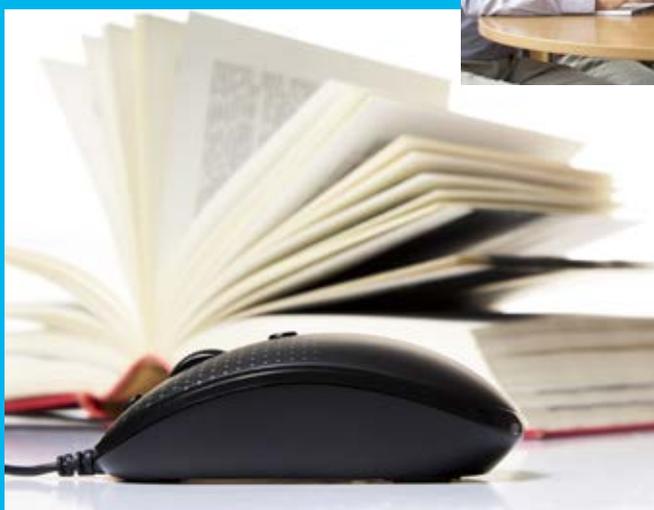


Bexley Library Service

Engaging communities, enriching and improving lives

A Library Strategy and Local Studies
and Archives Service Strategy
for Bexley 2014-2019



December 2014



Foreword

Libraries play an important role in people's lives, providing free access to books, information and resources and engagement with the wider world through the internet. Libraries in Bexley are bright, attractive, and welcoming spaces. They are accessible and comfortable places for all members of our communities.

Libraries are important because they can make a real contribution to the lives of all residents of the borough. They play a key role in maintaining and improving the quality of life of the people who live and work in Bexley. They are important places for residents to improve their lives, and develop their cultural interests. The information and facilities they provide can help people become healthier, seek new employment, and be connected to communities across the borough, the country and the world. They also play a significant role in providing opportunities for people of all ages to develop themselves and undertake informal and life long learning.

Libraries are important places for young people, where they can access the internet, develop their reading skills, grow their knowledge and improve their learning and educational attainments.

Libraries are at the heart of our communities. They have a key role to play in maintaining people's health and well-being – including offering safe and engaging places for people to go to meet and interact with others, thereby reducing social isolation. They are also places where residents from all communities can access Council services.

The Local Studies and Archive Service plays an important role in preserving and providing access to the borough's historic collections, revealing inspirational stories for all residents and engaging in successful externally funded projects which promote the borough's heritage.

The aim of a Library Strategy is to provide a vision for the service and to identify a path for the service over the next five years, building on the role libraries are fulfilling and promoting the wider roles libraries can serve.

This Library Strategy has been written at a time of significant financial pressure, when local authorities, including the London Borough of Bexley have to seek new and efficient ways to deliver services to residents. It is also a time when there is a marked national downward trend in people visiting libraries and borrowing books - a change in demand which is clearly evident in Bexley. This strategy recognises these issues and proposes how the Library Service will respond, through adopting further new, efficient and effective approaches to delivering benefits to residents whilst reducing operating costs.

The aims in this Strategy cannot be delivered by the borough on its own. The Library Service must work with, and through, a series of partners. In the coming years I look forward to working with them as we strive to fulfil the goals set out in the following pages.

**Councillor Alex Sawyer,
Cabinet Member for
Community Safety and Leisure**

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Library Service in Bexley

With 10 libraries across the borough and 2 community managed libraries (Bexley Community Library and Slade Green and Howbury Community Library), the Library Service provides direct universal access not only to books, audio visual material, IT and information, but also to local community events and activities. The Service also provides outreach services including those to housebound readers, and a wide range of events and activities including the Summer Reading Challenge, toddler times and reading groups. Public access is available to library services electronically at any time of the day or night, from any computer with internet access. In addition, the Central Library in Bexleyheath hosts the Local Studies and Archives Service which collects, preserves and makes accessible published works and archival material that relate to the history and heritage of the borough.

