

Merton Council's Pledge in Support of the National Year of Reading 2026

Merton Council:

1. Notes the launch of the National Year of Reading 2026 and the strong national and international evidence demonstrating the importance of reading in improving life chances, wellbeing, educational attainment, social mobility and community connection across all ages.
2. Recognises the vital role of libraries, schools, early years settings, further education providers, cultural organisations and the voluntary and community sector in supporting literacy, reading for pleasure and lifelong learning.
3. Declares its formal support for the National Year of Reading 2026 and commits to making reading a visible, inclusive and shared local priority throughout the year.
4. Resolves to support delivery of the National Year of Reading locally by:
 - a. Promoting National Year of Reading activities, messages, toolkits and resources through council communications, schools, community networks, public spaces and online platforms, ensuring residents are aware of opportunities to take part and access support.
 - b. Working in partnership between the library service, Family Hubs and children's centres, and local schools and settings to strengthen joint planning and delivery, supporting a coherent approach to reading from the early years through to secondary education and beyond, and reinforcing the relationship between community services, settings, schools, libraries and families.
 - c. Actively supporting and promoting the Summer Reading Challenge as a flagship programme within the National Year of Reading, recognising its role in encouraging reading for pleasure, preventing the summer learning dip and strengthening engagement between schools, libraries and communities.
 - d. Developing and delivering a programme of reading related events and activities across the borough, including author and illustrator visits, theatre and performance inspired by books and stories, poetry events, reading groups, family reading sessions and community led initiatives.
 - e. Supporting borough wide initiatives such as the Merton Big Read, encouraging shared reading experiences across communities and creating opportunities for residents of all ages to read, discuss and engage with the same books and themes.
 - f. Encouraging creative participation through storytelling and reading

competitions, including story writing challenges, poetry competitions and reading based creative projects for children, young people and adults.

g. Supporting schools to develop pupil leadership and engagement through initiatives such as school library ambassadors and reading champions, helping to promote reading for pleasure and positive reading role models within school communities.

h. Promoting learning to read and early literacy programmes, including phonics support, family learning and targeted interventions, working with schools, early years providers and partners to support children and families at key stages of development.

i. Recognising and promoting the Home Library Service and other outreach library services, including home visits, to support residents who are unable to access library buildings due to age, disability, illness or caring responsibilities, ensuring that reading opportunities reach those most at risk of isolation.

j. Ensuring that activities and programmes are inclusive and accessible, with particular focus on children and young people, families, older residents, people with additional needs and those who face barriers to accessing books, reading spaces or digital resources.

k. Promoting the use of digital and online resources, including eBooks, audiobooks, online reading platforms and virtual events, and using online promotion and social media to widen participation and reach new audiences.

l. Providing officer time to support coordination, partnership development and governance arrangements, including the establishment of an initial local steering group and reporting back to the relevant committee with a short delivery plan by an agreed date.

m. Exploring the provision of modest support for promotional materials and activity delivery, subject to existing budget constraints, external funding opportunities and collaboration with regional and national partners.

5. Commits to celebrating and showcasing local reading activity and impact throughout 2026, recognising the contribution of settings and libraries, schools, Family Hubs and children's centres, partners, volunteers and residents in building a strong reading culture that supports learning, wellbeing and community cohesion.