forces it to consider further reductions to the library service budget.
15. In considering options for reductions to the library service budget the council intends to ensure:
 - That there are no library closures
 - That hub library spaces remain open to the public for the same number of hours whether fully staffed or on a self-service basis
 - That the quality of the library stock and online services is retained.
 - That the library service remains a key interface between the council and residents

Part 3 – Possible Options

16. In considering how to deliver the Library and Information Service in the future, the council has looked at a number of options:

17. **Option 1 - We could outsource the service and commission a third party to deliver the service** – tender the delivery of library and information services and seek a third party provider to run the service on a contract basis.

Pros: A tried and tested option that other Local Authorities have adopted. A new external provider could bring new skills and capacity to the service.

Cons: The contractor may not share the same values as the council. This approach alone is unlikely to deliver the scale of savings required. The ability for the service to operate as a key interface between the council and residents, supporting the digital by default agenda, may be compromised. There have been a number of instances where this approach has failed elsewhere in London due to contractor failure.

Given the uncertainty of the level of saving that this approach could deliver and the compromise in terms of libraries being a key vehicle for face to face engagement with residents, this option has been dismissed.

18. **Option 2 - We could remove staff from two hub libraries making them entirely self-service** – the hub libraries in Deptford and Downham operate within multi-purpose buildings that are managed for the council by third-party contractors. These two libraries could become fully self-service with occasional visits by the peripatetic team that support the community libraries.

Pros: Could deliver the required £450k level of saving. There would be no library closures and building opening hours would be retained.

Cons: This option would have a disproportionate effect on the boroughs most deprived communities in the north and south. Last year staff in the hub libraries dealt with 260,000 face to face enquires from residents on everything from help to complete online benefits claims to locating a particular book. A large proportion of these were in Deptford and Downham. There would also be an increased risk of antisocial behaviour in unstaffed spaces. The saving would result in job losses and a reduction in the library service capacity to support and engage with residents in Downham and Deptford.

This option could deliver the required £450k level of saving but it has a disproportionate impact on the boroughs most deprived communities and has therefore been dismissed.

19. **Option 3 – close Lewisham Library** – Lewisham Library is the largest of the hub libraries and houses the archives and local history service as well as the reference library. However, the building is in a poor state of repair and is in need of investment or full re-provision. Lewisham Library could be closed until such time as a new central library could be provided as part of a wider regeneration project.

Pros: This approach would deliver the required £450k saving.

Cons: This would require the closure of the building. Lewisham library dealt with just under 50% of all the face to face enquiries received in 2017/18. This option would require the relocation of the archives, local history service and reference library.

This option would deliver the required £450k saving but would require the closure of a library building. This option has therefore been dismissed although the service will continue to look at options for both short term improvements to the building that could support additional earned income and a longer term re-provision of a central library for the borough.

20. Option 4 – reduce staffed opening hours across Lewisham, Downham and Deptford hub libraries – The hub libraries currently have the following opening hours

- Deptford 85 hours per week (64 with library staff, 21 self service)
- Downham 79 hours per week (64 with library staff, 15 self service)
- Lewisham 84 hours per week (64 with library staff, 20 self service)

The staffed opening hours would be reduced to 35 hours per week, the building opening hours would remain the same with the remaining hours being self-service. In Downham and Deptford the buildings would continue to be managed by the third party building and security contractors during self-service opening hours. In Lewisham public access to the library would be reduced to the ground floor during self-service opening hours and would be managed by security staff.

It is not proposed to make any changes to Catford Library as it already has substantial self-service opening hours that are supported by other staff working in the building.

Pros: This approach would deliver the required £450k savings. The impact of the cut is spread equally across the borough. There would be no library closures and building opening hours would be retained.

Cons: This approach would result in job losses and a reduction in the library service ability to support and engage with residents in the three hub libraries. Last year staff in the hub libraries dealt with 260,000 face to face enquires from residents on everything from help to complete online benefits claims to locating a particular book. There would also be an increased risk of antisocial behaviour during unstaffed hours.

This option could deliver the required £450k saving and although it would have a negative impact on the level of service delivered to residents this would be equally spread across the borough. On balance we believe that option three is the best way to continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service within reducing resources and it is upon this approach that we seek your views.

Part 4 – Key Dates

17. Key dates:

30 November 2018	consultation opens
28 January 2019	consultation closes
12 March 2019	Outcome of consultation considered by Safer Stronger Select Committee
27 March 2019	Outcome of consultation reported to Mayor and Cabinet and decision sought on future approach for the service.
April 2019	Implementation of new approach commences including staff consultation and reorganisation.
October 2019	New approach fully implemented.

Part 5 – Consultation Questions

18. We are happy to receive responses to this consultation in any format and we are particularly keen to hear your views on the following:
- The council wishes to retain its commitment to delivering a comprehensive and efficient library service. Our rationale for this is laid out in paragraphs 12 and 15 above. Do you agree that maintaining a public library service is important? Is there anything missing from the rationale?
 - Within this document you can see that we have discussed and then dismissed three approaches (paragraphs 17, 18 and 19 above), do you agree with our reasoning? Are there any other options that we should have considered?
 - We are undertaking an equalities assessment of the proposed change. Do you feel that the proposed changes would have a negative or positive impact on Lewisham residents on the basis of their race, gender, faith/religious belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender assignment or marital status? Please provide comments on the impact you feel the proposed approach could have, which groups you feel may be affected and any action you feel we could take to mitigate any potentially negative impact.
 - Do you have any other views on the content of this consultation paper, not covered by the above?