



## Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

### Report title: Library and Information Service report

**Date:** November 2023

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1.

**Ward(s) affected:** All Wards

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### Outline and recommendations

This paper provides an update and deep dive into areas of delivery and performance for the Library and Information service and invites committee members comments.

There are no recommendations within this paper

#### 1 Summary

- 1.1 The Library and Information Service operates through a network of four hub libraries (in buildings owned and staffed by the council) and eight community libraries (in buildings managed and staffed by partner organisations). And it offers Archive and Local History as well as Home Library services The libraries cover the whole of the borough with hubs in Catford, Deptford, Downham, and Lewisham, and community libraries in Blackheath, Crofton Park, Grove Park, Forest Hill, Lee, New Cross, Hither Green, and Sydenham.
- 1.2 The Lewisham Model has been in operation since 2011 – the collaboration between the council and partner organisations in offering access to library services – is based on the fact that the council is still responsible for the library provision wherever it is accessed from. The council owns the books, shelving, and IT infrastructure that allows the books to be borrowed. The partner organisations support this in exchange for free rent on the premises they occupy to support their own charitable objectives.

- Our libraries offer Value: They are free, offer access to books, technology, information, and services provided by skilled friendly staff.
- Our libraries are Impactful: They stimulate aspiration, build understanding of the world and grow strong communities.
- Our libraries are Supportive: They help people and communities progress through vital stages of their development.

1.3 Lewisham Council was awarded £19m to revitalise Lewisham Town Centre, after successfully bidding for money from the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF). The funding, combined with £5m of additional match funding from the Council, will be used for improvements to the town centre across three projects:

- Renovation of Lewisham Library into a new culture and business hub
- Transformation of the market
- Public realm improvements

1.4 £7million has been allocated to Lewisham Library to create a new culture and business hub and safeguard the future of this vital local service. These renovations will include the provision of a new community space, a new business hub offering flexible office space, meeting rooms and workspaces, with new improved hospitality offer and providing more spaces for local residents to enjoy.

## **2 Recommendations**

2.1 Committee are recommended to note the report

## **3 Policy Context**

3.1 Libraries are free at the point of access, open to all, and form a network of provision that covers all of Lewisham. And because library services across London and nationally have fostered collaborative working over many years, accessing Lewisham libraries also enables access to a richness of resource that spreads far beyond the borough boundaries.

3.2 Libraries have also pioneered partnership working and taking services out of the buildings into communities. Visits to schools, home library services and outreach services into many communities have all long been explored in libraries. In a recent poll, librarians were the second most trusted professionals after nurses. Lewisham's service has a long and proud history of change and transformation, and can keep doing so to impact positively on the way the Council supports and enables communities throughout Lewisham

3.3 Libraries are a key delivery mechanism for Lewisham's [Cultural strategy 2023-2028](#) and Borough of Culture legacy:

- Library sites in localities across Lewisham mean they are perfectly placed to deliver culture in the heart of our communities
- Cultural and creative organisations and individuals value Libraries and the space that they can offer
- Libraries can be a central point of information about cultural and creative networks, activities, resources and expertise across Lewisham
- Libraries are cultural agents in their own right and produce original, cultural output that continues to engage residents in creative ways, as in the case of [StoryTrails](#).

3.4 The Library and Information service delivery aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#):

- Cleaner and Greener
- A Strong Local Economy
- Quality Housing
- Children and Young People
- Safer Communities
- Open Lewisham
- Health and Wellbeing

3.5 In particular, the service is closely aligned to the following priorities because:

**Cleaner and Greener** – The service is required to maintain and operate the facility in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner, and to contribute to the delivery of the authority's wider policies for safeguarding the environment and promoting sustainability. This should be reflected in their annual environmental and energy management plan. This should include but not be limited to:

- maximising and promoting recycling and reducing waste
- reducing energy consumption
- displaying energy certificates
- minimising chemical usage
- aiming to use fair trade products and supplies from sustainable sources.

