



Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

Report title: The Lewisham Library and Information Service update

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|--------------------------|--|
| Date: | 3 March 2022 |
| Key decision: | No |
| Class: | Part 1 |
| Ward(s) affected: | All Wards |
| Contributors: | David Murray, Interim Director of Libraries and Learning Antonio Rizzo, Head of Library and Information Service |

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of the report is to update Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on the strategic positioning of the Library and Information Service as a core enabler of community resilience and delivery agent for corporate priorities.

Comments and suggestions from the Committee are sought and welcomed on:

- The suggested ways forward
- People to engage
- Opportunities for community focussed and corporate working

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

Last reports to Safer Stronger Select Committee dated 21 September 2021 and 9 October 2019
Public consultation carried out in June – September 2021

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1. Summary

- 1.1. Following the report of 21 September 2021, the Safer Stronger Select Committee requested a paper on the strategic positioning of the Library and Information Service.
- 1.2. This paper sets out a series of options for contributions the library service could make to community and corporate agendas and seeks feedback from members of the SSSC on the suggested options and the process for securing a clear vision for the service.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. 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.
- 2.2. 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 (Ipsos Veracity Index), librarians were the second most trusted professionals after nurses. Lewisham's service in particular 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. For all of these reasons, the Library and Information Service supports all four of the Council's four core themes for the borough's post Covid 19 recovery:
- 2.3. An economically sound future – The Service supports residents and businesses through free public access to Wi-Fi, computers, reference resources and partnerships such as Start-up in London Libraries delivered with the British Library, and much more. And beyond these services, the core offer of reading and literacy underpins children's learning, self-help and skills development for adults and the opportunities around libraries as part of a customer access programme offer efficiency and cost-effectiveness so the Council can optimise scarce resources.
- 2.4. A healthy and well future – The Service actively supports social prescribing, hosts health lectures, promotes national programmes such as Reading Well and unique initiatives such as the Reading Friends aimed at combating social isolation. The service further encourages people to be actively involved, supporting their physical and mental well-being, including opportunities to access free sessions in the libraries, such as Tai Chi, sitting down exercise, yoga and more. For many, the very act of visiting the library, seeing other people and talking to staff and other customers is an enormous benefit. Free to enter, no questions asked about purpose, libraries are one of the few remaining civic spaces that enable an individual to participate in wider society in ways that make them feel safe, secure and part of something bigger.
- 2.5. A greener future – The Service hosts regular events by external agencies that support residents on identifying greener utilities providers, insulation solutions, etc. The Service consistently encourages people to take personal action to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality and builds in green policies

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into things like procurement of the courier service used by libraries. With a very established role in information provision, both online and face to face, libraries can play a very dynamic role in reaching all sections of the community to promote awareness and action.

- 2.6. A future we all have a part in – Libraries are a free, statutory, universal service and provide access to information and support for residents to read for pleasure or for learning, find information to enable them to make informed decisions or learn about the world and act as either a self or mediated access point to a host of data, entertainment and sources to become digitally engaged. The service has the power to enable others to think and act to realise the aspirations people have for themselves, their families and their communities. Libraries have a long history of acting as agents of social change, either directly or through supporting others. This radical history, borne of books, continues as libraries still act for many as windows onto a world that would otherwise be impossible to see. And more recently, the Service played an active part in engaging residents during the pandemic through supporting the Test & Trace provision and maintaining the Home Library Service and this illustrates the key role in helping to building resilient and cohesive communities.

To further support the Borough of Sanctuary priorities, the service is also working towards becoming a Library of Sanctuary. This initiative seeks to recognise the good practice of libraries which welcome people seeking sanctuary and other new arrivals into their community and seek to foster a culture of welcome and inclusivity.

- 2.7. 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.

3. Background

- 3.1. The report to Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee of 9 October 2019 started a conversation on the future of the Lewisham Library and Information Service.
- 3.2. The report to the Committee of 21 September 2021 – as well as providing an update on the achievements of the Service in the years 2019-2021 – looked at the results of the public engagement on the elements that would be of major importance to residents that the Service could positively contribute to.
- 3.3. This report builds on previous work to suggest practical steps to framing a new approach to both the purpose and positioning of the library service.

