



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE ELMBRIDGE

NEW WALTON LIBRARY, EVALUATION OF USE

21 SEPTEMBER 2009

KEY ISSUE

To inform the Local Committee of the results of the evaluation of the new Library in Walton and to assess the results of the pilot scheme of opening Walton on a Sunday between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.

SUMMARY

One year after the opening of the new Walton Library, a project team has undertaken a full evaluation of the library and the service it offers. This report is to inform the Local Committee of the results and highlights key findings from the evaluation. The evaluation report also forms part of a larger evaluation of the Library Staffing Review which led to improvements to opening hours also introduced in May 2008.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Committee (Elmbridge) is asked to agree that:

- (i) Note the report for information
- (ii) Offer comments on future developments for the library
- (iii) Offer comments on the effectiveness of Sunday opening

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The new Walton Library opened to the public on 27th May 2008. It is open 7 days a week, the only library in Surrey to be open on a Sunday.
- 1.2 The opening of Walton Library, which has cost nearly £2 million, is part of an improvement programme being rolled out by Surrey County Council to offer better services and to meet the modern needs of library users. It followed the launch of new library hours – which saw the 25 main libraries in the County extending opening by 198 hours per week.
- 1.3 The library offers self-service facilities, which has been high on the list of County Council's priorities. The venue, at 54 The Heart, off Hepworth Way, boasts a range of improved facilities over the previous library in Walton. It has 24,000 items on its shelves, and 25 public access computer terminals, all of which have Internet access and Microsoft Office applications. The computers are accessible to the public either by booking in advance or by using dedicated 'walk-up only' terminals. Of the 25 computers, four are for use by children and they are located in the junior library and there are two computers in the young adult area of the library.
- 1.4 The Charity of Robert Phillips Trust has given £100,106, the largest grant in the history of the charity, to provide a range of facilities for children and young people. Consultation with a group of students from Rydens High School and feedback from this group was used in the selection process for the new Walton Library and many of the resources identified have been ordered for the new library.
- 1.5 The County Council is also working in partnership with Elmbridge Borough Council providing two meeting rooms as well as contributing to an information point to give details about a wide range of services, to report problems and have questions answered.
- 1.6 A full evaluation of the library has been undertaken covering consultation with customers and staff; stock; library use in relation to retail outlets in the Heart Centre; impact on visits and issues at neighbouring libraries; effects of the change of level of resources provided; cost of provision; and partnership working.

2 ANALYSIS

- 2.1 The analysis below is based mainly on the public consultation with customers of Walton Library held in June 2009. It took the form of an exit survey. One – termed the Weekday Survey – ran for selected opening periods on each day between Monday and Saturday inclusive whilst a Sunday Survey was conducted on the final day of the week throughout all hours of opening.

- 2.2 The analysis of the number of visitors show a 243% increase of people visiting the new library over the use at its previous location. The number of books and audiovisual material issued also shows a 136.5% increase. Between April 2008 and March 2009 5,661 people joined Walton library, a 390% increase over the previous year. 1063 people joined between April to July 2009, an increase of 175.9% over the previous year and showing that a higher percentage of people continue to join the library.
- 2.3 36.9% (Sunday 43.7%) of members/customers were new to Walton Library, not having been members/visitors at its previous location. Figures are indicative of a broader customer base including those attracted to visiting a library on Sundays.
- 2.4 When asked about use of the library, book borrowing was the most popular activity at 72.7% (Sunday 59.4%) of users. Other well-liked activities were browsing (36%) – sometimes an adjunct to borrowing items – together with computer use (30.4%) and accessing the internet (22%), with an increase in these activities on Sundays - browsing (42.6%), computer use (36.6%) and accessing the internet (23.8%). Libraries continue to be synonymous with books, but the impact of the Virtual Library is not insignificant and growing. A year ago a similar survey was conducted at Knaphill Library, after it moved to its new location, and computer use and access of the internet there stood at 18% and 11.8% respectively.
- 2.5 Customers were asked to rate nineteen aspects of Walton Library. Staff helpfulness tops the list with 97.4% (Sunday 96.5%) of respondents assigning a very good/good rating to it. Other aspects of service provision with scores of 90% or over in both surveys include hours of opening, computer facilities, lighting, colour scheme as well as the overall library rating of 94.1% (Sunday 91%).
- 2.6 Satisfaction with hours of opening for over 90% of customers which can be attributed to a 70.4% increase in the number of opening hours per week including the introduction of Sunday opening from 11.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.; whereas in 2003 when the Public Libraries User Survey (PLUS) was last conducted at Walton Library, the satisfaction level regarding opening times was 45.8%
- 2.7 Children's services get a very good/good rating of 93.6% from Weekday Survey respondents whereas this percentage falls by 17.9% amongst Sunday Survey respondents. It is likely that this apparent anomaly can be attributable to the range of well-received children's activities provided on weekdays which do not form part of the Sunday agenda.
- 2.8 PC ownership within the home is now widespread with 82.8% (Sunday 83.3%) of households containing a PC; of which, 94% (Sunday 94.1%) provide access to the internet. Nonetheless, this does not in any way detract from use of PCs in libraries – 30.4% rising to 36.6% on Sundays - in part because aficionados of the Virtual World, particularly the young,

