THE LIBRARY SERVICE IN REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL'S LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

5TH MARCH 2007

KEY ISSUE

To report on recent progress and improvement in Surrey County Council libraries in Reigate and Banstead, and to note current issues and future developments for the Library Service in Surrey and their impact.

SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the Library service in Surrey and a progress report on the services provided in Reigate and Banstead. The report looks forward to future challenges, describes how the service is planning to respond constructively to change, and highlights future opportunities to develop libraries.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Committee is asked to note the:

(i)   Current state of provision of static and mobile libraries in Reigate and Banstead and the range of services provided in them

(ii)   Beneficial outcome of local member funding for the refurbishment projects at Banstead and Horley Libraries

(iii)   Opportunities for the service to develop in Reigate and Banstead to meet the needs of its residents in future, and continue to promote the interests of libraries in plans for joint development of local services.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Surrey County Council Libraries – a brief overview

1.1.1 Within the new structure of Surrey County Council, Libraries form part of the Libraries & Culture Service, in the Services to Communities Directorate. This is a time of change for Libraries; there is a need to respond to the challenges of new services, changing lifestyles, and changing patterns of use.

1.1.2 Book borrowing is falling nationally, but visits to libraries are holding steady. Use of public access PCs connected to the Internet is now a considerable draw, reflecting the shift in information provision in some areas from print to electronic format.

1.1.3 Books and reading as a creative use of leisure is still very important in people's lives, and promoting books and reading is a priority for libraries.

1.1.4 The Libraries & Culture Service Business Plan for 2007/08 and the following two years seeks to respond positively to these changes and enable libraries to continue to be relevant to people's lives.

1.1.5 The priority for Libraries is the use of resources to make the most of the available budget:

- A capital programme of library refurbishments to contemporary design standards is under way. **Redhill, Banstead and Horley Libraries** have already been upgraded.

- We are developing a Network Strategy for the next ten years, to enable a constructive response to local development opportunities. Examples so far have been the inclusion of Libraries in the planning process for the **Horley Master Plan**, and the **Merstham Regeneration project.**

- Procurement: new library resource supplier contracts for 2007 provide greater efficiency and more books.

- We are introducing new 'self-service' technology in libraries, so that borrowers can check in and out their own books.

- We are reviewing library staff levels and roles in the light of changing library services and use, seeking to increase efficiency, improve opening hours, and improve personal service to the public.

- We are extending use of online services to enable library members to manage their borrower accounts online and make use of a range of high quality library and information services from home, workplace or school/college.

2   ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

2.1   Major development themes in Libraries and their impact in Reigate & Banstead

2.1.1   **Modernisation programme** - The introduction of 'Self-service' new technology for users: improvements to library automation mean that users can now check in and out their own loans, and book their own sessions on public access computers. Staff are still on hand to assist less confidant users.

2.1.2   Self-service technology for users was piloted in **Redhill Library** in November 2005. Improved staff efficiency has enabled the library to open for 56 hours instead of 51.

2.1.3   The same Self-service technology is to be introduced in **Horley and Banstead Libraries** in 2007. **Horley Library** will reopen as a 'Self-service' library on 1st March 2007.

2.1.4   **Library refurbishments** - A capital programme has been in progress since 2005, and has enabled refurbishment projects at **Redhill and Banstead Libraries** during 2005/06. Library interiors are being upgraded to contemporary design standards, drawing on the retail experience with which libraries are now increasingly in competition.

2.1.5   The project at **Banstead Library** benefited from Local Member funding allocation to provide enhancements to the original plan.

2.1.6   Capital funding of £500k has been allocated to improving libraries across Surrey. The Countywide programme for 2007 has the priority of introducing Self-service technology into 11 of the larger libraries in Surrey during 2007.

2.1.7   Scheduled for 2007 is a major refurbishment of **Horley** and further work in **Redhill and Banstead Libraries.**

2.1.8   Member funding has again enabled a more ambitious project to take place at **Horley Library** (due to re-open on 1st March 2007). The decision to refurbish **Horley Library** has been taken in the light of the timescale for the Horley Masterplan and the regeneration of Horley Town centre, and the lack of attention to the building during a period of uncertainty.

2.2   Access to Library services In Reigate and Banstead

2.2.1   Residents of Reigate and Banstead have access to Library services through six static libraries at **Banstead, Horley, Merstham, Redhill, Reigate and Tattenhams**, and through the Mobile Library service.

2.2.2   Since August 2006, all library phone calls have been routed through the Surrey County Council contact centre.

2.3   Libraries in Reigate and Banstead

2.3.1 **Banstead**.
The recent refurbishment has created an attractive space for circulation, display of new and popular books, to satisfy the demand for quick choice. Later this year, there will be a further phase of building improvement to introduce self-service technology for borrowing and return of books.