The Library Service has undertaken a major programme of capital investment over the last ten years and nine libraries have been refurbished. These libraries are attractive, fit-for-purpose and welcoming environments. A new, community managed, library (to replace the current Slade Green Library) opened in October 2014 as part of the Slade Green and Howbury Community Centre and there are also detailed plans for a new Thamesmead Library as part of the Southmere Regeneration Scheme.

Libraries have been established as focal points in local communities, offering a wide range of services. They have been developed as Council Contact Points, and they remain a key point of access and day to day contact to all Council services for residents from all communities.

The Local Studies and Archives Service continues to seek new ways to promote access to the collections through a range of activities and services. The Service has engaged with local community groups to deliver a wide range of history projects. While realising the importance of delivering an accessible onsite facility at the Central Library, the Service has also extended its provision of online digital resources and operates a successful outreach programme.

Over the last few years, the Library and Local Studies and Archive Services have significantly developed and promoted many opportunities for volunteering. The Home Library Service is run in conjunction with the Royal Voluntary Service and volunteers provide a free book delivery service to any residents of Bexley or Bromley, who are unable to reach and use their local library, providing an often much appreciated opportunity for social interaction. Volunteers also help to provide the annual Summer Reading Challenge and there are a range of other opportunities for volunteers to assist with the provision of services across the Library Service.

Key volunteering roles include “computer buddies” where volunteers provide IT taster sessions in libraries for beginners and also offer trouble-shooting sessions on specific issues. Bexley Libraries also work with Age UK to run Older People’s drop in sessions at four libraries and there are opportunities for volunteering at these sessions as well. Volunteers also assist at “Stitch and Sew” sessions at some libraries and help to deliver Toddlertime and Storytime sessions in libraries.

In addition to expanded volunteer programmes, in recent years several opportunities have been grasped to maximise the use of space in the Library Service and to work closely with external and internal partners to achieve a more integrated approach to the use of the library buildings, in recognition of their value as community assets. Key partners that currently use library space to deliver their services include Age UK and the Citizen's Advice Bureau. As well as maximising use of library space, this approach also benefits customers, who are able to access multiple services in a single visit. The range of activities, programmes and services on offer has, therefore, been substantially increased over the last few years, providing new opportunities for residents to use the library spaces to meet and socialise with people who have similar interests, thereby helping to address growing concerns about rising levels of social isolation.

1.2 Shared Library Service with London Borough of Bromley

In July 2011, the Bexley Cabinet Member for Leisure and Bromley's Executive Committee approved the merger of the back office and management function between the London Borough of Bexley and London Borough of Bromley Library Services. In Bexley, this decision was taken as part of its corporate efficiency programme. A back office saving of approximately £0.7m across both boroughs was realised.

Both boroughs have retained and separately manage their front line library services, whilst the shared service acts as a business unit delivering strategic service development, professional input and business/facilities support to the two boroughs. The shared service is hosted by Bexley in office accommodation that is located near the boundary between the boroughs.

The shared service went live in January 2012. There has been no adverse impact on the frontline service in either borough and its consistently high quality of professional input helps to develop the service to meet changing customer needs and expectations. Whilst meeting the challenge of delivering a service across two boroughs, the shared service constantly looks at ways to get the best value for money and to use shared resources in the most effective way.

A key achievement in 2013 was the joint procurement and implementation of a replacement Library Management System with both boroughs joining the London Libraries Consortium – a development that opens up access to the stock of seventeen London Borough library services to Bexley residents.

1.3 Community Managed Libraries

Demand for services and supply of alternative services change over time. Over the last decade, there have been a number of key factors which have had a substantial impact on library services. Nationally there has been falling usage (demand) and reducing local authority resources (supply), which has promoted substantial changes to the library market – the most obvious of which are closure of non-core branches, private sector management (outsourcing) and community management. There are numerous examples of each of these approaches across the country.

Examples of community management include:

- The London Borough of Lewisham transferred 5 libraries to community management in 2011. Three libraries – Crofton Park, Grove Park and Sydenham - are run by Eco Communities, a social enterprise group which also run a computer recycling business from the buildings. Blackheath Library is run by Age Exchange and New Cross Learning (a Library) is supported by the charity, Bold Vision.