**A strong local economy** – The service: works with partners to ensure that libraries are well used by the community, and to act in ways that support further investment into the town centre. The service provider is further encouraged to create work placements and apprenticeship opportunities for young residents. The service provider should commit to paying the London Living Wage, as a minimum.

**Children and Young People** – The service:  
- works with schools to contribute to raising educational attainment, to improve facilities and services for young people, and promote partnership working.  
- works in partnership with schools to promote Deptford Lounge events to the school community, utilising school projects where appropriate within their programming.

**Open Lewisham** – The service:  
- ensures that the programme of activities meets the aims and objectives of both the facility and the authority, and be flexible to accommodate future changes in local demographics and participation trends.  
- develops programmes that have a proactive approach to addressing the needs of under-represented groups, such as young people, students, people who are economically disadvantaged, disabled people, older people (60+), health referrals, BAME residents, and people who are economically inactive.  
- works with local partners in the business and community sectors.

## **Health and Wellbeing – The service:**

- delivers a programme of activities and events that contribute to educating and supporting residents to live healthy, active lifestyles.

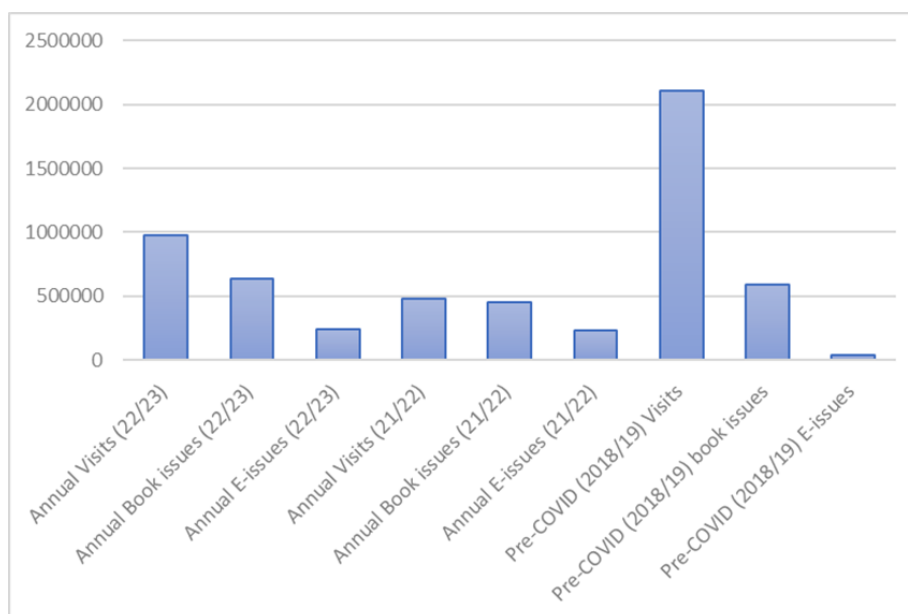
Libraries' physical presence in communities is also a powerful symbol – a symbol of a Council that recognises and invests in communities and all they stand for. The library network covers the borough geographically, enabling access for all within a few minutes' walk of either a council or community run library. Working in partnership with other Council services and other organisations, the network of council and community run libraries offer enormous opportunities to build social capital at a community level and help realise initiatives like 15-minute neighbourhoods and resilient communities in which everyone can be supported to live their best lives.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 The Library and Information Service operates through a network of four hub libraries (in buildings owned and staffed by the council) and eight community libraries (in buildings managed and staffed by partner organisations). And it offers Archive and Local History as well as Home Library services. The libraries cover the whole of the borough with hubs in Catford, Deptford, Downham, and Lewisham, and community libraries in Blackheath, Crofton Park, Grove Park, Forest Hill, Hither Green, New Cross, Lee, and Sydenham. The service budget in 2023-2024 is £3.5m of which £2.1m is staffing.
- 4.2 Lewisham Libraries offer opportunities to access culture and express creativity (with exhibitions, poetry reading, reading groups), support reading and literacy (from Bookstart programmes for the under 5s to the Reading Ahead scheme for emerging adult readers), foster digital literacy (supporting access to the internet and digital services in libraries and in the home through loanable web enabled tablets), support economic growth (through projects like BIPC London, in partnership with the British Library's Business & Intellectual Property Centre and through a wealth of free resources for businesses), are embedded in their communities (through community libraries, visits to doctor surgeries, early years settings, older residents' homes), support independent and supported learning (through hosting courses and giving access to online learning), and support health & wellbeing (through links to Macmillan, the Reading Well scheme, health lectures in libraries). Initiatives like City of Stories – with Spread the Word – are a direct way of helping communities work with authors to explore the written word.
- 4.3 A new Library and Information service strategy will be developed and launched in 2026 to coincide with the opening of the refurbished Lewisham Library (Culture and Business Hub).
- 4.4 The reduction in opening hours post pandemic has resulted in a reduction in residents' accessibility to library services and spaces. This combined with the closure of floor space at Lewisham Library due to the poor condition of the building has resulted in visitor numbers not returning to pre-pandemic levels. It is hoped that a rebalancing in staffing levels following the closure of Lewisham will galvanise activities in the building resulting in improved footfall.