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4. Context

- 4.1. The Library and Information Service operates through a network of four hub libraries (in buildings owned and staffed by the Council) in Catford, Deptford, Downham, and Lewisham and eight community libraries (in buildings managed and staffed by partner organisations) in Blackheath, Crofton Park, Grove Park, Forest Hill, Manor House, New Cross, Torridon, and Sydenham. The Service offers Archive and Local History as well as Home Library services.
- 4.2. The Lewisham Model – 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.
- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. 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 Start Up in London Libraries and 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.
- 4.5. Lewisham has great reason to be proud of the Service because:
- 4.6. People love visiting our libraries
CIPFA shows that in 2018-2019 (the last CIPFA Public Libraries Profile 2020) Lewisham had the 5th highest number of visits to libraries in London. The number of visits per 1,000 population (5,985) is 26.6% higher than the average in London (4,728). So Lewisham Libraries count over 2.2 million visits in a year.
- 4.7. Libraries donate books to every child under 5
Lewisham reached 100% of children under the age of 5 through the Bookstart scheme. Children are given books at regular intervals to allow them (and their

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families) to develop a love of books and reading from a young age. Making it Real with CYP's Early Years Team also delivers meaningful outcomes engaging young families in early literacy programmes.

- 4.8. Libraries answer people's questions
It is estimated that library staff answer over 250,000 enquiries every year – the fourth highest in London. These go well beyond books, providing people with the information they need for their education, job search, volunteering opportunities, health related interests, and more.
- 4.9. Libraries are digital
Libraries offer an array of services online including free access to thousands of daily newspapers, hundreds of magazines, tens of thousands of books and audio books and comics, and a YouTube channel, Facebook presence, a regular podcast, and more. Libraries also host a wide range of initiatives
- FestivalUK 2022 – The StoryFutures Collective – to take place
The StoryFutures Collective are developing an unprecedented storytelling project which will mix film, augmented reality (AR) and location-based experiences
 - Mi Wifi – tablet borrowing scheme
Mayor of London's Mi Wifi scheme which enabled us to buy 70 tablets to create a tablet borrowing scheme
 - What's the Story?
A summer school programme giving socially-excluded young people a chance to learn journalism and information management skills
 - Digital Zones
A Go ON UK digital skills programme to increase the public's digital literacy skills.
- 4.10. Some of our libraries are collection zones for donated IT devices that are refurbished and brought back into use.
- 4.11. Libraries are well run
The Library and Information Service, the Local Archive and Local History Service, and the Home Library Service cost £10.58 per year per resident. This is the fourth lowest cost in London.
- 4.12. Residents support the libraries through volunteering
Lewisham has the highest number of volunteers in London, which (at 1,748) is seven and half times more than the average (233).
- 4.13. Libraries are there for people when they are needed
Libraries open seven days/week for over 80 hours per week and – in spite of reducing resources – increased their opening hours consistently over the last 11 years. And residents are never more than a mile away from a library.
- 4.14. Residents love libraries
Over 76% of our visitors are satisfied with services they receive in libraries.

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- 4.15. Library staff are trusted
Ipsos MORI confirmed that librarians are the second most trusted professionals in Britain.

5. **A strategic vision for the Library and Information Service**

- 5.1. All of this points to a service that is appreciated and a success. Lewisham Libraries have a proud history of innovation, and it is clear that this approach needs to continue.
- 5.2. However, in the context of a community in need of help and support, and a financial context for the whole Council that is deeply challenging after years of savage budget cuts, there is a very significant challenge to ensure that libraries demonstrate very clearly their impact and contribution in three key arenas.
- 5.3. **As a key community asset** – how do all libraries become spaces that respond to local needs, flexing within an overall framework to the particular needs of local communities and improving the life chances of individuals and families?
- 5.4. To achieve this, a much more dynamic use of data and insight, and local intelligence is needed to shift and change in response to the needs of people, recognising that as the determinants of a fulfilled life shift for communities, so must the service. This also means that the offer in each library needs to be different. Retaining the advantages being part of a network, and understanding what a universal core offer looks like that is open to all, each library needs to flex to respond to local need and recognise that its flexibility is a positive not a hindrance. And this includes both Council and community run libraries.
- 5.5. All library buildings need to become truly flexible spaces – as the Deptford Lounge is – that can host whatever menu of services impacts most, and library staff need to be skilled and able and ready to engage and enable individuals and communities to achieve their aspirations. This in no way dilutes the power of libraries – it enhances them, so long as there is a very clear understanding of what the drivers for change are. The service also needs to use data and insight to understand how to reach more of those who currently do not use the service – too often the very people who could benefit most. The service does well in terms of access and reach – but needs to use recently done work to start to target particular communities who are not using the service as much as others.

