

A woman with brown hair tied back is sitting on a blue armchair, reading a large book titled 'THE BIG BOOK OF DINOSAURS' to a young boy with glasses and a baby. The boy is standing next to her, looking at the book. The baby is sitting on her lap. They are in a library with bookshelves filled with books in the background. A large white geometric shape is overlaid on the image.

Libraries first!

Wandsworth's library strategy

2025 -2030

Introduction

Libraries first! Libraries will be the first! place of connection for communities, and the beating heart of Wandsworth.

They're integral pillars in our community and a source of support for so many of our borough's 327,000 residents. For some, our libraries are a sanctuary of peace. For others, they're a way to connect with the wider community. For many, they are a lifeline that offers free internet access, training courses and valuable advice.

Where many councils across London and the rest of the country have closed libraries, we've set our own path, and we are proud of our libraries. We've invested millions into these facilities, and we were delighted to open our brand new Wandsworth Town and Northcote libraries, and to see the refurbishment of Putney Library! We're incredibly proud that in the last year, they were some of the highest performing in the country with visitors increasing and nearly two million books and other items borrowed in 2024.

Over the next five years, we'll build on this success by aiming to get even more of our residents to visit, especially those still missing out on library services because they don't know what's on offer, or they don't have time. Some of our plans include refreshing our computers, trialling extended opening hours and responding to feedback from our residents by putting on even more great activities and fun events for all ages. To achieve our ambitions, we'll need to work closely with our other services across the council, partners and the voluntary and community sector.

To kick off and celebrate the launch of our strategy we have some exciting plans for our first year:

- 1 Refurbishing the children's libraries at Balham and Battersea Park, while upgrading our IT facilities across all libraries and improving our study spaces
- 2 Testing longer opening hours to ensure more people, whether students, workers, or families, can access our libraries at times that suit them
- 3 Introducing extra initiatives that residents have told us they want such as basic digital skills training and wireless printing

Read on to find out more about how we'll invest, improve and encourage even more visits to our 11 wonderful libraries.



Judi Gasser
Cabinet Lead for Children

“We want Wandsworth libraries to be the **first!** place of connection for our communities, we want to encourage even more residents to visit our libraries, especially those who can benefit most from the many services and activities on offer from the council and partners”

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1 Libraries first!

For access for all

Making it easier to visit your local library.

Residents have told us that they want libraries to be open longer. By extending opening hours and making it easier for everyone to drop by we're making libraries the **first!** place our residents think to go whether that's to pick up a new book, access the internet and wifi, or just spend time in a community space where they can work, read and enjoy some peace and quiet.

We'll also make sure that residents on lower incomes can access library services and remove any cost barriers that might exist.

We plan to:

- make Roehampton Library's new extended hours permanent, extend the hours at Battersea Park and York Gardens Libraries, and explore extending the hours of other libraries, particularly the ones in areas where they can have the most impact
- take the library out into communities through community librarians
- offer an Access for All library service for residents on the lowest incomes with free book reservations, no fines and discounts on hire of spaces, and work with Wandsworth Workmatch to help those who are unemployed to find work
- keep investing in libraries

Investing in Wandsworth Libraries

This strategy builds on the recent refurbishment of Putney Library and new libraries at Wandsworth Town and Northcote, with renewals planned for Roehampton and York Gardens Libraries, plus refurbishments at Balham Library and Battersea Park Children's Libraries.

We're also planning to restore the historic glass roof at Battersea Reference Library.



2 Libraries first!

For community connection

Helping our residents connect to their community.

By making sure our libraries are friendly, welcoming spaces we're helping to make libraries **first!** for connecting communities. We know that loneliness can affect anyone at any time, especially if you're older or vulnerable so we're going to work in partnership to offer even more affordable social events that can help residents connect and have fun!