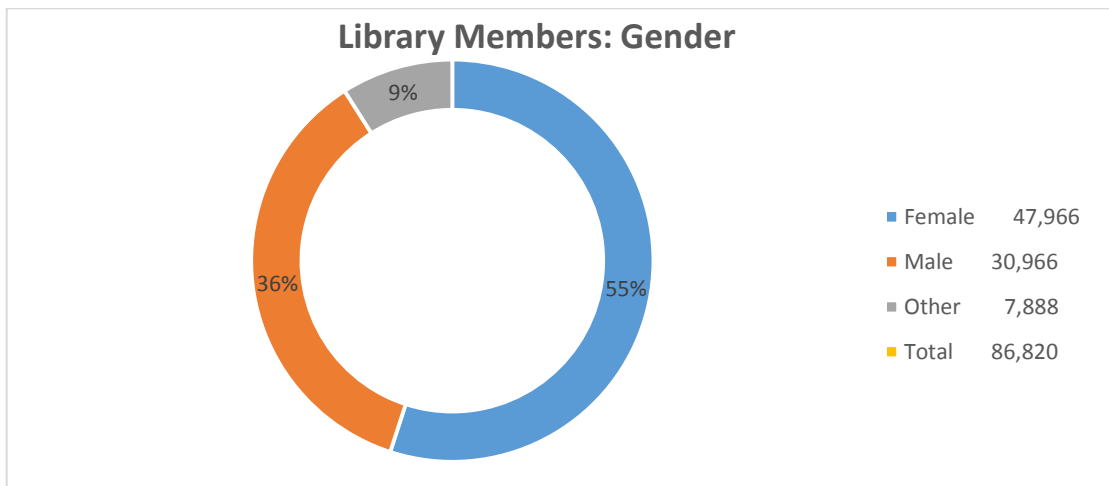
4.5 Although footfall has not fully recovered since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is worth noting that libraries have seen a significant increase in visitors' numbers in 2022/23. However, book issues have significantly increased since 2018/19 from 593,909 to 637,293. E-issues have also thrived since the pandemic from 36,810 in 2019/19 to 240,324 in 2022/23. This demonstrates that our book and digital stocks continue to be relevant and engage with residents.

Annual Visits (22/23)	976,649
Annual Book issues (22/23)	637,293
Annual E-issues (22/23)	240,324
Annual Visits (21/22)	475,778
Annual Book issues (21/22)	449,089
Annual E-issues (21/22)	229,062
Pre-COVID (2018/19) Visits	2,012,709
Pre-COVID (2018/19) book issues	593,909
Pre-COVID (2018/19) E-issues	36,810



The library service has over 86,000 card holders, 55% of whom are female, 36% are male, and 9% identify as other.