There is enormous power in the library service playing a leading role in standing alongside communities, helping people to help themselves and securing the kinds of skills and resilience that enable people to feel a real sense of ownership about what their lives could be. Building the kinds of networks and social capital that benefit individuals and communities needs to be a key aim of the library service.

This also helps debunk the myth that libraries, reading, learning, arts and culture are only for a 'certain type of person'. It helps everyone feel empowered to access what libraries can offer on their own terms. It also helps officers, Members and partners to overcome preconceived ideas about what is and is not appropriate for different people and diverse communities.

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- 5.6. It is too easy to equate 'popular' with poor, highbrow with wealth. The library service needs to play an activist role in deconstructing these stereotypes and replacing them with the concept and reality that, with access comes opportunity – and opportunity unlocks the way forward for people who so often feel excluded and disenfranchised and forgotten. Libraries need to reclaim their role as social and community pioneers and champions. Open, accessible and welcoming to all, whether it's those seeking to build their own business, read for pleasure or using the service as a safe and welcoming space and somewhere to feel warm, welcome and secure. All of these uses are valid.
- 5.7. The service also needs to continue to expand beyond its buildings, something libraries have done for many years, embracing the opportunity to take services into spaces where the community offer can be delivered – schools, community organisations, markets, shops – so that inside and out the service can stand alongside the community in which it operates. The buildings are a great asset, but the services delivered are more important and these are not always building dependent. Working alongside nurseries and schools is an obvious link to develop further.
- 5.8. And to enable this kind of flexibility a clearly articulated and shared set of outcomes is needed to ensure that change is managed effectively and coherently and the service focusses on what matters most and not simply what can actually be done. This in turn needs a very open and transparent understanding of how to balance the competing demands of different user groups, in terms of resources, time and effort but also in terms of practicalities of sharing buildings. This will inevitably involve some potentially challenging conversations about how a universally accessible space can accommodate so many competing needs and why the service offer in one library looks different to that of others. But without that openness the service risks being diluted to such an extent that it begins to fail to serve anyone well.
- 5.9. **As a key delivery agent for the Council's corporate objectives** – how do libraries continue the journey to being a trusted and valued corporate resource, open to working across organisational boundaries and plugging into key priorities? With significant trust and goodwill, a presence in each locality and a track record of diverse service provision, libraries should be a natural vehicle for cooperative ambition. They need to be viewed as an absolutely essential part of neighbourhoods and communities – an absolutely mainstream delivery partner for other services and corporate objectives. This means more than simply opening and closing a building if others want to use it or relying on well-established relationships. It means a very clear appraisal of what part libraries play against a set of deliverables and what resources, skills and other factors are critical to success. It also means being very crisp with corporate colleagues that a willingness to collaborate needs to be appropriately resourced. But the opportunities for a clearly articulated corporate delivery role are enormous. Playing a role in keeping adults independent and out of social care; supporting children's educational attainment through things like the summer reading scheme; enabling strong and supportive families through rhyme times; being a key access point for customer services, face to face and digitally; building on skills to get people into work; providing safe and welcoming spaces for young people to meet, learn and find their way in life ... the opportunities are enormous. Understanding how to translate potential into reality is absolutely essential. The service has been good at working in partnership outside of the

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Council – it now needs to build better relationships within.

- 5.10. **As an effective collaborator and partner to deliver shared agendas –** libraries have a solid track record of working with other agencies. How can this be expanded and formalised into a clearer set of actions? Continuing this work will enable the service to reinforce the core offer whilst pushing boundaries about what the role of a library can be, looking out all the time at how to add value for local communities. As well as statutory partners the service needs to explore more how engaging with community, faith and voluntary sector organisations brings the service closer to more communities, bringing new into the orbit of the service. And for library staff this brings an opportunity to share knowledge, skills and experience with colleagues with whom they will share many aspirations to make people's lives matter. And for the service, the opportunity to access additional funding streams for both council and community run libraries is of fundamental import.