- The Primrose Hill Community Library in Camden was transferred to community management in April 2012. The library is run by a Management Board, which includes representatives from the Primrose Hill Community Association and the local Friends group.
- Farnham Common Community Library in Buckinghamshire was founded by a new group which came together as a response to the councils public consultation on devolving the management of some libraries to the local community.
- Friends of Grappenhall Library run Grappenhall Library. The Friends group registered as a charity and in December 2011, the library building was transferred to their ownership.

Similarly, in Bexley, in 2012, the management of Bexley Village Library was transferred to a community organisation, Greener Bexley to manage. The library has now successfully delivered its services to the community for over two years. Key successes have included increasing opening hours, introducing additional events for the local community and the formation of beneficial partnerships with individuals, community groups and other agencies who are keen to work with a charitable organisation. The library has also been successful in attracting a good level of volunteer support. The Council supports the library with seconded trained staff and some new book stock, ensuring the library has access to the most popular best sellers. The library is free to innovate and tailor its services, as well as its brand, to the local community and has developed a strong offer for children, families and adults, including some unique events and activities such as guitar lessons and French classes. A café has also been introduced as a result of a partnership with another charity. The library has its own membership and stock systems that work independently of the Council's library systems.

A similar model was adopted at the second community managed library, in Slade Green, which opened in 2014.

2. Setting the scene

2.1 National Priorities

There have been a number of national documents and strategies published over the past few years.

In December 2009, The Department for Culture, Media and Sport published a consultation document - ***Empower, Inform, Enrich*** followed by ***The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries***; A Policy Statement in March 2010. The document identified that the public library service has a key role in a democratic society, libraries help to promote equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom, and public libraries embody a commitment to open access to information and education for all. Libraries contribute to a wide range of National and Local Government targets.

During the period that followed there has been increasing pressure put on local authorities by substantial reductions in central government funding. Many authorities have responded to the financial climate by seeing the opportunity to drive better value through new partnerships and ways of working across the Council. Approaches adopted to achieve efficiency have varied across Britain, and have included the introduction of various different models of community management of libraries, working across councils through shared services initiatives, outsourcing provision to the private sector (sometimes through collaborative partnership with other boroughs) and closures.

In November 2012, The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee published a report of their session on ***Library Closures*** in which the Select Committee received evidence from a wide range of sources and stakeholders.

In January 2013, The Arts Council England (ACE) published **Community Libraries – learning from experience**, a piece of new research about the different ways that communities are now involved in their local library. The report identified the emerging approaches, ten case studies which illustrate the range of practice across England, the strategic issues which need to be considered by library authorities and the principles by which community libraries can form part of a local authority's network of libraries.

In May 2013, Arts Council England (ACE) published **Envisioning the Library of the Future**. This was a major research project undertaken over a year which aimed to help library staff, funders and users to better understand what libraries could and should look like in the future. The report suggested that three essential ingredients define the public library:-

- A safe, creative community space that is enjoyable and easy to use, in both physical and virtual form;
- An excellent range of quality books, digital resources and other content;
- Well trained, friendly people to help users to find what they want either independently or with support

Based on their discussions with members of the public and the sector they identified four priorities to sustain and develop a 21st century public library service:-

- Place the library as the hub of the community
- Make the most of digital technology and creative media
- Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
- Deliver the right skills for those who work in libraries

These national documents and strategies play an important role in setting the scene for a new Library Strategy for Bexley.

2.2 Corporate Priorities

The themes and objectives of the London Borough of Bexley are set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy (2008-2018) and in its key planning document, the Corporate Plan.

The Library Service falls within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Leisure. The overall aim of this portfolio area is to promote services that increase participation, encourage excellence and widen the appreciation of sport and cultural facilities in the borough.