who wish to be able to access it at all times. Also, use may be restricted in those households with more than a single occupant yet only one PC.

- 2.9 The new library appeals to a younger range of customer with 68.1% (Sunday 72.6%) being under 55 years of age. The library is attractive to young people as 17.9% (Sunday 14.7%) are 24 years of age or under. Walton has 12.3% (Sunday 8.4%) of users within the 15-24 age group, whereas percentages for a similar age range in Group A Libraries such as Farnham (4.3%) and Godalming (3%) are considerably lower according to the Public Libraries User Survey (PLUS) conducted in 2006.
- 2.10 Borrower registrations also shows that the percentage of members at Walton aged between 0 – 14 is 27.55% against the county average of 24.74%, and between 15-19 is 4.19% against the county average of 3.69%.
- 2.11 It is significant that in the Sunday Survey form completion, 10.8% of respondents were making their first visit to Walton Library thus showing a continuing buoyancy in Sunday use which may not yet have reached its full potential. There is a symbiotic relationship between the retail trade and the library with each enhancing the footfall of the other. The majority (53.2%) of Sunday visitors cited combining library use with shopping in The Heart Centre.

3 CONSULTATIONS

- 3.1 Public consultation with users of Walton Library was held in June 2009. 458 people completed the weekday survey and 103 people completed Sunday survey.

4 FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The overall cost effectiveness of Walton Library and in particular the cost of opening on Sundays will be considered as part of the overall evaluation of the Library Staffing Review undertaken in 2008. A full report on this will be brought to the Local Committee when the evaluation is complete.

5 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The State of the County 2008 report states that in Surrey the proportion of the population from Black and Minority ethnic groups is 7.9%, with 5.5% from “other white” groups. The respondents to the Walton Survey for weekdays showed 9.3% from Black and Minority ethnic groups and 13.6% from “other white” groups. The Sunday figures are 3.3% and 9.9% respectively.

- 5.2 30 people responded saying they had disabilities in the weekday survey and 4 on Sundays. In the comments section within the consultation, there were 4 comments about access via lifts to the second floor and 2 comments about parking. There was one comment about a lack of tapes in other languages.

6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no crime and disorder implications

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The new library has been a very great success with high levels of use and high levels of customer satisfaction. The library has moved from one of the least used libraries to one of the best-used libraries in one year.
- 7.2 The library was designed to encourage young people to come into the library, supported by the Charity of Robert Phillips, and the use of the library shows that this strategy has been very successful.
- 7.3 Sunday library opening has proved to be successful, encouraging a broader based membership. Sunday library opening enhances the quality of urban life as the second most popular (43.6%) reason for Sunday library use was because respondents had “more time”, and this is reflected in respondents’ comments.
- 7.4 The staff in Walton Library are to be congratulated on delivery of a high quality service.

8 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- 8.1 The project team will be making recommendations for actions to address issues arising from the report.
- 8.2 The results of the evaluation will be used as part of the wider evaluation on the library service.
- 8.3 A further report on the evaluation of the Library Staffing Review will be brought to the Local Committee before the end of the financial year.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:

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