A discussion about the similarities and differences between hub and community libraries is also needed. Lewisham has done an excellent job in building an integrated approach to both 'types' of library, cementing very positive relationships. The core elements of all libraries are clear – stock managed by the Council, celebrations of key aspects across all libraries (LGBTQ collections in February, for example) and ongoing support from Council staff. And community run libraries have made a tremendous difference by thinking afresh about issues like fundraising and ensuring diversity of access to a range of other organisations. As the conversation continues about the future of hub libraries, questions around consistency and difference, standards and expectations, support and independent all need to be addressed. These are not new issues for library services – the differences between central, town centre and community libraries for example have been rehearsed for decades – but that conversation is now needed in Lewisham to ensure hub libraries perform a very clear role in corporate and community initiatives and community libraries are supported and enabled to deliver local services that resonate. Information, advice and guidance is a good example of where clarity of offer and support is essential. As libraries find a clearer role in a wider customer access or resident experience programme of change, what can communities expect from each library as part of a wider advice network? Community libraries do not have the resources or expertise to support 'advice' work. Currently, neither do hub libraries. Should either? Both? These are the kinds of positive conversations that now need to be addressed.

- 5.11. In all of these conversations there will be five key guiding principles:
- **Make a difference to people's lives** – how the service supports people to meet the aspirations they hold for themselves, their families, friends and communities must always underpin thinking and delivery;
 - **Look out as well as in** – working with partners inside and out of the Council ensures libraries capitalise on the skills of others whilst also adding value;
 - **Recognise the world around** – public services are under extraordinary pressure. Libraries need to earn their right to support and funding by delivering on community and borough wide priorities. And flex to do this within a clear vision, set of values and priorities;
 - **Make positive choices** – the library service can deliver a lot. But it cannot do everything. It must be brave in offering options for scrutiny and

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recognising where others can do better, and then focus on where it truly adds value;

- **Be brave, be bold, be open** – public libraries have been around for 150 years and prospered because they have sought and found new roles that deliver recognisable difference. That need is greater than ever.

5.12. Following the detailed work on who is using libraries and why, undertaken by Shared Intelligence in 2021 and shared with this committee in September last year, how the service can optimise its impact in communities and deliver on Council priorities now requires detailed discussions with a number of stakeholders and partners. These discussions need to include a clear appreciation of the strategic opportunities and a very clear sense of how to turn opportunity into operational practice that makes a difference to individuals and their communities.

6. Key enablers

- 6.1. As part of the work needed to achieve any of these objectives some key outstanding issues need to be resolved. Three very pressing issues are:
- 6.2. **ICT** – The Service has been working with the ICT Shared Service to plan and deliver a complete overhaul of its ICT infrastructure including new computers, better internet connectivity, better Wi Fi, new print and payment solutions across the Hub Libraries. This work is essential to the effective operation of the service, in Council and community run libraries. The service's IT infrastructure needs to be embedded in corporate IT support in exactly the same way that, for example, office based staff in Laurence House are. There is no reason why the libraries IT should be any different.
- 6.3. **Maintaining buildings** – library buildings exist in a world where many people, rightly, have high expectations of the social, educational and functional spaces they use. People expect the basics to be in place – hygiene, cleanliness, safety, a degree of comfort. There is little point in striving to provide excellent services in library buildings unless they are clean, functional and fit for purpose, and preferably lift the spirits as places where people actively want to be. It is not acceptable to offer services to communities in spaces that are dirty, unpleasant and uncomfortable. It is profoundly disrespectful. How library buildings are maintained is a key question for the Council.
- 6.4. There are specific issues around Lewisham Library. The Arts Council have recently declined to offer funding for Lewisham Library. As the library continues to deteriorate a decision is now needed urgently on a way forward that sees Lewisham Library as an opportunity to co-locate other services and refresh the library as a power house of community resources whilst looking for opportunities to relocate as part of a community hub in any town centre developments.
- 6.5. **Skilled, trained, confident staff** – according to the Shared Intelligence work, a significant number of library users like the mediation and support staff bring. If libraries are to be the community focussed, flexible, corporate resource they should be, then the people offering the service will be a core element of this. Whether paid staff or volunteers, enabling those serving people to feel fully

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confident in their abilities is essential, and building on the staffing structure in Council run libraries and the good work of partners in community libraries needs to be set within wider corporate culture and values development programmes.

7. Timelines and actions

- 7.1. To achieve a clearer sense of the future role for libraries, and get a realistic basis for further discussion and agreement, the following will be undertaken in three phases that mirror the approach taken in corporate change programmes.

