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## **Reorganisation process of Library and Information Service in Lewisham Borough of London**

*(Reorganizacja systemu biblioteczno-informacyjnego sieci bibliotek publicznych w Lewisham w Londynie)*

**Słowa kluczowe:** Lewisham Libraries, biblioteka społeczna, restrukturyzacja, reorganizacja, biblioteki publiczne

**Abstrakt:** Sieć bibliotek publicznych w Lewisham w Londynie składa się z 13 filii, do których należą 3 biblioteki publiczne: Lewisham Library, Downham Library, The Library of Deptford Lounge oraz 10 bibliotek społecznych: Catford Library, Blackheath Village community library service, Crofton Park community library, Forest Hill community library, Grove Park community library, Manor House Library, New Cross Community Library, Pepys Community library service, Sydenham community library service and Torridon Road community library. W artykule przedstawiono proces restrukturyzacji, któremu poddana została sieć bibliotek publicznych w Lewisham w Londynie. Reorganizacja bibliotek przyczyniła się istotnie do: zmiany ich funkcjonowania, spłaszczenia struktury organizacyjnej, wyznaczenia elastycznych stanowisk pracy, zwłaszcza tych związanych z obsługą użytkowników oraz utrzymania specjalistycznych etatów. Proces restrukturyzacji wpłynął także korzystnie na wzrost elastyczności samej organizacji, nawiązanie i rozwój współpracy z innymi bibliotekami, urzędami oraz grupami społecznymi.

**Keywords:** Lewisham Libraries, community libraries, restructuring processes, reorganisation process, public libraries

**Abstract:** Lewisham Libraries in London consists of 13 branch libraries, amongst which there are 3 council's libraries: Lewisham Library, Downham Library, The Library of Deptford Lounge and 10 community libraries: Catford Library, Blackheath Village community library service, Crofton Park community library, Forest Hill community library, Grove Park community library, Manor House Library, New Cross Community Library, Pepys Community library service, Sydenham community library service and Torridon Road community library. This article describes the restructuring processes which Library and Information Service in Lewisham Borough of London has gone through. The reorganisation changed the way in which the Library and Information Service is structured substantially, introducing a flatter organisation and flexible job roles, increasing the front-line service, and maintaining key professional roles. As a result, it allowed for flexibility and growth, to support developments through increased collaboration with other library services, other council departments, and with community groups.

London is an international centre of diversity of cultures in terms of arts, music, festivals, museums and much more. The city is home to more than 300 nationalities that have

over time created and shaped the city's culture into what it is today. London is more than one of the greatest cities of the world – it's almost a country in its own right [8].

Lewisham is a part of London, stretching from the banks of the Thames, in the north, to the borders with Bromley, in the south. The 13.4 square miles of Lewisham encompass strong communities who take pride in their local areas and neighbourhoods. Lewisham has a population of 250,000 which is relatively young with one in four under 19 years old. It is the 15th most ethnically diverse local authority in England and there are over 130 languages spoken in the borough. Lewisham has over 800 active voluntary and community sector organisations and more than 200 individual faith groups. There is a huge variety of community and cultural activities taking place in the borough, highlighting the creativity and energy of local citizens and organisations. Lewisham is one of the greenest parts of south-east London. Over a fifth of the borough is parkland or open space which makes attractive residential neighbourhoods and creates a relaxing and pleasant environment in the midst of bustling city life [6, s. 4].

According to Cllr Chris Best, Cabinet Member for Community Services: “Arts, parks, heritage, libraries, sports and leisure play a vital role in improving the quality of life for all our residents, bringing sustainable regeneration, improved health and increased opportunities for participation and informal learning. Lewisham is justly proud of its cultural offer and is ambitious for the future having made a considerable investment in its cultural and leisure facilities over the past few years. We are offering first class leisure centres with exciting libraries reflecting the aspirations of our diverse local community” [4, s. 1].

The vision statement of Lewisham Libraries is based on the idea that Lewisham Libraries create an essential service which is changing lives in the heart of the community. This vision comes from the overall Lewisham vision “Together we will make Lewisham the best place in London to live, work and learn”. The Local Authority values its statutory duty to provide an effective and efficient Public Library Service under the Public Library Act 1964. The Service exists to enable and encourage individuals and groups to gain impartial access to books, information and knowledge. It does so by:

- encouraging the active participation in cultural, democratic and economic activities,
- enabling the educational development through formal or informal programmes,
- assisting and encouraging the positive use of leisure time,
- promoting the enjoyment of reading and the development of literacy, numeracy and basic IT skills,
- encouraging the use of information [6, s. 7–8].