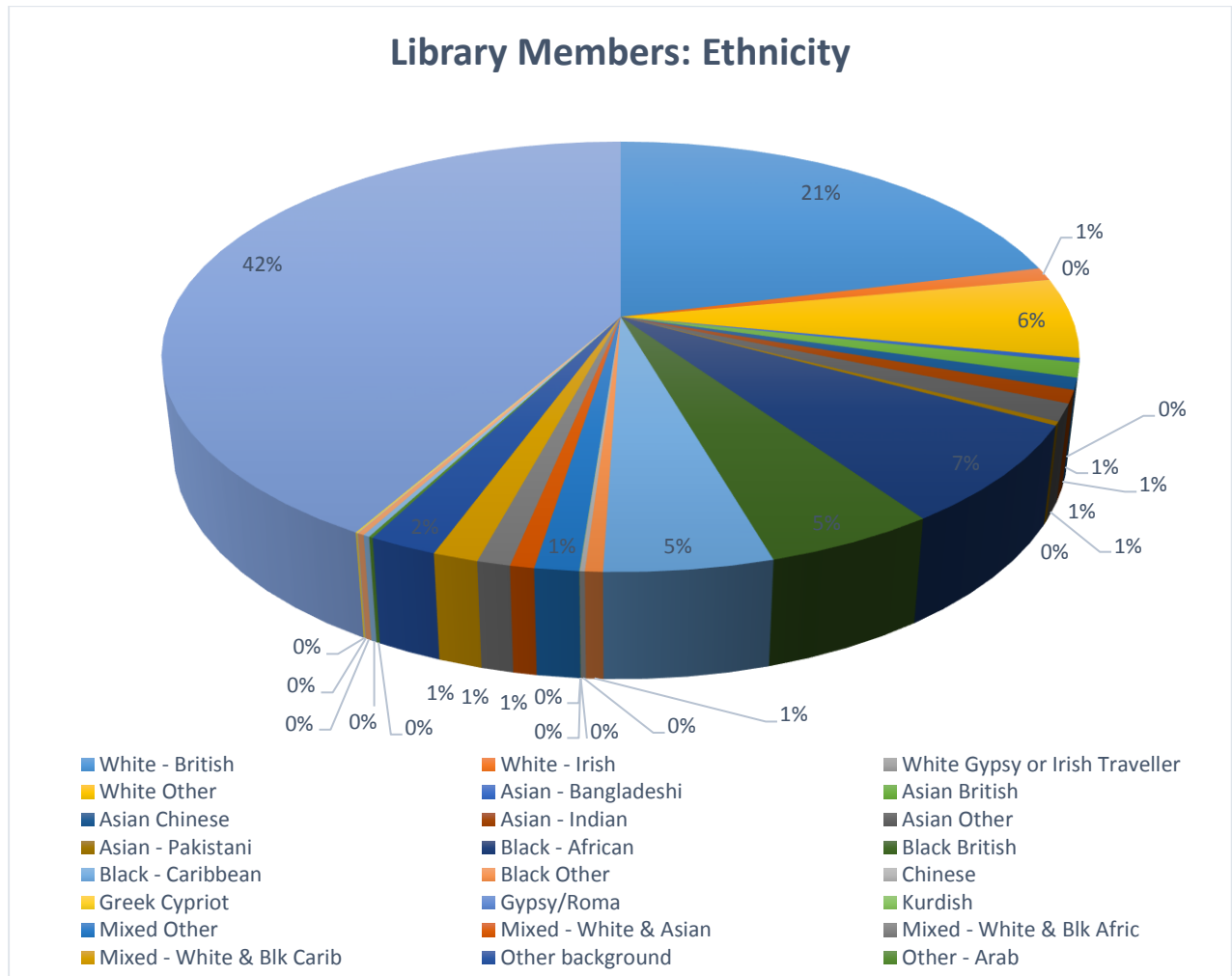
Gender	Count	%
<b>Female</b>	47,966	55%
<b>Male</b>	30,966	36%
<b>Other</b>	7,888	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,820</b>	



The ethnicity and disability breakdown of library members is available in the tables below. These tables also show that 88% of library users report a disability, aligning with the observatory [Health Report](#) for Lewisham that shows, for example, that 78% of adult Lewisham residents report a learning disability.