We plan to:

- find out what residents would like libraries to offer and organise even more fun, free and affordable social events
- support residents who don't speak English as their first language with more English language conversation groups
- continue our free coffee mornings in welcoming spaces that are cool in summer and warm in the winter, supporting some of our most vulnerable residents
- provide temporary refuge for people in danger by having more libraries achieve 'safe haven' status



“When I'm at home, there's nothing much to do”

Knit and Natter attendee, Putney

3 Libraries first!

For learning

Giving everyone space to study and learn.

We want to make sure that our libraries are **first!** for learning and study.

Libraries are already a place that residents go for formal and informal learning, providing access to important quiet spaces where they can focus, study and work online. In fact, more than half of visitors (58%) aged 16-34 say the main reason they visit their libraries is study space.

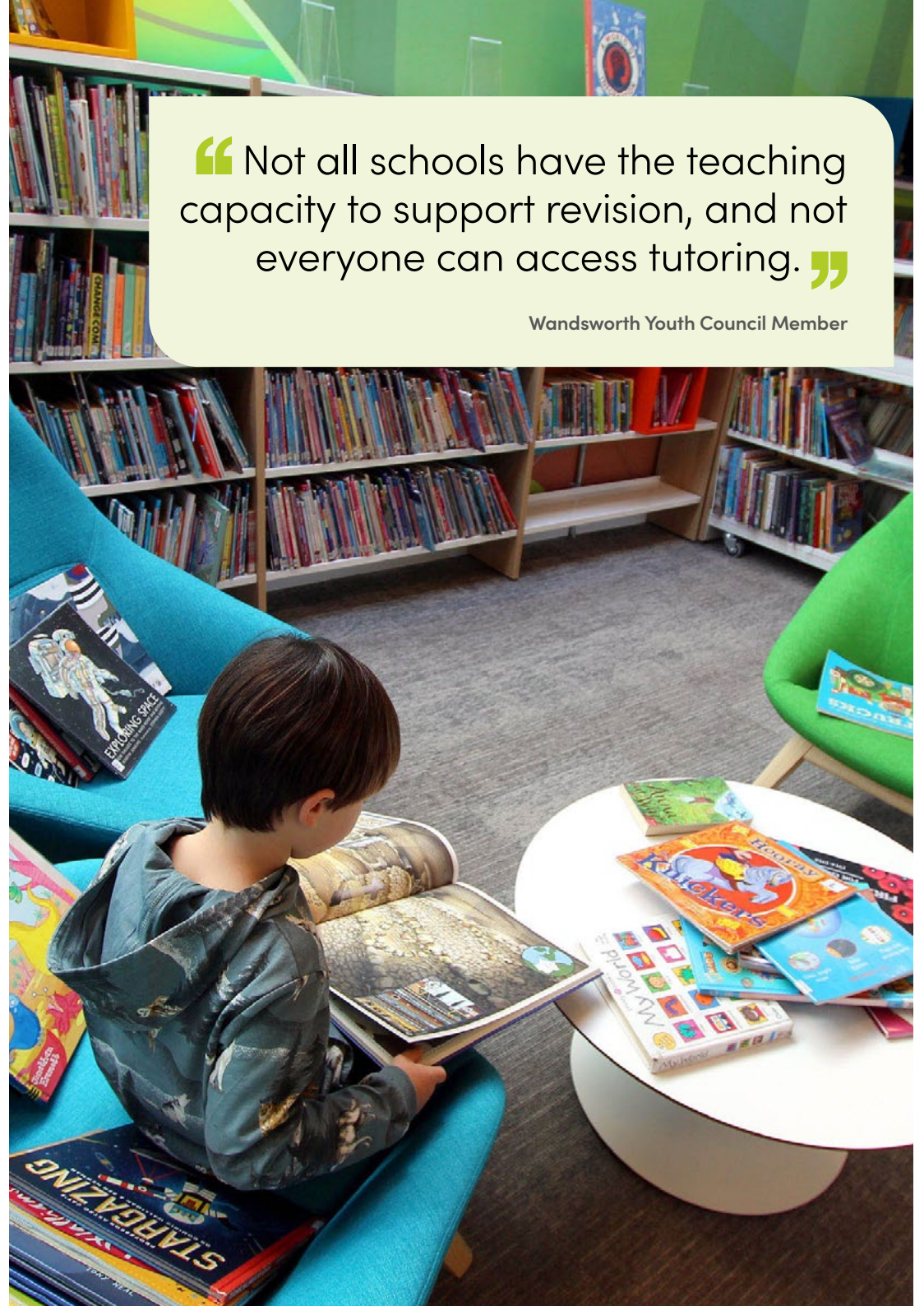
We're building on this by encouraging more people to visit our study spaces, and offering extra support for learning both independently and in groups.