The Lewisham Libraries and Information Service was created around a central ideal: to make available shared resources that can be used by all members of the community to stimulate imagination and inquiry, through literature and reference. The services available through libraries provide a wide range of benefits to individuals and society in terms of inspiration, information and education. It is this combination of public and private values that makes libraries liberating, empowering, inspirational and enjoyable [6, s. 2].

Definitions of libraries and the benefits they offer have been expressed in a variety of ways. The library users often have a strong sense of what they expect to see in a library and information service, with a basic offer from libraries covering:

- free loan of books,
- CDs, DVDs and other formats of music and film,
- access to a wide range of newspapers and periodicals,
- local history information,
- general access to information.

But nowadays public libraries are also increasingly a place where people can access services and get other assistance covering:

- basic skills and literacy,
- CV writing,
- access to information on educational courses, benefits, housing, schools and council services,
- how to pay Council Tax,
- family learning,
- services for early years,
- activities for children of all ages and formal education support,
- local and national democracy and civic engagement,
- asylum Information,
- quiet study spaces [6, s. 5–6].

Since 2010, the Library and Information Service in Lewisham has gone through the restructuring processes. The main reorganisation has taken place in 2011 and changed the way in which the Library and Information Service is structured now, introducing a flatter organisation and flexible job roles, increasing the front-line service, and maintaining key professional roles. As a result, flexibility and growth was emphasised, to support developments through increased collaboration with other library services, council, and community groups. The Service was divided into two teams, the Business Development Unit to develop products and audiences and the Business Delivery Unit to deliver this development to customers. In 2014-2015, the reorganisation process decreased the number of senior library roles while increasing the flexibility of front-line positions.

Currently Lewisham Libraries consists of 13 branch libraries, amongst which there are 3 council's libraries: Lewisham Library, Downham Library, The Library of Deptford Lounge and 10 community libraries: Catford Library, Blackheath Village community library service, Crofton Park community library, Forest Hill community library, Grove Park community library, Manor House Library, New Cross Community Library, Pepys Community library service, Sydenham community library service and Torridon Road community library.

Lewisham Central Library is a four level fully accessible building located on Lewisham High Street, which includes Adult, Children's and Reference Libraries, Local History and Archives, Art Gallery, meeting rooms for hire, Open Learning Centre and a cafe. Lewisham Library is the borough's busiest library with the highest stock issues and customer enquiries.

The Open Learning Centre offers customers a place to visit for learning, personal development and skills acquisition, whilst the Limelight Gallery space presents the artistic talents within the Lewisham community. Lewisham Heritage service – the Local History and Archives Centre (LHAC) – is based at Lewisham Library and occupies over 1 km of shelving, museum objects over 350 metres, along with 7,000 books, 30,000 prints, 15,000 postcards, 85,000 negatives. The collection is accessible in a variety of ways including access in within the library, via the web, through collections in other Lewisham libraries, through online services such as AncestryLibrary.com and exhibitions presented to local community. The service is open 43 hours a week and deals with over 12,000 enquiries. LHAC is a 4\* archive service, in the top 10% nationally of all local authority archives. Items within the LHAC collection date from 1400s onwards. Lewisham library cooperates with many organisations, including Working Links, Lewisham University Hospital, Volunteering Lewisham, Job Centre Plus and Community Systems, Business Advisory Service, Community Drug Education Project and the Lewisham Refugee [5].

**Photography 1.** Lewisham Library



**Source:** <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/43258/Library+campaigners+take+fight+to+Lewisham+council>.

Downham Library is a part of the Downham Health & Leisure Centre and it is recognised as the hub of the local community and attracts the largest number of library visitors in Lewisham. It was the first library in Lewisham to introduce self service facilities and innovative retail approach to displaying and promoting stock. The library also offers the Youth IT Space which supports 7–17 year olds in developing ICT skills through school class visits, homework support, and a range of exciting leisure activities [2].

