

Surrey Performing Arts Library. Summary of findings from the user survey.

Background.

A user survey was sent to those registered at Surrey Performing Arts Library (PAL) who had been seen¹ between 1 August 2015 and 31 August 2017². Group representatives encouraged their members to complete the survey. This enabled us not only to gather information on the active use of material but also to get an indication of their views on the 3 options proposed in the survey. The response to those 3 options is listed below.

A total of 1474 responses were received: a postcode mapping comparison of active borrowers and respondents indicated that the user survey reached its intended audience. 78% of the responses were submitted during the first 2 weeks of the period.

509 groups were notified of the survey. 168 (33%) were recorded on our system as not having borrowed items within the previous 12 months (38% of music groups and 23% of drama groups)

Postcode mapping of Surrey based PAL borrowers³ indicates concentrations of in the following geographical areas: a) immediate Dorking area; b) Leatherhead/Fetcham/Epsom/Ewell; c) Redhill/Reigate; d) Guildford/Godalming.

Our West Sussex users are spread throughout the county with concentrations around the south coast (Shoreham to Bognor) and the Horsham area. Use by groups within the immediately neighbouring London boroughs also show on the map (Kingston/Surbiton/ New Malden).

User profile

Based on responses to the monitoring section, the demographic profile of PAL is female, retired, white British with no disability or long standing condition. The gender bias at 58.9% female shows a slight variance to the gender balance of library membership as a whole (61.7% female). However, the age demographic of Pal is markedly different to that of the general library. Of the 1353 people who gave us age details, 11.5% (155) were under the age of 45 compared with 62.4% of that age group within the overall library membership. For a general performing arts library service this imbalance is a concern.

¹ "Seen" is defined as activity recorded on the library computer system. Data extraction: 31/8/2017

² 346 music groups; 164 drama groups; 752 individual borrowers

³ Borrowers using the service from 1 January 2015 to 31 Aug 2017

Membership balance of respondents.

64.2% of respondents were from the musical end of the performing arts spectrum. The remaining balance was 11% drama groups/members and 24.8% were answering as individuals.

The user survey attracted a high level of response from those who use the current Denbies site to collect and return items and for whom this is their local library. Although this is a countywide service focussing on dance, drama, music and other performing arts, there was a general tone within the additional comments that this facility belonged in Dorking or at least within Mole Valley. This seemed to be argued on a single element of the performing arts - music - and the connection of Vaughan Williams to the area - Leith Hill Place, Leith Hill Music Festival and the small specialised collection PAL holds and hosts (some of which is already housed in the Surrey History Centre).

For many “its actual location doesn’t matter” as long as the service continued to provide their material. For West Sussex users, retaining the facility to pick up at their local West Sussex library was highlighted as a concern.

It should be noted that groups in West Sussex have a strong relationship with Surrey Libraries as their own local library authority firstly contracted the service out to Surrey Libraries and then, due to further budget reductions, withdrew their financial support. Fortunately, the close working relationship between Surrey and West Sussex library services means these groups can collect PAL material from their own local West Sussex library – a process that can be continued within option 1 but would have to be negotiated for option 2. One commented that he/she would be much less happy with option 2 “since some stock came from West Sussex Music Library some years ago and I believe that is why we have continued access. I would not like our access to be threatened.”

How they use the service.

Consistent with the level of response from the music and drama community, multiple copies of vocal/orchestral scores and play sets were the main pre-occupation of the respondents.

Respondents were asked to indicate their most frequent way of choosing material⁴. The response differed according to the type of material they wanted to borrow. Browsing was a favoured method for drama groups and individuals (40.4% [127 of 314] and 48.8% [261 of 535] respectively). For music groups, there was no

⁴ The options were: 1) visit staff in the library; 2) telephone staff in the library 3) email the library; 4) visit the library and browse; 5) use online catalogues; 6) other method

overwhelmingly favoured choice with an equal spread, the most frequent being face-to-face contact at 27% (280 of 1037 respondents).