2.3 Sustainable Community Strategy - 2008-2018

The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the ten year vision for the borough, and the Library Service makes a major contribution to this strategy, through helping to achieve a strong, sustainable and cohesive community by:

- Providing safe, welcoming, and neutral places for all members of our communities
- Playing a role to facilitate links with the Community and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Safer Neighbourhood Workers
- Provision of training opportunities for local community groups and individuals
- Provision of resources to aid individual development
- Supporting users in accessing learning opportunities
- Promoting informal learning and assisting those undertaking formal learning

2.4 Corporate Plan – 2014 -2018

The Corporate Plan “Investing in Bexley” sits at the head of the Council’s planning process, setting out the Council’s key medium term priorities for 2014 – 2018. The Plan sets out three key priorities for the coming years:

- Growing the economy, delivering on jobs and inward investment
- Living long, fulfilling and independent lives
- Providing Value for Money

2.5 Financial challenges

As part of the corporate efficiency programme, (2011-2014), in 2011, a fundamental review of the Library Service took place to identify ways to make over a million pounds of efficiency savings whilst seeking to minimise impact on front line services.

As with other local authorities, the Council’s financial position remains exceptionally challenging and further substantial reductions in expenditure are required in the coming years and within the time frame of this Strategy.

In March 2014, the Council agreed the following expenditure reductions in its budget for the Library Service for the three years from April 2014 to March 2017:-

- £0.12m in 2014/15 arising from further savings from the implementation of the shared service with the London Borough of Bromley and additional ICT savings
- £0.041m in 2014/15 following changes to the staffing in the Local Studies and Archives Service
- £0.8m in 2016/17 following the implementation of community management for some of the libraries in the borough

Relevant background research and an assessment of need has been undertaken to ensure that efficiency savings can be made, whilst still ensuring that the Council continues to deliver an effective, efficient and comprehensive service.

As noted above, both demand for, and supply of library services has changed dramatically over recent years. In view of this, and in recognition of the on-going requirement for further efficiencies in future years, it is envisaged that further changes may be required to the Library Service during the lifetime of this Strategy. In line with the corporate approach, which supports enhanced collaborative working, approaches might include, but not be limited to, more shared services and/or externalisation of the service. Any further changes that are proposed during the lifetime of this Strategy will be consulted on, at the relevant time, as appropriate.

3. Understanding the customer profile 2014- 2019

3.1 The demographic profile and trends, including the Thames Gateway

The last official census (2011) showed that the London Borough of Bexley has a population of just over 232,000. This is an increase of 6% on the 2001 census figure and higher than projections from the Greater London Authority which predicted a decline in population.

Just over 58% of the Borough’s population are of working age (20 to 64), 16% are aged 65 or over and 19% of Bexley’s population is of school age (5 to 19). 6.6% of the population is aged between 0-4.

Bexley has a minority ethnic population of 18.1% (excluding White Irish and White Other). There are 13 other main ethnic groups, of which the largest populated group is Black or Black British, African.

The 2011 census data shows that 52% of the borough's population are female.

Just over 37,000 (16%) of people considered themselves to have a limiting long term illness.

The most recent information on the religion / faith of people living in Bexley is also from the 2011 census. Figures show that in 2011, 62% of people living in Bexley were Christian, 2.4% Muslim, 1.84% Sikh and 1.5% Hindu. The number of people stating their religion as Buddhist or Jewish or other religion were much smaller. Two key statistics emerging are that 24% people said they had no religion and 7% chose not to state their religion.

Despite the overall image of constancy in Bexley's demographic make-up, Bexley's location in the Thames Gateway and the fact that Bexley Riverside is one of the Mayor of London's Opportunity Areas, is helping to secure significant investment in housing, jobs, community infrastructure and the environment. This is changing people's lives and contributing to thriving, cohesive and balanced communities. The on-going substantial investment programme planned for the Thames Gateway will lead to a sharp rise in population over the next 10 years. A housing target of 446 additional dwellings per annum between 2015 and 2025 is identified for Bexley in the Further Alterations to the London Plan (2014); equivalent to 4,500 additional dwellings over the ten year period. Along with London as a whole, Bexley's population is changing, therefore it is necessary to ensure that the Library Service is able to meet growing demand that population growth will create, within the context of changing patterns of customer usage of libraries. Despite recent population increase in Bexley, however, demand for library services is, none-the-less, reducing.

3.2 Changing Customer Patterns and Technological Advancement

Nationally, libraries have seen a great change in the way they have been used over the past few years, a trend that is mirrored in Bexley. Traditional borrowing has fallen as the reduction in the cost of purchasing books has made them more affordable. Linked to this is the rapid evolution of the World Wide Web, which many people now have access to at work or at home. The use of the internet has clearly had an impact on visits to libraries for reference and information purposes. Mobile technology, such as tablets and kindles etc has also had an impact on book borrowing.

