

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**  
**19 JULY 9007**

*EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE REVIEW OF LIBRARIES*

**1. Observations / Conclusions**

- 4.1 From its investigations, the Working Group concludes that libraries are hubs of their communities, as evidenced in the surveys undertaken as part of the review, and offer valued meeting places for all, particularly the elderly and isolated.
- 4.2 Members feel that the Library and Information service is proactive pursuing strategies for book selection and display, library layout, signage, promotional events and ICT.
- 4.3 Library location and layout is thought to be crucial to vibrancy as, despite its appeal, the Ascot Durning Library appears under utilised owing to its remote siting and limited signage.
- 4.4 Accessibility is an important library feature and consideration should be given to physical access, parking and opening hours.
- 4.5 Volunteers are a valued commodity assisting with the home library service and use of further volunteers could be made especially where funding constraints limit services.
- 4.6 As reading groups and book clubs appear popular and over subscribed they could be extended for all age groups in libraries across the borough.
- 4.7 There is a valuable link between libraries and education and the Working Group would like to see this extended, e.g. via ICT learning suites as approximately 20% of adult are said to have limited literacy skills. This has been commenced with Learn Direct.
- 4.8 A coffee shop and toilets would be a welcome addition to a library.
- 4.9 It appears that some users are unaware that they can return loan material to any library in the Borough as the courier service will return items to the library of origin. Wider promotion of this facility would be beneficial.
- 4.10 Themed display of books, e.g. a best sellers section, facilitates borrowers' selection.
- 4.11 Users have an expectation of a 24/7 service and means of increasing opening hours and accessibility would be welcomed. This may include an on-line reference facility of reference texts such as the Encyclopedia Britannica available to users at home 24/7, a self-issue loan scheme, electronic ordering of loan items for home delivery at a charge, an out-of-hours return 'drop box' or introduction of e-books.
- 4.12 The 'Bookstart' project, which introduces young children to reading, is important and should be continued.

- 4.13 As much demand for library services is from those learning English as a second language, the provision of translation information would assist.
- 4.14 Users appear to be more satisfied with the re-organised mobile library service which is more personalised than that previously provided.
- 4.15 Modernisation and increased use of ICT is necessary for libraries to flourish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where their role is seen to be moving towards promoting reading and learning, enabling access to digital skills and services and encouraging community cohesion and civic values.

## 2. Recommendations

### **General Recommendations**

- 5.1 As teenagers represent the lowest library user age group (2% of borrowers), further work to provide appropriate stock and surroundings should be undertaken to encourage them to make greater use of libraries and develop reading habits.
- 5.2 Internal and external library signage should be reviewed and updated where necessary.
- 5.3 The provision of further ICT learning suites in libraries should be pursued if possible to provide learning opportunities for adults with limited literacy skills in a non-threatening environment in conjunction with adult education co-ordinators.
- 5.4 Consideration should be given to introducing an on-line system enabling library users to access reference materials at all times from their homes utilising their library card and a pin number.
- 5.5 The Library and Information Service could make greater use of volunteers to enhance and expand its services, to engage residents in promoting the libraries as a community place.

### **Recommendations Concerning the Civic Hub Library**

The new civic hub library should:

- 5.6 be flexible to facilitate development and adaptation to meet future needs;
- 5.7 have an exhibition style to facilitate public art, heritage collections and other displays as an entrance feature and be light and airy with planting;
- 5.8 feature flexible low level display shelving and versatile furniture which can be re-arranged to accommodate displays/events etc;
- 5.9 locate the children's area on the ground floor to facilitate access;
- 5.10 include an ICT learning suite, preferably in a separate room with links to the library, preferably featuring a Learn Direct outreach centre;
- 5.11 utilise electronic signage and boards both within and outside;
- 5.12 offer a 'quick pick and browse' self-issue loan scheme to speed borrowing and free staff for other duties and extended opening; and
- 5.13 Include a loan material 'drop off' facility to enable return of borrowed items outside opening hours.