

## **Achievements in LB Wandsworth on library services**

### **Wandsworth bucks London's library closure trend with three branch rebuilds and expanding services**    Published: Friday 5th August 2016

A new report explores how Wandsworth has managed to keep its entire local library network fully open while delivering a wide range of service improvements and branch upgrades.

The paper, which was discussed by the council's community services committee, shows that all 11 branches have gone from strength to strength since 2013 when the day-to-day management was outsourced to charitable social enterprise Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) following a competitive tendering exercise.

Three years later and this innovative partnership has reduced the cost of the service by around £300,000 a year while delivering significant new investment in library buildings and the ICT facilities local residents rely on.

Work has now started on a brand new Wandsworth Town centre library on Garratt Lane and the council is also developing plans to replace another two existing branches, York Gardens and Roehampton, with new state of the art buildings offering a wide range of modern services.

Since GLL took over the network in 2013 Battersea Library has been upgraded with a new fit for purpose children's area, which is much brighter and affords better access to parents with buggies. Improvements have also been made to the study area in the Reference Library including the restoration of 1920s study desks.

Earlsfield has been also completely redecorated inside and out, and 'teen' and 'homework' areas created. The children's library at Northcote was redecorated and children's library at Tooting completely refurbished.

The report goes on to say that in 2014/15, the last year for which comparative statistics are available, almost a million and a half books were issued to Wandsworth library users – the second highest level among the 33 London boroughs. Meanwhile three quarters of a million children's books were issued – more than in any other borough.

Wandsworth Council's leisure and culture spokesman Cllr Jonathan Cook said:

“Whilst other councils are considering closing down libraries Wandsworth's entire network is flourishing and we have plans to deliver three brand new and improved branches.

“The council has not been afraid to experiment and, through outsourcing day-to-day management of our branch network to GLL we have harnessed another organisation’s new ideas and opened the door to new sources of investment. The result is that we are delivering the savings we need while providing the first class libraries residents demand.”

Other improvements achieved under the partnership with GLL include:

- New e-resources including company information service MINT and music downloading service FREEGAL
- Software that automatically identifies and sorts books, to free up staff time at Balham Library
- Cloud-based printing and photocopying to enable customers to print from home or from their device
- A better system to ensure libraries get new titles as quickly as possible and people have a shorter wait for reserved items
- An online system to enable the public to buy images from the heritage collection
- Email warnings to help customers avoid late return charges
- More e-book titles available
- A comprehensive programme of events in the libraries
- Online learning sessions
- Link ups with other organisations including the Putney School of Art and Design and the Citizens Advice Bureau to help local people access other public services in their local branch

Wandsworth and GLL are also developing plans to co-locate library services at other community settings such as leisure centres and health centres.

**The full Wandsworth Council report on library service is [here](#).**

*London Forum hopes its members can encourage all boroughs to improve libraries.*