Comments bore out that keeping the music sets as a single collection and the drama as a single collection (not necessarily co-located) were fundamental to the way they operate. It should be noted that there would be no loss of this facility should the 2 collections be re-located as proposed in option 1.

The staff at SPAL were well regarded, being “helpful and informative” (adjectives frequently used to describe all our staff working in libraries) and some concern was expressed about a perceived loss of specialist knowledge.

It should be noted that contact with staff can range from the simple request “what do I have on loan?” renewal, the author of a work, whether something is on the shelves and available to borrow to a more complex enquiry. The questionnaire did not venture into that area.

What do people value most about the current service at the Performing Arts library?

People were asked to rank which service they valued most from a list of the following options.

Range of items I can borrow
Facility to book vocal/orchestral/play sets in advance
Competitive hire charges
Staff support
Good access for collection /drop off of heavy items
Facility to view catalogue online
Facility to order material at any time by email or online form
Something else

The more respondents who selected the same option as their most valued service, the higher it appeared in the overall ranking of the options. The range of stock was the option which came out highest, along with how they can plan to use it.

The competitive hire charge was the third most valued feature for both music and drama groups.

We also know from the questionnaire that music groups (because of the numbers of copies which might be involved) also use other sources to ensure they have the required numbers (confirmed by 302 (22%) of the 1373 people who replied to this question). Examples of services which they mentioned using are: commercial lending organisations such as Chameleon and Gernontius; other choirs and orchestras; other public libraries and private libraries.

107 of the 1030 comments were around a willingness to pay increased fees.

Although use of online means of helping choice was not as highly valued, there were some interesting comments on how these could be improved e.g. by developing a Netflix type solution and digitising music.

How often do people borrow multiple copy sets?

The standard loan period for general library material is 3 weeks. For groups hiring multiple copy sets this rises to 3 months. Of the 1400 people who responded, 620 (44.3%) borrow multiple copy sets every 3 months and 358 (25.6%) every 6 months. It does show that people may only use the library every 3 or 6 months. Given that PAL offers an advance booking facility (up to 6 months), the stock can be out of circulation for large amounts of the year.

Options for the future of the Performing Arts library

The respondents were asked to think about the proposed options on the future of Performing Arts that were being considered.

Option 3 – closure of the service - brought the strongest response whereby 1325 people (91.6%), out of 1474 who responded, disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, showing a desire for the service to be retained in some way.

Option 1 contained 2 elements within the proposal.

- a) Housing the music sets in a new library location and the drama sets in a different location. The service would operate by a mix of Surrey County Council staff and volunteers.
- b) Moving single copy⁵ items so they become part of the general library stock and distributed throughout the Surrey library network.

Although disagreeing with the options, nearly 60% of respondents told us they would use the library as usual or slightly less indicating that the move would not deter them from continuing to borrow music/play sets from a location other than Denbies. Less than 10% would stop using the service. It should be noted that many groups already

⁵ Single copies refers to books, music scores, CDs and DVDs which are not part of any set

use other Surrey and West Sussex library as a pickup/drop off point so a change of location would have little impact.

When asked at which library they would prefer the music and drama sets to be housed, the top 3 libraries were Guildford, Epsom and Redhill for both music and drama subjects.

Supporters of Option 1 commented on the wish to see the service retained in a public library setting to retain “democratic control over... a public resource” and were concerned at the profit making element of an outside organisation. They also made clear that their concern was to keep the music collections and drama collections entire, and co-location was not essential.

Option 2 proposed a transfer of ownership in part or to a community or other organisation on the understanding that the stock will continue to be available to the public

With a total of 1458 responses, this proposal drew a high response. 470 (32%) strongly agreed with this and half that number strongly disagreeing

Comments were made on the length of time needed to achieve this and people worried a great deal about the apparent deadline of 1 April 2018. Others expressed concerns about the way that the collections would be developed in the future and sustained and “there would have to be a very watertight agreement to ensure future accessibility”.

The comments on option 2 also highlight that many are concerned that PAL should not be “split up” and indicated that they thought a transfer to an organisation outside the council would not result in two very separate “music” and “drama” libraries.

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