Changing leisure patterns have also impacted on the use of the Library Service, as libraries have to compete with an increasingly vast range of activities, entertainment and media.

The challenge in Bexley is to develop services which remain relevant to the 21st century customer, takes account of changing customer demand and usage, meets both local and national agendas, ensures value for money, and which represents the most efficient and effective mechanism for delivery.

The steady growth in the popularity of e-books and the range of e-readers and devices (including tablets and smart phones) on which digital format can be accessed, presents a challenge but also an opportunity to all public library services. The report, 'An independent review of E-Lending in Public Libraries in England' by William Sieghart was published in March 2013, setting out key principles for solving issues and moving forward with the wider provision of e-books in public libraries. The report recommends strengthening partnerships between publishers, authors and libraries, as a priority to develop e-lending within libraries. In Bexley, e-books are available through OverDrive, the current e-book market leader amongst UK public libraries.

This technology brings a tremendous opportunity to refresh the library offer and to make reading and libraries more accessible to all, attracting new readers and keeping the interest of current readers. At the same time, e-books represent a fundamental change for the publishing business and national agencies are working to try and secure the position of e-books in libraries with the publishing industry.

Bexley Library Service will promote and increase the availability of e-books as more publishers enable their titles to be borrowed and will make them available as widely as possible within the restrictions that publishers place on libraries to deliver them.

4. Vision for the Library Service

The vision for the Library Service is as follows:-

“Bexley Library Service - Engaging communities, enriching and improving lives”

The Library Service will work efficiently, providing accessible and flexible spaces with relevant services, promoting reading, access to digital services, information and advice, and lifelong learning for residents and communities in Bexley. It will continue to support the further improvement of literacy in children and adults.

In response to the exceptionally challenging financial climate, and the reducing demand for traditional library services, whilst also recognising the need to safeguard the Council's statutory requirement to provide a 'comprehensive' library offer, the aim for the Service over the next 5 years is to retain a smaller network of six accessible, attractive and vibrant libraries delivering a greater range of relevant, innovative services with a skilled and dedicated workforce, which are close to other services and agencies, and in areas of high footfall. An increase in opening hours in these libraries will ensure that residents have the maximum opportunities to visit and enjoy our libraries. The six libraries which are required in order

to provide a comprehensive service are Central, Sidcup, Thamesmead, Welling, Erith and Crayford. The Council is committed to increasing opening hours at these libraries to optimise access opportunities. The Library Service's membership of the London Libraries Consortium will continue to offer residents the advantages and convenience of being able to access a vast network of London libraries and a huge range of stock, beyond that held only in Bexley.

In addition to increasing opening hours at these libraries, the Council will also seek to further enhance the six libraries through provision of an additional range of services for residents. To some extent, these additional services will be demand-led, but might include, for example, a range of additional groups and activities, eg stitch and sew groups, games clubs and coffee mornings. The opportunity to develop more Pop in Parlour and Safer Neighbourhood sessions will also be explored, and there will be focused discussion with other partners to see if they might wish to utilise the library space to deliver their own community based programmes.

As the population gets older there is a growing recognition of increasing social isolation in some communities. There is also recognition that library services may be well-placed to provide a positive response to this problem. The role of libraries may simply be to make more visible, to potentially isolated individuals, the universal library offer which is available; but it may go further through, for example, introducing new, bespoke programmes specifically aimed at combating isolation. Officers are in discussion with relevant partners to explore these issues and opportunities further.

As part of the next 5 year strategy, therefore, the Council will explore opportunities for service and programme development in the six libraries, both internally and with its strategic partners, which will continue to expand libraries as community hubs. Linked to this 'socialisation' agenda, the Library Service will also seek to increase opportunities

for residents to become more involved in the community through building the already impressive volunteering offer.

Linked to the enhanced Council Library Service, the Council will seek to develop the community management of the remaining libraries - Blackfen, Bostall, Northumberland Heath and Upper Belvedere. The Council will seek to support local community groups and organisations to manage these libraries, so that they can provide flexible services to residents, with distinct, creative and locally tailored offers.

