

Greater London Authority: Information Services

The visit took place at the Foster designed City Hall, home of the Greater London Authority. The GLA consists of a directly elected Mayor, separately elected 25 member assembly and a permanent staff of around 600. Information Services supports the work of the Mayor, London Assembly members, GLA Staff, Functional bodies (TfL, Met Police etc), London Boroughs and individual library members.



City Hall (© www.london.gov.uk)

Attendees were welcomed by Liz Osbourne, Information Services Manager. Information Services support the main areas of responsibility of the GLA; Economic development, social development and environmental improvement. Liz and her team supply specialist enquiry services, the Urbaline database, alerting bulletins and a small resource collection. The team is comprised of 5 subject specialists covering a varied range of urban issues (incorporating 6 themes: equal opportunity, sustainable development, health, health inequalities, climate change and community safety). Requests for information include facts & figures, information on people or organisations, press reports and details of current research.

After an overview of the role of Information Services by Liz, we were given a demonstration of the primary database, Urbaline, by Seema Rampersad (Systems and Stock Manager). This database covers urban affairs and contains abstracts of books, reports, journal articles and summaries of news items. The information is specific to London and the GLA. Other databases in use include Urbadoc and Social Policy and Practice. The information team also supply alerting bulletins such as the Daily Information Bulletin, Urban Abstracts and Specialist Bulletins (Environment News, Culture, London 2012 etc).

Seema then took us on a tour of the library and building. The library itself holds over 500 journal & statistical series and over 40,000 books & reports, as well as offering access to e-documents/journals and databases, and a comfortable meeting area for GLA employees. The book collection is catalogued numerically as and when items arrive, so there is no subject specific categorisation, making it difficult to browse in any way other than randomly, but which makes for some interesting juxtaposition of titles.



Staircase (©www.london.gov.uk)

Finally, we were treated to a tour around the building, taking in the amazing central staircase, a stroll past the Mayor's office on the 8th floor and great views of the London skyline from the 9th floor balcony.

An enjoyable and fascinating hour or so was had by all in attendance.

Michael Gainsford, Imperial College London Library.