We plan to:

- encourage visits from students in their first year of secondary school by showing them how to use the library for their studies
- improve digital literacy and online safety awareness in young people by developing learning programmes in partnership with schools and colleges
- explore how libraries can give more young people access to future tech skills through a partnership with Apple UK
- give practical support to residents preparing for exams like driving theory or Life in the UK
- make our study spaces more welcoming for individual study, group study, and adult learning, with late opening hours designed into our spaces
- help people with their studies by giving them access to educational resources in libraries

“Not all schools have the teaching capacity to support revision, and not everyone can access tutoring.”

Wandsworth Youth Council Member



4 Libraries first! For reading

Encouraging a lifelong love of reading.

Reading for fun isn't just a hobby – we want to build a community of lifelong readers because we know that reading can significantly enhance life chances!

We want to make sure all of our residents can enjoy these benefits by making libraries **first!** for reading and our goal is that every child in Wandsworth has a library card and a strong reading habit before they start school.

We plan to:

- make sure every child has a library card by introducing a “universal library membership”
- refurbish Balham and Battersea Park Children's Libraries to be more welcoming for families
- make it easier to borrow and return books through a new library app
- help local authors write and share their stories through support and funding from our library provider's new literary foundation
- increase access to a wider range of e-books
- offer access to premium resources and subscriptions for free and make sure more people are aware of these
- continue to make sure that libraries are venues for family activities focused on fun, literacy and communication
- become part of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library scheme which will gift books to children in the borough

“Reading for pleasure was found to be more important for children's cognitive development than their parents' level of education”

Institute of Education, 2013



5 Libraries first! For wellbeing

Supporting our borough's wellbeing.

We want our libraries to be **first!** for wellbeing activities and information. We already offer lots of activities in our libraries including yoga, pilates and our libraries are rich with books and information that support healthy lives. By working in partnership we want to increase the wellbeing offer to residents and make sure more people visit their local library for the benefit of their health.

We plan to:

- support families by contributing library resources and activities created with parents and professionals to the borough's SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) programme
- help families with SEND feel confident our libraries can accommodate their needs when they visit, and reassure them about things like roughly used borrowed books
- explore the introduction of more dementia and autism-friendly features in libraries
- help tackle health inequality in the borough by encouraging more people to visit their library to access information on health and wellbeing
- train all library staff in Making Every Contact Count, which uses everyday interactions to positively influence health and wellbeing
- support residents to be active by welcoming yoga, Pilates and other exercise classes in libraries, and promote Wandsworth Moves initiatives like Couch to 5K



Community Spaces

When it's cold, our 11 libraries' heated Community Spaces provide welcoming and cosy places for residents to warm up. Visitors can enjoy a hot drink, and have a friendly chat with other members of their community.

"My home gets so cold it can be painful, so I really look forward to coming to my Community Space. I feel warmer the moment I walk through the door. It's absolutely lovely and very social – I know so many of the people."

6 Libraries first

For information

Helping people in Wandsworth access local support, advice and services.

Libraries are, and always have been, packed full of free, accessible and unbiased information, ranging from books to free newspaper subscriptions. In addition libraries offer digital access to borough wide services. But we are aware that services and offers to residents might be hard to access because of barriers like digital literacy, language or disabilities. We want to make libraries **first!** for awareness of, and access to information that can support residents.

