

Committee	Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee		
Report Title	Proposed changes to the Lewisham Library and Information Service		
Contributors	Executive Director for Community Services		
Date	30 November 2015	Item	4

1. Reasons for Lateness and Urgency

- 1.1 The subject of this report is the outcome of the consultation on proposed changes to the Library and Information Service. The consultation closed on Sunday 15th November and received a high volume of responses that needed to be collated in order to prepare the report. For this reason the report has despatched late.
- 1.2 The report is being presented to Safer Stronger Select Committee in order for it to be scrutinised prior to Mayor and Cabinet on 9th December and therefore could not wait until the next Safer Stronger Select Committee Meeting.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. On 16 September 2015, the Safer Stronger Select Committee considered the proposed changes to the Library and Information Service in the context of the Lewisham Future Programme that set out the Draft Savings Proposals for 2016/17.
- 2.2. On 30 September 2015, Mayor and Cabinet agreed for public consultation on the proposed changes to the library service to be undertaken and for the outcome of the consultation to be reported back to Mayor and Cabinet on 9th December 2015.

3. Purpose

- 3.1. This report informs the Select Committee of the outcome of the consultation and invites comments prior to the report being presented to Mayor and Cabinet.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1. The report to Mayor and Cabinet will recommend that:
- A saving of £1million from the Library and Information Service budget is approved.
 - Staff consultation on the restructuring of the library service is undertaken
 - The formal tender process to identify partner organisations to take on the management of Forest Hill Library, Manor House Library and Torridon Road Library buildings commences.
 - That detailed plans for the reconfiguration of the ground floor of Laurence House are developed.
 - That a further report is brought back to Mayor and Cabinet contracts to appoint the partner organisations and approve plans for the ground floor of Laurence House.

5. Policy context

- 5.1. Shaping the Future, the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy includes the following priority outcomes which relate to the work of the Library and Information Service and reflect the Council's aspirations for the service:
- Ambitious and Achieving – where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential.
 - Empowered and Responsible – where people can be actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities.
 - Healthy, Active and Enjoyable – where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and wellbeing.
 - Dynamic and Prosperous – where people are part of vibrant localities and town centres, well connected to London and beyond.
- 5.2. The Library and Information Service also contributes to the following Council Priorities:
- Community leadership and empowerment – developing opportunities for the active participation and engagement of people in the life of the community.
 - Strengthening the local economy – gaining resources to regenerate key localities, strengthen employment skills and promote public transport.
 - Active, healthy citizens – leisure, sporting, learning and creative activities for everyone.

6. The Proposal

- 6.1. The Budget Savings Proposal presented to the Select Committee on 16 September is based on:
- The creation of three Hub Libraries – Deptford Lounge, Lewisham and Downham Health & Leisure Centre—which will carry an enhanced role for face to face contact between the Local Authority and the public to support the digital by default agenda.
 - The extension of the Lewisham Community Library Model to Forest Hill, Torridon, and Manor House, in partnership with other council services and community organisations. And the integration of the library provision into the repurposed ground floor space within the Catford complex (Laurence House).
 - The review of front line staff to include new functions through the re-training and enhancement of front line roles
- 6.2. The Proposal, if implemented, would produce reduced revenue costs of £950,000. The proposal also includes efficiencies to be realised on the Deptford Lounge budget which would produce savings of £50,000.

7. The public consultation

- 7.1. The council conducted a public consultation through five public meetings, a questionnaire, and a series of focus groups. The council also took into account the contributions of a petition, blogs, tweeter feeds, and individual correspondence addressed to the Library and Information Service and elected members during the consultation.
- 7.2. The main themes emerging from the consultation are summarised below. Please note that what follows does not reflect every detail of the consultation but aims to capture the more substantial themes that were brought forward during the consultation. Appendix 1 offers a fuller analysis of the public consultation.

- 7.3. The austerity approach – It emerged consistently during the consultation that many residents feel strongly against the climate of austerity that is having a negative effect on the local authority and its capacity to continue to sustain services to residents. Some maintain that the council should find ways to express its residents' views to central government.

It was explained that the council has a duty to present a balanced budget and that, despite savings agreed to date, there remains an expected reduction in funding of at least £50 million and savings of this order to be made by 2019/20 (see Medium Term Financial Strategy – July 2015 and Mayor & Cabinet savings report – September 2015).

- 7.4. The value of the library service – Residents were unanimous in expressing their views on the value of the Lewisham library service and its staff. The impact on citizens and future generations was repeatedly articulated in person and in writing. For these reasons, the majority of respondents thought that cuts should be taken elsewhere.