Discovery phase: March to June 2022

| What | What we need to know |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Digital inclusion | How to use library IT and staff skills to close the digital exclusion gap? |
| Skills and work agenda | How do libraries work within a wider network to help build their skills profiles, deliver job readiness or support small businesses? |
| Resident experience | What role do libraries take to support the new strategy, be part of the service web available and offer spaces where people can feel part of their wider community? |
| Customer access | How do libraries mediate access to other services and into digital? |
| Educational attainment for children | How do libraries formalise activities that maintain literacy and learning levels through additional services? |
| Independent living | Do libraries have a formal role in keeping people out of expensive adult social care by supporting independent living, physical and mental well-being? |
| Community resilience | What is the role of libraries in building safer, stronger communities where people can feel part of something 'better'? |
| Culture | What do libraries contribute to a rich cultural life across the borough? How do they collaborate with partners as diverse as the Hornimans and Goldsmiths? |
| 15 minute neighbourhoods and assets | What is the potential around libraries as community anchors? |
| Community libraries | After a decade of operating, what is working and what could we learn from to improve? |
| IT | How do we deliver a resilient IT service for all the libraries? |
| Capital | What are the resources available or options for growing funding to deliver appropriate buildings? |
| Digital services | What is the role of libraries in Lewisham - as conduits, creators, gateways? |
| Young people | How do libraries offer safe, welcoming spaces to young people as part of a wider menu of support? |
| Seldom heard voices | How do libraries reach those who need the service but are not currently using what is available? |
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Design phase: June – September 2022

| Discussion | When | Outcome required |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Community Services DMT | September | Discussion and endorsement of approach |
| EMT | September & November | Alignment of libraries to corporate plan, incl appropriate KPIs and outcomes |
| Mayor & Cabinet | September & November | Agreement to role of libraries in developing flourishing communities |
| Scrutiny | Tbc | Challenge sessions on all aspects of future thinking |
| Community library partners | October | Moving on in partnership |
| Current non-users | October | A clearer sense of what the service needs to do to reach more people |
| Young people | October | A clearer of sense of the very specific needs of young people and how these could be better met |
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Delivery phase: October 2022 onwards

Working with partners inside and out of the Council to drive change and development.

8. Actions to incorporate in thinking

- 8.1. The following table illustrates the actions, timescales, interdependencies, and budget constraints associated with the strategic approach proposed above.

| Item No. | Description/Actions | Start | End | Interdependencies | Budget constraints and advantages |
|----------|---|---------|----------|---|---|
| | Catford Library move into the shopping centre | 12/2021 | 4/2022 | Reorganisation, Lewisham Library redevelopment | Additional revenue costs |
| | Lewisham redevelopment | 11/2021 | 12/2022 | Decision on Library Resource Centre Future move to town centre development | £600k allocated Capital requirements |
| | Archive and Local History collections move | 2/2022 | 12/2022 | Depending on Lewisham's refurbishment | None |
| | Reorganisation of the Service | 6/2021 | 12/2022 | Subject to authorisation through Corporate Permission to Recruitment, phase 2 should complete ahead of Lewisham's reopening | None |
| | ICT infrastructure | 3/2022 | 10/2022? | Subject to authorisation | £200k? |
| | | | | | |

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9. Financial implications

- 9.1. The above strategic approach and action plan impact both the revenue and capital funding over the next few years.
- 9.2. The community libraries use the book stock purchased by the Council and occupy their premises rent-free but otherwise receive no financial support.
- 9.3. In the year 2021-2022, the Service has delivered savings of £368,000, £300,000 through a staff reorganisation and £68,000 as the Service's share of additional Corporate Saving (a council wide staff saving resulting from new ways of working). The service net budget in 2021/2022 is £2.6m of which £2m is staffing.
- 9.4. In 2022/23 the move of Catford Library out of Laurence House is expected to generate additional revenue costs in relation to the operation of the new Library premises (electricity, water, rates, security & staffing). These costs are expected to generate budget shortfall that has been estimated in £160k per annum. Further options can be explored next year to mitigate the projected overspend.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

11. Equalities implications

- 11.1. Having equitable access to library services across Lewisham is of significant importance. Ensuring the quality of service, stock, resources and support enables greater efforts of library staff to reach all communities and address some of the under-utilisation of various services that recent research has highlighted.

12. Climate change and environmental implications

- 12.1. Libraries have a role to play in supporting climate action.

13. Crime and disorder implications

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

14. Health and wellbeing implications

- 14.1. Libraries have a role to play in supporting the health and wellbeing of residents.

15. Background papers

- 15.1. Budget Cuts report 3 Feb 2021
<https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s77135/Budget%20Cuts.pdf>

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16. Report author and contacts

- 16.1. David Murray, Interim Director of Libraries and Learning
Antonio Rizzo, Head of Library and Information Service

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