We plan to:

- create a clear plan for how libraries can host information and services to meet the needs of local people
- continue signposting people to local council and partner services with leaflets and posters
- offer more support to new arrivals in Wandsworth, offering them signposting and information and becoming accredited as 'libraries of sanctuary'
- improve residents' digital skills so that they can access information by providing training
- boost residents' wellbeing by connecting them to community services and health professionals through more programmes like CathARTism at Balham and Tooting Libraries
- introduce our library partner's new voter and political literacy programme to encourage people to take part in the democratic process



“A key barrier to library use was a lack of awareness, but when provided with more information, we heard how surprised people were about how diverse it is”

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

7 Libraries first! For culture

Expanding our libraries' offering of culture, heritage and art.

Welcoming, inclusive and free to all, libraries are perfect spaces for celebrating culture and heritage. Across Wandsworth, our libraries are already showcasing our borough's amazing cultural diversity.

Whilst we celebrate our local heritage and 'Welcome to Wandsworth' our year as London Borough of Culture 2025, we want to make libraries **first!** for culture by hosting more exhibitions and other cultural events, like takeover days by local artists.

We plan to:

- organise more arts and cultural events in libraries, encouraging visits from those less likely to go to traditional arts venues
- work with residents to develop a new programme of takeover days, exhibitions and events
- repair the heritage glass roof at the Grade II-listed Battersea Reference Library to protect this cultural asset for generations to come
- encourage local children to engage with our diverse heritage by launching our library provider's Young Historian Award and expanding our 'mini museums' offer
- connect library events to our work revitalising our town centres and high streets through cross-promoted events
- have libraries play a bigger part in local arts and culture programmes like the Wandsworth Arts Fringe festival and the Creative Wandsworth youth arts programme
- support the programme of events and activities in Wandsworth during 'Welcome to Wandsworth' our year as London Borough of Culture



“People from Asian, Asian British, Black and Black British backgrounds are more likely to visit a library than they are to visit an art exhibition, theatre or live music event. This makes public libraries great places for artists to reach new audiences”

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

8 Libraries first! For digital

Giving every resident in Wandsworth free access to modern digital services.

Our libraries provide Wandsworth residents with vital digital services, from public computers and software to internet access and wifi.

Along with our study spaces, using these digital services is one of the most common reasons people visit our libraries, especially those on lower incomes.

Access to the internet and computers has never been more important, so we want our libraries to become the **first!** place to go for anyone in Wandsworth who needs help getting online.

We plan to:

- invest in new computers and technology
- develop new digital training programmes to give local residents the digital skills to apply online for work and benefits
- make sure our digital equipment and study spaces are meeting our visitors' needs by reviewing things like how the space is set up, sockets and wifi reliability
- help users print more easily by introducing wireless printing from users own devices
- continuing to support children without home access to computers and the internet by providing them with designated computers



9 Libraries first!

For sustainability

Creating libraries that will last for generations.

Libraries have always been the **first!** for sustainability as the original supporters of a circular economy. We want to continue to encourage more borrowing and expand our support on sustainability for generations to come. We will support and expand the conversation about sustainability and climate change.

We plan to:

- help our residents understand, and take action on climate change, by helping deliver the borough's Climate Action Plan
- introduce 'sustainability corners' where residents can find all the resources they need on sustainability
- develop partnerships and offer events that will help residents to prepare for the future
- do everything we can to reduce the carbon impact of our libraries as part of capital investment, like introducing energy efficiency measures as part of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS)