2.3.2 **Horley**
Horley Library closed for refurbishment on 7th February and re-opens on 1st March 2007. When it re-opens, it will offer users self-service technology for borrowing and return of books, and a complete makeover inside to contemporary design standards.

2.3.3 **Merstham**
Merstham Library continues to be a very popular small library, at the heart of its community. Links are excellent, in particular the location of the Merstham Playlinks toy library has had a tremendous spin-off in activities for children and parents, and development and maintenance of children's use of the Library.

2.3.4 **Reigate**
Reigate Library suffers somewhat from its lack of visibility and its location on the periphery of the town centre. However, it is highly regarded by its users, and attracts a high number of visitors for its size and scope. There is a fruitful relationship with the Register Office in the same building. Parents often find out about the library for the first time when coming to register their baby, and often join as a family.

2.3.5 **Redhill**
Redhill Library underwent refurbishment work in Autumn 2005, and re-opened in November 2005 offering self-service technology for users. The new method has been well accepted by a large number of library members who are used to such technology in other parts of their lives. Other users were less confident, and library staff continue to be available to support them. The increased efficiency has enabled Redhill Library to open at 9am and close at 6pm on weekdays, when it opened formerly at 9.30am and closed at 5pm. On 19th March, Redhill Library will close for 4 weeks for essential Health and Safety work to the ceiling on both floors.

2.3.6 **Tattenhams**
Tattenhams Library retains its place at the heart of the Epsom Downs community, and the high regard of its users. Despite the restrictions of space, it is used for surgeries by MP and local councillors.

3 **Performance data for Libraries in Reigate and Banstead 2005/06** *(latest available year)*

Library	Band/hours open per week	Annual Issues	Annual Visits	Issues per hour	Visits per hour	Floor space sq. m.
Redhill	1 / 56hrs	274,015	343,324	107.0	134.1	780.7
Avg. band 1	*52 hrs*	*343,444*	*430,754*	*137.0*	*173.0*	*1004.36*
Banstead	2 / 38.5hrs	177,559	108,686	92.4	56.5	432.56
Horley	2 / 38.5hrs	177,289	183.154	88.7	91.6	490.1
Avg. band 2	*41.2 hrs*	*185,215*	*162,689*	*90.0*	*79.0*	*468.99*
Reigate	3 / 35.5hrs	88,664	92,981	48.6	51.0	388.7
Avg. band 3	*36.7 hrs*	*108,578*	*83,102*	*57.7*	*44.2*	*286.65*
Tattenhams	4 / 26.5	55,648	54,698	40.5	39.8	154.94
Avg. band 4	*28.5 hrs*	*70,606*	*65,260*	*48.5*	*44.8*	*188.74*
Merstham	5 / 17.0	25,769	33,062	29.7	38.1	156.0
Avg. band 5	*21.9*	*33,922*	*36,219*	*29.8*	*31.8*	*122.56*

Points to note:
- Libraries in Surrey are divided into 5 bands, according to size, scope and business. Within those bands there are variations in use that are accounted for by size, opening hours, number of public terminals available.
- Some libraries attract more library visits, proportionally, than others. This may be because of their location close to shops, workplaces and public transport that make them a magnet for quick visits.
- The trend is for library users to visit frequently, but borrow less. Some library visitors come for some purpose other than borrowing books, such as to use a public access PC, or to seek information.

4 The Mobile Library Service in Reigate and Banstead

4.1 The Mobile Library visits 19 villages or similar isolated communities every week or fortnight, and 17 sheltered housing units every four weeks. The vehicle, with its distinctive pictorial livery, carries a choice of over 2,000 books and spoken-word cassette tapes.

4.2 Members of the community unable to access static libraries highly value the service. In the Public Library User Survey conducted in October 2006 the question "What do you think of this library?" was posed. 97.6% of those responding stated "Very good" or "Good".

4.3 The advice of Members of the Local Committee has been instrumental in the introduction of stops at Netherne on the Hill and at Green Lane, Lower Kingswood on the other side of the A217 to the existing Lower Kingswood stops. In response to the suggestions of Members, the stops at Hooley, Chipstead and Walton on the Hill now operate on Thursday mornings rather than Monday mornings when there is more activity in these villages.

4.4 Following a request from local residents, it has been possible since January to introduce a fortnightly stop on Friday afternoons at Spencer's Way to serve the Whitebushes estate in Redhill.

4.5 Mr Chris Phillips, the Area Manager with a countywide responsibility for mobile libraries, welcomes any further advice from Members of the Local Committee as it is helpful in trying to ensure the Mobile Library Service meets the needs of the people of Reigate and Banstead and matches demand as effectively as possible to the available vehicle resources.

4.6 The timetables for the Mobile Library Service are now on the Surrey County Council website at www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraries. These live interactive pages provide the times of the mobile library visits in Surrey for the next three months as well as maps showing the location of each stop. The service is also publicised through posters at appropriate locations, Residents Association newsletters and parish magazines. In 2007 it is hoped to raise the profile of the service through local radio.