**Photography 2.** Downham Library



**Source:** <http://www.downham.towntalk.co.uk/news/d/9518/downham-library-commended-in-public-library-buildings-award-2009>.

**Photography 3.** Deptford Lounge Library



**Source:** <http://www.e-architect.co.uk/london/deptford-lounge>.

Deptford Lounge Library is located in the heart of Deptford. The library is particularly successful in working with the local community and offers a venue for local organisations to both deliver and present their activities. In 2011 the library moved into the exciting Deptford Lounge and Tidemill School facility in which created the space to further development of its cultural and learning offer [2].

All Lewisham Libraries are involved in the community based service called the Home Library Service (HLS). The HLS has recently established a partnership with Adult Community Care integrating the excellent Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) talking book service into the service. At present the HLS visits 670 adults in their homes delivering books and assisting with other information needs for those people unable to get to the libraries. The service also works with Lewisham Community Transport collecting users into libraries for special events featuring music, local history and entertainment [6, s. 28].

Other Lewisham Libraries operates as the community libraries, including Blackheath Village community library service, Crofton Park community library, Forest Hill community library, Grove Park community library, Manor House Library, New Cross Community Library, Pepys Community library service, Sydenham community library service and Torridon Road community library.

The idea of transferring libraries to the community library model is a part of the Council's £88 million savings programme. This reorganisation helped the Council to save about £240k on upkeep and maintenance, about £755k on salary costs, and including the reduction of costs on IT maintenance and software, the Services contributed savings of £1M. Restructuring processes created an opportunity for community groups and organisations to acquire and develop alternative services within the former library buildings with minimal or no rent, as long as they committed to maintaining the buildings and keeping them open to the community. As a result, access to the buildings has improved and organisations have invested in the buildings and sought funding opportunities to improve the space for residents. What is more the sense of community ownership has increased and local groups and individual residents have continued to support their library through both fundraising and volunteering. Significantly, the community library model has also meant that the Council can still provide the library services from a building, even after it has been transferred. First of all, the Council remains responsible for the books and the library catalogue and for providing the shelving, the self-service terminals and library cards. Secondly, the Council maintains the stock to the standard it applies to all its collections and promotes reader development programmes and trains the staff and volunteers at the community libraries. Thirdly, the Council ensures that the benefits offered to residents using their Lewisham Library continue to be available to all residents. Finally, it retains its statutory responsibility to deliver library services and has never transferred that responsibility to any other authorities. The community library model takes the responsibility of the Library and Information Service and the outreach programme it delivers.

In May 2011, the Council transferred four library buildings to the community model. Crofton Park, Grove Park and Sydenham have been taken over by Eco Communities, a social enterprise that works in recycling technology. A group of local residents, New Cross

Learning, joined up with the social enterprise Bold Vision to run the New Cross Library. In Blackheath, the charity Age Exchange, offered to house the Library in the building that they were in the process of renovating.

The Service has worked with Axiell UK and the Community Libraries to roll out Open Galaxy Touch. This is a web based IT solution which allows volunteers restricted access to the Libraries' database and enable them to support users in accessing services (e.g. searching the borrower record and checking the status of reservations).

In addition, the community library model was formally extended to Pepys Resource Centre in the Evelyn ward in December 2013 through the introduction of RFID enabled stock and OG Touch.

In October 2016 Forest Hill Library was re-opened as a community library and it is run now by V22 – the art organization with specialisms in philosophy and the visual arts [3].

**Photography 4.** Forest Hill Library



**Source:** <http://www.stanfordstates.london/forest-hill/attachment/library/>.

The Archibald Corbett Society and the Corbett Residents Association have joined forces to take over the management of Torridon Road Library from Lewisham Council. This library was re-opened as well in October 2016 [7].

As a last part of the expansion of Lewisham's community library programme Lewisham Council is looking for an organisation that shares the social values to be the partner in managing the beautiful Manor House Library, Grade II\* listed, four-storey Georgian building in Lee Green.

**Photography 5.** Manor House Library



**Source:** <https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/birthsdeaths marriagesCP/marriage/Pages/ceremony-venues.aspx>.

In conclusion, the whole reorganisation process of Library and Information Service in Lewisham Borough of London corresponds well with Lewisham Council vision '*Together we will make Lewisham the best place in London to live, work and learn*'.

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