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Councillor Edward Lister  
Leader's Office  
The Town Hall  
Wandsworth High Street  
London  
SW18 5JB

6<sup>th</sup> February 2011

Dear Councillor Lister,

**Re: Changes to library services in Wandsworth**

Wandsworth Council is currently consulting on proposed changes to library services across the borough, as outlined in paper no. 10-830. Please accept this letter as my contribution to this consultation process.

Our library services are valuable, and should be treated with care – Wandsworth Council must ensure that it does as much as possible to ameliorate the impact of any cuts made, and that changes to services are made with due consideration to wider social impact they will have.

As it stands, I have a number of concerns about the cuts proposed, and manner in which the public has been consulted on the proposals. There is a strong feeling amongst residents who have contacted me that the council is moving too quickly to implement cuts to library services – making it more likely 'bad' decisions will be made that cannot be reversed in the future. I share these concerns, and see a number of problems with the proposals, and consultation, that may lead to these 'bad' decisions being taken.

**1) Concerns about public consultation**

The consultation presents residents with a difficult choice: accept the closure of York Gardens library, which appears to be providing a highly valuable service to residents in the locality (particularly children) or accept reduced hours at the majority of Wandsworth's libraries.

Why has no third option – that no cuts made to library services – been presented to residents in this consultation process?

I also note that borough-wide cuts of £73,000 are already being made, and that these cuts are neither being adequately explained, nor consulted on. Tooting Library, which is the second most

popular library in the borough by books issued, is thankfully protected from reduced opening hours. But I have concerns that proposed staffing, supply, stock and services cuts will impact on the services there.

Residents have not had a chance to have their say on cuts at Tooting, or other libraries in the borough.

**Wandsworth Council has expressed a desire to “talk to local people to find out what their priorities are, then find a way of delivering results together.” It should start here, on the subject of the provision of library services, with a full and frank discussion of all the possible options – not just the two presented to residents as part of this consultation.**

## **2) Is this the right choice?**

Our local libraries are highly valued by residents – providing a wide range of services to a broad cross-section of the communities they serve. Popularity and utility cannot only be measured by the number of books issued in any given year – there is a wider social benefit to a community that comes from the local provision of good IT facilities, or a quiet place for children to do homework.

They provide a vital lifeline to the most deprived members of society – ensuring access to books (which are increasingly expensive) and IT facilities that many do not have access to at home.

Any cuts to opening hours (as threatened at Earlsfield and Balham libraries – both well used by my constituents), or the loss of a whole library, should be taken extremely seriously by Wandsworth Council, and consideration paid to the wider social impact cuts to these services may have. It absolutely should not be just viewed as a ‘bean counting’ exercise, where cuts are made based on a one-dimensional view of ‘popularity’ - such as the number of books borrowed in a year.

While I welcome the steps Wandsworth Council has taken in conducting equalities impact assessments as part of this consultation process – they have both come after the options have been identified.

**A more comprehensive study of all the libraries in the borough must be undertaken to ensure that the most vulnerable and deprived parts of the community do not lose out as a result of cuts or closures that are not being targeted effectively, and appropriately.**

The case that has been made for the closure of York Gardens library perfectly demonstrates why residents are concerned that these cuts are not being targeted properly, and that the proposed cuts are misguided.

York Gardens library is in Latchmere Ward, which is ranked as the most deprived ward in the borough of Wandsworth. Council figures estimate that as many as 48% of households in the area don't have access to a computer or the internet.

It is clear that York Gardens is particularly important to local children, who are the main users of the libraries services (50% of the libraries users are aged 11-15 - the average for Wandsworth is 19%), a high proportion come to use computers and to do homework – well above average for the borough.

Yes, fewer people use the library, but this in itself is not a good measure of the social benefit this library provides.

It is clear to anybody that reads the Draft Equalities Impact Assessment produced during this consultation that the service at York Gardens is highly valuable to local residents, and is performing a social function that exceeds that of many other libraries in the borough.

York Gardens serves one of the most deprived communities in the borough, and specifically provides a service for the most vulnerable group within that community: children. Far from closing York Gardens and ripping these vital services out of the heart of the local community, Wandsworth Borough Council should be looking to replicate the same levels of support for children at libraries across the borough.

I urge Wandsworth Council to listen to the hundreds of people who have signed petitions, written to their councillors and Members of Parliament, and responded to the consultation with the simple message that these cuts are not wanted.

Wandsworth has considerable reserves, and can afford to take these decisions more slowly, to ensure that they are the right choices for our libraries.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', written in a cursive style.

**Rt Hon Sadiq Khan**

Member of Parliament for Tooting