5. Local Studies and Archive Service

In 2008 Bexley Local Studies and Archives Service published a five year strategy (2008-2013) which successfully delivered on five broad strategic aims:

- Community Engagement and Participation
- Collections Management and Development
- Digitisation
- Income Generation
- Records Management

Through a number of community history projects and a thriving outreach programme Bexley residents now engage more with Bexley's Local Studies and Archive collections. A planned approach to collection care and development has ensured that the collections are better managed and are becoming more representative of the people of Bexley. An extensive digitisation programme has ensured that for the first time more of our impressive range of image collections is now accessible online. Digitising the collections has allowed us to generate income through partnership with Max Communications (an online photographic printer) and with the online genealogical and historical record website, Ancestry.com.

Looking forward to the next five years the Local Studies and Archive Service will build upon its previous successes. From 2014 to 2019 it will aim to deliver against five strategic aims:

- Encourage local communities to make greater use of Bexley Local Studies and Archives services
- Collect, preserve and make accessible Bexley Local Studies and Archive collections
- Promote Bexley Local Studies and Archives collections using print, broadcast, online and social media
- Work in partnership with the Council, voluntary and commercial sectors to promote the history, heritage and tourism of Bexley
- Develop and deliver programme of events to commemorate World War One

6. Library Strategy - Medium Term Priorities – 2014-2019

In order to address the vision there are four Medium Term Priorities for the period of this Strategy, which link to the wider Corporate Plan, and these are:-

1. Ensure an efficient and effective Library Service delivering Value for Money for Bexley's residents and striving to increase usage of the service
2. Develop and promote six modern libraries which are accessible to all
3. Seek to develop all libraries as community hubs and the four remaining non-Council libraries as community managed libraries
4. Seek to develop new partnerships with a range of external bodies

7. Annual Aims of the Library Strategy

The following annual aims have been identified and these are shown with the appropriate Medium Term Priority. These will be reviewed and revised if appropriate on an annual basis. The Library Service will continue to work efficiently and effectively, utilising its experience of delivering substantial transformation over recent years to develop the service to meet the priorities and aims of the residents of Bexley.

Ensure an efficient and effective Library Service delivering Value for Money for Bexley's residents and striving to increase usage of the service

- To deliver an efficient, imaginative and flexible Library Service in Bexley and an efficient and effective shared back office across Bexley and Bromley
- To review best practice and evaluate our performance to ensure the library offer and shared service are delivering to the highest possible standard
- To seek opportunities for additional income and external funding (including HLF, Big Lottery Fund) for innovative projects within the service
- To provide an efficient and flexible Local Studies and Archive Service
- To explore options for further cost effective management of the Council's Library Service through exploring further partnership working, including (but not limited to) outsourcing or extended shared services options.

Develop and promote six modern libraries which are accessible to all

- To promote the Library Service in a targeted way to reach as many residents as possible
- To arrange outreach activities and deliver the home library service to expand the reach of the Library Service beyond the static library premises.
- To develop and increase access for residents to literacy in a range of formats, including digital formats and develop our e-lending offer and online digital services
- To provide a wider range of volunteering opportunities within the Library Service, developing volunteer role descriptions and recruitment campaigns to enable a diversification of volunteer skills and opportunities with the service

Seek to develop all libraries as community hubs and the four remaining non-Council libraries as community managed libraries

- To develop the six Council libraries as access points for a wider offer of Council services and partner services, with all libraries acting as community hubs for local communities
- To investigate, develop and support the community management of the remaining four libraries
- To engage communities to identify and develop relationships with community organisations interested in managing these libraries and to support them with the development of exciting and innovative services

Seek to develop new partnerships with a range of external bodies

- To develop relationships with partners who share our values and work towards a vision to co-locate, deliver or host their services within libraries where appropriate
- To investigate and develop cross cutting partnerships and/or further shared services with other agencies, authorities and public bodies
- To develop services that target the prevention of health problems, economic difficulty and social isolation, and to support other services with the delivery of prevention measures within Bexley (“social prescribing”).

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