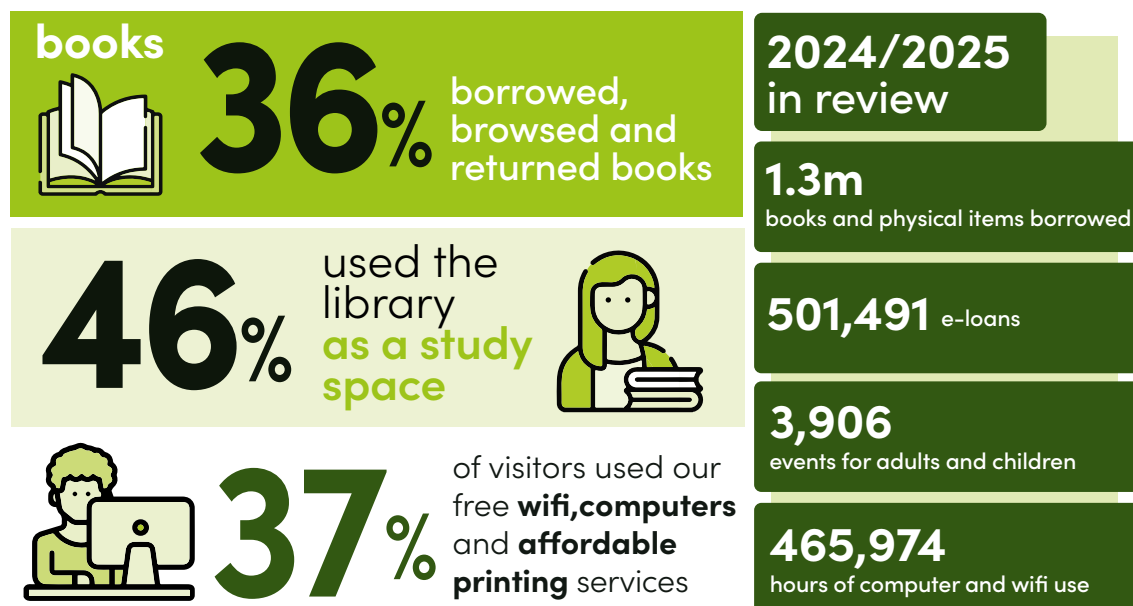


At the heart of the community

Our libraries are integral to our community, so as part of our libraries **first!** approach, we're using them to help the council achieve more impactful change in the borough and this strategy helps to deliver against other council policies.

- Helping residents access local services
Access for All scheme
- Help residents get active **Wandsworth Moves Together Leisure Strategy**
- Prevent illness in residents by encouraging them to 'Start Well, Live Well and Age Well'
Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Make Wandsworth one of the best places to grow up **Youth Strategy**
- Give families access to more support by bringing libraries into the Family Hubs network **Family Hubs Programme**
- Provide all children with exciting and inclusive opportunities for play where they live **Play Strategy**
- Boosting cultural opportunities for residents **Arts and Culture Strategy**

How do people use our libraries now?



What success will look like

More visits

Wandsworth libraries reach the top 10% nationwide for the number of physical and digital visits per person.

Broader reach

More people from the borough's lowest-income areas visit their library.

Bigger impacts

Our partners make an even bigger impact thanks to our support and coordination.

More community involvement

The number of residents involved with or volunteering at our library increase.

Stronger communities

We gather evidence that shows our libraries are helping reduce loneliness.

Celebrations of culture and heritage

More residents engage with arts and culture at their local libraries.

Sustainable evolution

Our libraries, services and visitors prioritise sustainability.

Get involved with your local library

There are so many great ways you can get involved with your local library.

- Find out what's going on at your local library by dropping in for a chat
- Try something new at your library – you could try borrowing an e-book, check what services you can access or find out what events are coming up
- Chat to your friends about what's on offer at your local library and bring them along with you!
- Get stuck into volunteering at your library – it's a wonderful way to meet people, make friends and feel connected to your community

Get in touch with your ideas

Have a great idea for your local library? Want to host an event? Have some helpful feedback? We want to know!

Drop our friendly team a quick email at **administration.Libraries@GLL.ORG** and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Want to find out more? Check out our website at **wandsworth.gov.uk/libraries**