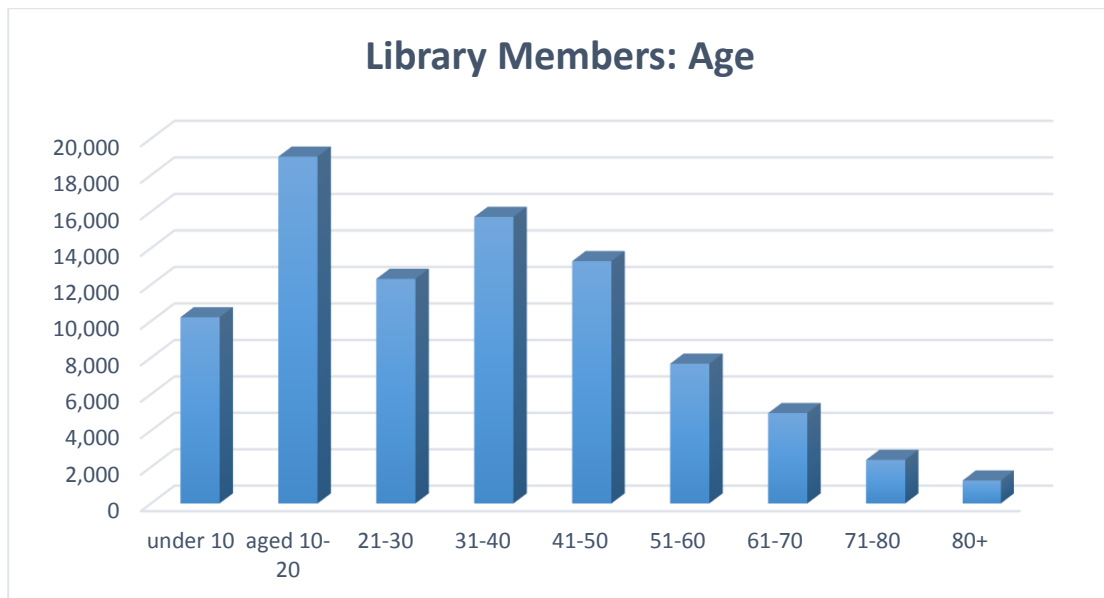
Ethnicity	Count	%	Disability (count)	%
White - British	18,300	21%	14,484	79%
White - Irish	845	1%	649	77%
White Gypsy or Irish Traveller	5	0%	3	60%
White Other	5,217	6%	3,989	76%
Asian - Bangladeshi	290	0%	246	85%
Asian British	946	1%	693	73%
Asian Chinese	767	1%	661	86%
Asian - Indian	839	1%	645	77%
Asian Other	1,129	1%	922	82%
Asian - Pakistani	243	0%	201	83%
Black - African	6,485	7%	5,732	88%
Black British	4,444	5%	3,488	78%
Black - Caribbean	4,339	5%	3,966	91%
Black Other	452	1%	407	90%
Chinese	128	0%	62	48%
Greek Cypriot	3	0%	-	0%
Gypsy/Roma	1	0%	-	0%
Kurdish	8	0%	-	0%
Mixed Other	1,141	1%	911	80%
Mixed - White & Asian	619	1%	476	77%
Mixed - White & Blk African	855	1%	695	81%
Mixed - White & Blk Carib	1,171	1%	1,037	89%
Other background	1,770	2%	1,537	87%
Other - Arab	105	0%	69	66%

Other - Latin American	168	0%	88	52%
Prefer Not to Say	170	0%	76	45%
Turkish Cypriot	24	0%	16	67%
Turkish	56	0%	31	55%
X - not given	36,297	42%	34,976	96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,817</b>		<b>76,060</b>	<b>88%</b>



The age distribution of Library members is available in the tables below.

under 10	10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	80+
10,214	19,011	12,317	15,709	13,286	7,670	4,960	2,394	1,259



