

Croydon Libraries Consultation – Phase 2

Sanderstead Residents' Association has considered the proposed options and in asking you, our members to participate in the process and suggest you contain some or all of the following *italicized* issues, in addition to your own comments. Based on the comments the SRA has received so far from its members and others we believe that the best option would be our proposed option 1A as detailed in item 8 below.

Proposed Option 1: reduce library service hours by 21 % across the borough. Under this option all libraries remain Council-run but libraries would be open on less days per week. Sanderstead Library would only being open on Mondays and Fridays for 8 hours each day.

Suggested Issues for Consideration and Questions

- *There is evidence in other public service scenarios that service reduction, whilst reducing costs also reduces use due to unattractiveness. This results in further lack of use of the facilities driving further pressure to reduce costs, which can only be achieved by further reductions in opening hours, and ultimately complete closure. This closure by stealth option is not acceptable.*
- *Sanderstead library is the only Croydon library, which has maintained its footfall throughout the previous 5 year review period. In the previous survey of the 2,510 responses received, 22% were in respect of Sanderstead library, the highest of all 13.*
- *The statistic for events at libraries shows a similar level of demand. In 2019/20, the five proposed closure libraries provided regular activities and events with South Norwood providing the most of all activities. This was closely followed in 2nd place by Sanderstead library.*
- *These statistics demonstrate that Sanderstead library has a robust demand for its services and the Council should demonstrate that they have carried out a suitable assessment of demand at this location and declare the result before implementation of this option is considered.*

Because of the effect of the first bullet point above, Sanderstead Residents' Association do not support this option

Proposed Option 2: the council would work in partnership with an organisation to outsource the management of all 13 libraries.

Suggested Issues for Consideration and Questions

- *The experiment of externalising the library service to the private company, Carillion failed not only because the company was badly managed resulting in its bankruptcy but also because the current review of the Boroughs' libraries has exposed that maintenance of, for example, Sanderstead library building, was not carried out. This has resulted in a backlog of work being required and added a detrimental cost in the evaluation of maintaining the service.*
- *The Council must demonstrate that if this option is to be considered, the maintenance of the service and the building will be assured in the contract, procurement would be done to the highest standards and the contract monitored to the highest professional standards.*
- *An agreed acceptable level of service and adequate equipment supply, including books and premises maintenance must be enforceable conditions of any contract.*

Sanderstead Residents' Association do not support this option on the principle and experience of the concept that delivery of public service cannot be made through private gain.

Proposed Option 3: This option would involve eight libraries staying in Council control and open fewer days a week. The other five - Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead, Shirley, and South Norwood libraries would be leased to community groups, with the council providing some staff two days a week, as well as books and IT support.

Staffing savings would be expected to be delivered and would be managed by the Council providing more control over the delivery. However, it is likely to take longer to achieve the buildings savings due to the need to effectively procure these communities run services.

Suggested Issues for Consideration and Questions

- *As it stands, the proposal is not credible from the very broad description given. Currently some groups have expressed an interest in being involved with the option. Although Sanderstead Residents' Association expressed an interest, it was never included in the report-back.*
- *None of the organisations, including Sanderstead Residents' Association would appear to have the experience or knowledge to construct a business plan to cater for the responsibilities required, particularly being the leaseholder of the premises, including responsibility for utilities, maintenance and repairs,*
- *For this option to work effectively, assuming one organisation is prepared to take on the responsibilities, the Council must ensure continuity of the service in accordance with the Croydon Library Plan. It might be that the Council would be dealing with five separate community groups and how would they manage these?*
- *It is impossible to conceive that a completely new voluntary organisation can take over and run the required service on an agreed vesting date. Transfer of public services such as a library is not a case of merely 'contracting out' an activity in the same way as, for example refuse collection.*
- *Transfers of services in other spheres in the past have required a transition period with support to the transferee over a period with the possibility of a reducing subsidy to ensure continuity of service. Such annual budgets will depend on the Council's service specification and the operator's business plan.*
- *The Council therefore must accept an Operators' proposed business plan and develop with them a transition budget reducing over the initial period with the possible necessity of a base continuing subsidy thereafter.*

With the information provided Sanderstead Residents' Association do not support this as a credible and practical option.

8. If you have any other suggestions for how we could deliver the library service with the reduced budget, tell us here:

Sanderstead Residents' Association propose a variation to Option 1 that we have labelled Option 1A and is that:

- *The library remains Council-run and will be open initially 5-days/week with an intention to open for 6-days/week.*
- *The salary cost of the proposed 2-day/week to be re-allocated to provide a professional presence with the remaining hours required provided by volunteers.*
- *Croydon Libraries service adopt an entrepreneurial approach towards community groups with the aim of raising money to go to an additional (protected) fund for additional professionally staffed opening hours.*
- *The Library Plan aspirations will be maintained and that Croydon Libraries in conjunction with other Council Departments follow the Localism Agenda, looking at additional ways of using the premises for Childrens' Services and Health.*
- *Shared use to meet a local community need e.g. homework clubs, knitting clubs, and paid-for use of the building e.g. training sessions when it's not in use would be maintained*
- *Cross-departmental action to ensure assets such as Sanderstead Library are developed to maintain all social based services.*

Sanderstead Residents' Association consider that this option is the only credible one as it:

- Would be cost neutral as the building fabric would be maintained,
- Costs of services and maintenance will not increase,
- Meets the legal requirement of implementing the Croydon Library Plan

9. Do you expect any positive or negative impacts on your local/wider community

Sanderstead Residents' Association believe that the following issues must be addressed if the effect of the proposals are to be regarded as positive impacts:

1. 10 year Croydon Library Plan set out the vision for a library service and outlined how the network of 13 libraries would adapt to meet the changing needs of all residents and what the Council would do to create a service that is designed around the needs of residents and communities.

As this plan was adopted by democratic process and remains in place, the Council needs to confirm that all the Consultation Phase 2 options include the requirements of the plan.

2. Open + Technology

2.1 O&T is not included for installation at all libraries. The Council needs to explain why the Library Plan outcome for 'accessible modern facilities and buildings for the use of online resources can be fully utilised during and outside of core hours' is not included at all libraries.

2.2 The Council must provide details of examples of the success or otherwise of the self-service system proposed, particularly in respect of safety of young and vulnerable people.

2.3 The response and arrival times need to be determined for emergency situations. For example, what would trigger a Croydon security staff intervention at say Sanderstead library, how long would it take to alert a responding organisation and how long before they arrived on site? If the Metropolitan Police are to be involved, their assurance of these times, when determined, are acceptable and achievable.

3. Deferred Maintenance

The review of Sanderstead Library building has exposed that maintenance was not carried out. This has resulted in a backlog of work being required and added a detrimental cost in the evaluation of maintaining the service.

In all options, a requirement that the library building and grounds should be restored to the condition when Carillion took over the operation of the library with any maintenance backlog being addressed.