5 Performance of the Contact Centre

5.1 The roll out of library telephone calls to the contact centre began in August 2006 and was completed with Saturday opening in January 2007. A team of staff from the library service worked closely with a team from the contact centre to ensure the necessary protocols were in place and training was provided for all contact centre staff. The two services continue to work together to improve the service to the public.

5.2 The initial response from many library users was one of suspicion that the service would be worse; many generally disliked the idea of a contact centre. Many verbal and some written complaints were received from customers who had not actually used the service. Some library staff were also dubious of the benefits to their customers. A major concern was the lack of the personal touch.

5.3 The complaints from those who have used the service fall into two main categories, length of time waiting for the call to be answered, linked with the cost of the call and procedural mistakes made by staff members at the contact centre. Overall we have recorded 68 complaints and 70 comments about the change in service up to the end of January 2007. The two services liaised to address the issues raised in the complaints and by February 2007 the number of complaints had reduced significantly to less than one a week, mostly now being about the length of time before their call was answered.

5.4 The contact centre is now dealing with routine enquiries about renewals, requests, computer bookings and opening times, and are passing the more detailed enquiries through to the libraries and to Enquiries Direct. The staff in the libraries are very pleased with the outcome of the changes and are building good relationships with staff in the centre. A typical comment from a Library Manager in the last quarterly report was "Many comments this quarter regarding the Call Centre. However, things have settled down now. Calls seem to be being dealt with more efficiently and readers seem to be a lot happier!"

Library Service Calls 2006/07

	Sept	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**	**Jan**
Number of calls	2581	10,984	13,033	11,144	13,486
% of contact centre calls	8	47	29	33	27

6   Hire of Libraries: policy and charges

6.1 Currently, the hire of a library is at the discretion of the manager, and highly dependent on the layout and content of the building and its suitability for use by the public. Charges are also locally determined. Some activities take place in libraries on a partnership basis, such as the Welcare-run Playlinks Toy Library at Merstham, and the use of Tattenhams Library for surgery sessions, and no charge is made. The basis for such arrangements is generally mutual benefit.

6.2 A review of the policy for hiring libraries is now under way, in conjunction with Surrey County Council Risk Management. There will be a consistent policy that harmonises hire of libraries with hire of schools. Rates will be revised, and published for all library buildings that are available to hire. Because of security and health and safety risks, lack of caretaking staff and the lack of flexibility of space, libraries are suitable for hire only in limited circumstances. Individual requests are subject to a risk assessment.

6.3 The county-wide policy for hire of libraries, and the scale of charges, will be introduced during the financial year 2007/8.

7   Heritage connections in Reigate and Banstead

7.1   Reigate and Banstead pioneered a new model in developing local studies, through Local History Centres based in libraries, and run in partnership between Surrey County Council Libraries, Surrey History Centre, and local organisations and societies promoting local and family history.   The first Centre opened in Horley Library in 1995, and has been followed by Centres in Redhill and Banstead Libraries.   The centres make a notable contribution in the areas of

- Local research and sharing knowledge and memories

- Expert response to specific local history enquiries

- Fostering a sense of place, and encouraging new residents to take an interest in their new home

- Linking older and younger people together through work with schools

7.2   Reigate is privileged to have the earliest public lending library in England, the Cranston Library, founded in 1701.   This landmark of library history is preserved in its original location in St Mary's Church. Surrey County Council supports its preservation through an annual grant towards security costs, some administrative and professional support, and by representation on the library Trustees. The Cranston Library participates in the county programme for Heritage Open Day in September each year, and holds the annual Cranston Lecture, in memory of its founder, the Revd. Andrew Cranston, each Autumn.

8   SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

8.1   The future requirements for library provision are being taken into account in the following plans:
- The Horley Master Plan
- The regeneration of Redhill Town Centre
- The Merstham Community Plan for regeneration

9   CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1   There are no crime and disorder implications to consider.

10   EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1   Members are asked to take note of the contribution of Libraries in Reigate and Banstead to equalities and diversity:

- Libraries are open to all, free at point of use and neutral

- Provision for minority ethnic communities is available through all libraries, with emphasis on excellent relationships with the Asian community at Redhill Library

- Children are entitled to library membership from birth, and the recent introduction of an under-5s library card, featuring the much loved children's story character Maisy, enables them to borrow books free of library fines.

- Services are available in different formats for those who require them, and mobile library and Books on Wheels services meet the needs of isolated communities and the housebound.

11   CONCLUSION

11.1   The Local Committee is asked to note the:

(i)   Current state of provision of static and mobile libraries in Reigate and Banstead and the range of services provided in them

(ii)   Beneficial outcome of local member funding for the refurbishment projects at Banstead and Horley Libraries

(iii) Opportunities for the service to develop in Reigate and Banstead to meet the needs of its residents in future, and continue to promote the interests of libraries in plans for joint development of local services.

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