## 5 Community Libraries

- 5.1 On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2011, Mayor and Cabinet agreed the Community Libraries model as a key element of the future provision of library services in Lewisham. As part of the Council's £88 million savings programme, Lewisham Council decided on the reprovision of the service through partnerships with the voluntary sector enabling the new model by transferring those library buildings to the community whilst retaining a remodelled library service within the individual sites.
- 5.2 The four buildings identified for the delivery of community library services were Sydenham, Crofton Park, Grove Park and New Cross. The fifth building – Blackheath Village Library - is not in Council ownership, and that community library service is being delivered in partnership with Age Exchange from their Reminiscence Centre.
- 5.3 Due to the success of the model, on 9 December 2015, Mayor and Cabinet resolved to extend the Community Library model to the Forest Hill, Torridon and Manor House library buildings.
- 5.4 The Council in community library settings continues to manage and maintain the book stock for library users, although no Council library staff are based at the community libraries. Self-issue terminals enable users to borrow the stock on site and offer access to a catalogue of more than eight million books across The Libraries Consortium.
- 5.5 As part of our ongoing quality assurance and support to our community partners who are delivering the Lewisham Model on behalf of the community library settings, the service is committed to rolling out a Community Library MOT and review process which will support the development of the Library and Information service strategy. This process is intended to provide a regular health check for the providers of our community library provision, including early indication for the need for any intervention and support to continue to deliver provision that meets



local community needs.

5.6 Current providers running community libraries are:

- a. V22 Communities: Forest Hill, Manor House and Sydenham
- b. S&B Childcare: Grove Park
- c. Eco Communities: \*Crofton Park
- d. Age exchange: Blackheath
- e. Bold Vision: New Cross Learning
- f. Corbett Community: Torridon Road

\* Eco Communities are looking to serve notice on this lease and cease delivery at Crofton Park Library.

5.7 Appendix 2 highlights some issues that recur in the Community Libraries and demonstrate their strengths. In brief, here, we note that following the pandemic, some partner organisations required more time to bounce back to business as usual. This is partly about issues in attracting volunteers (which has been a common issue across the third sector post-Covid) but also about substantial increases in costs. Some measures like the Warm Welcomes Fund have provided a much-needed injection of funds, but the increases in costs of utilities, staff, etc. are proving an intractable problem for some community partners that are looking at reducing their responsibilities and possibly withdrawing altogether from the Community Library Service. The council will continue to work with Community Library partners to make sure that the other providers step in, should this be required.

## 6 Fines and Charges Policy

6.1 Fines and charges were included in the budget report that was agreed by Mayor and Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023. As part of the strategy work, officers are reviewing the Fines and Charges policy to look at how these support or hinder residents and offer opportunities for future income generation. The report on the future approach to our fines and charges policy is scheduled to go to Mayor and Cabinet in February 2024.

## 7 Comparisons with Library services within other boroughs

Description	Lewisham	Southwark	Lambeth
Budget	£ 3,532,170	£ 8,000,00	4,108,000
Number of Libraries	13	12	10
Number of Community Libraries	9 (1 being totally independent)	0	0
Number of Council run Libraries	4	12	10

Annual Visits (22/23)	976,649	1,034,897	Not available
Annual Book issues (22/23)	630,776	1,443,363	673,113
Annual Visits (21/22)	58,680	597,093	Not available
Annual Book issues (21/22)	146,395	902,142	402,494
Pre-COVID (2018/19) Visits	2,012,709	1,989,494	1,439,560
Pre-COVID (2018/19) book issues	593,909	1,443,075	723,542
Resident population (2021 census)	303,600	307,700	317,700
Sq mileage of the Borough	13.4 sq miles	11 sq miles	10.5 sq miles

## 8 Levelling up fund project – Culture and Business Hub

8.1 Lewisham Council identified a number of socio-economic challenges in the Borough and particularly in Lewisham Central including high levels of deprivation, limited employment opportunities, poor health and high levels of crime. While these challenges are complex and multi faceted, there are urban and spatial challenges that are aggravating them, including:

- A degraded environment
- A limited night-time economy
- Lack of civic space for community activity and services
- Environmental concerns and pollution
- Tackling road safety
- Making the most of Lewisham's transport advantages
- Risk of a divided town centre
- Harnessing local pride in place

8.2 Within this context, Lewisham Council was awarded £19m to revitalise Lewisham Town Centre, after successfully bidding for money from the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF). The funding, combined with £5m of additional match funding from the Council, will be used for improvements to the town centre across three projects:

- Renovation of Lewisham Library into a new culture and business hub
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8.3 £7million has been allocated to Lewisham Library to create a new culture and business hub and safeguard the future of this vital local service. These

renovations will include the provision of a new community space, a new business hub offering flexible office space, meeting rooms and workspaces, with new improved hospitality offer and providing more spaces for local residents to enjoy.

#### 8.4 Ground floor

- Café opening onto street
- 'Lewisham Lounge' an adaptable community space for socialising, exhibitions and cultural attractions

#### 8.5 First floor

- Improved and more accessible library space

#### 8.6 Second floor

- Business Hub, with flexible office space, meeting rooms, and work spaces

#### 8.7 Third floor

- Archive and Local History Centre, the heart of Lewisham's past and a place to visit in itself that offers schools, scholars, and residents a glimpse into the local heritage.

#### 8.8 Rooftop

- Potential for a rooftop activity/social space and/or food and beverage offer, utilising the panoramic views
- Plant (to free up space on lower floors)

8.9 The new Culture and Business Hub will provide a flagship cultural and civic space with a library to attract visitors. A mixed offer of cultural programming and flexible community spaces, alongside high-quality library and archives service, will draw visitors to the town centre during the day and the evening. A business hub will support local businesses and start-ups and creating jobs. Its hospitality offering (café and rooftop bar) will help activate the night-time economy across the town. The hub will be a focal point for Lewisham and a building that residents are proud of.

8.10 Lewisham Library closed to the public on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and is set to reopen Spring 2026. Interim provision during the closure of Lewisham Library includes:

- Click and Collect service at Glass Mill Leisure Centre
- The Heritage service relocated to 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Catford Library
- A programme of peripatetic library events in partnership with community stakeholders in the ward. Examples of peripatetic activities will include, reading groups, author events, activities for children (Storytime, Baby Bounce, RhymeTime), visits to schools, nurseries, Family Hubs, GP surgeries, Lewisham Shopping Centre, outreach awareness sessions to promote online services engagement with local groups and individuals (residential homes, hospital, Age Concern, disability coalition, Migration Museum, Lewisham Youth Theatre, Adult Learning Lewisham), and much more.

## **9 Financial implications**

9.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report

## **10 Legal implications**

10.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 makes provision for regulating and improving library services.

- Section 7(1) sets out the duty of every library authority to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”.
- Section 7(2) provides that, in fulfilling its duties, a library authority should have regard to the desirability “of securing by any other appropriate means” that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, pictures, records, films and other materials in sufficient number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements of adults and children.
- Section 9(1) provides that “a library authority may make contributions towards the expenses of any person providing library facilities for members of the public”.

## **11 Equalities implications**

11.1 There are no adverse equalities implications to Lewisham residents in relation to this paper.

## **12 Climate change and environmental implications**

12.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications as a result of this paper.

## **13 Crime and disorder implications**

13.1 There are no crime and disorder implications as a result of this paper.

## **14 Health and wellbeing implications**

14.1 The Library and Information Service delivers a programme of activities and events across the borough that contribute to educating and supporting residents to live healthy, active lifestyles. The options described assure that residents continue to benefit from the libraries’ contribution to supporting health and wellbeing while the Lewisham Library building is refurbished.

## **15 Glossary**

[Link to Oxford English Dictionary here.](#)

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
LUF	Levelling up Fund

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
GLA	Greater London Authority
DLUHC	Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
BIPC	Business and Intellectual Property Centre

## **16 Report author(s) and contacts**

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## **17 Appendices**

Appendix A – Issues and Visits 2021-22 & 2022/23

Appendix B – Lewisham Library and Information Service – Library (Hub and Community) profiles