Lewisham has consistently invested in the library service and has achieved very positive results in the last years, within substantially reducing resources. The increased popularity of libraries, the way in which the service engages with local communities, and the growing satisfaction rate demonstrate that both the council and its residents value the service. The proposal presents a positive way forward for the service that balances budget reductions with sustainable service delivery.

- 7.5. The consultation process – Some believed that the consultation was not properly carried out because of insufficient publicity or time and opportunity to respond, or because the information was inadequate.

The consultation started on 1 October 2016 and ended on 15 November 2015, which is over the six weeks standard consultation time. The Budget Savings Proposal for the Library and Information Service was made public on 9 September when a paper was presented to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee. The consultation was publicised through the local media, including South London Press, News Shopper, and Mercury. Notifications were sent to residents through the Lewisham Life email newsletter. Publicity and papers were available on the council web site and in all the libraries.

The information provided before and during the consultation clarified the Library Service performance, including an overview of the existing community library provision, and the proposed approach to delivering savings. The Service aimed to provide the relevant information without overwhelming the reader. The public participation in the consultation in person and in writing demonstrates that residents were able to evaluate the options and express informed views on them.

- 7.6. Deterioration of the Service if community run – A large number of respondents expressed concern about the quality of the service if this moved to being “community run”. The comments were mostly based on the decrease in book issues at the Community Libraries, the fact that council staff are not based in the buildings and the risk of temporary closures.

There has been a fall in book issues from library services nationally. Overall Lewisham's book issues have performed well against this national trend but it is true that the issues of books decreased faster in the community libraries than in the council-managed buildings. This may be partially attributed to the reduced stock at community libraries and the accessibility of the self-service technology. The library service intends to take steps to address the drop in book issues across the whole service and is investigating changing the self-service technology to better support self-issue. More positively, visits to community libraries have risen, demonstrating increased usage of the service. This

consistent trend is linked to three factors, the increase in opening hours, the introduction of additional services in the buildings, and the direct involvement of local communities in the running of the buildings and the activities in them. It is also worth noting that residents' satisfaction with the libraries service has risen since the introduction of the community library model in 2011. The need to temporarily close a service for lack of staff or unforeseen problems with a building, whilst always regrettable, can occur in any business, including the council-run libraries.

- 7.7. The local community – Many felt that the proposal would have a negative impact on the local community and some people asked how the council would continue to engage with local communities if the proposal was taken forwards.

The buildings and particularly the services in them are likely to change following the implementation of the asset transfer. The lack of certainty about the future of their local library is reasonably presenting residents with concern. However, our experience of the community libraries shows that creative and individual solutions can be found for each building, which avoids the potential impact of a more radical approach, such as the closure of a building. The council recognises that local residents will want to continue to be engaged with the implementation of the proposal and will establish mechanisms to continue to work with local stakeholders.

- 7.8. Volunteers – Respondents expressed concern over the use of volunteers to “replace” council staff. Some stressed the lack of reliability that is inherent in the transient role of volunteers. Some were concerned about issues linked to the ability of volunteers to care for the assets and to safeguard visiting audiences, particularly children.

The council is not proposing to replace council staff with volunteers. During the consultation, the community library model was explained. This is based on the commitment by a third party organisation to support access to library service from a building that they are now responsible for. The council commits to sustaining the library service, e.g. through buying books, maintaining the IT-based self-service infrastructure, and providing a peripatetic library service. All the partner organisations maintain safeguarding policies.

- 7.9. Support for a particular library – Respondents articulated a number of reasons why the individual libraries should be excluded from the proposed changes. For example,
- Forest Hill residents thought that their library should be excluded for a range of reasons, including the performance of the library and the impact on their community.
 - Manor House residents thought that their library should be excluded because of its status as a valued heritage building.
 - Torridon Road residents thought that their library should be excluded because of the work it does with children and families.

The value of the individual libraries was never in dispute, as much as the capacity of the future, much reduced workforce to sustain the current presence in these buildings. Some modelling is presented in Section 8 that reflect possible solutions based on retaining the council presence in all the buildings while reducing costs through staff reductions.

- 7.10. Catford – the consultation highlighted the need for a different approach for the library presence on the ground floor of Laurence House, which should be developed with other council services within the building. Residents did not support the proposal that library staff should be removed from the premises leaving the service to operate on a self-service basis with the support of the peripatetic community engagement team. The proposal for Catford is to retain a library service offer as part of an integrated ‘front door’ to the council on the ground floor of Laurence House. The ‘front door’ has three key components:

- A safe, public space – a truly public space, open to all, with books, information and computers that people can access themselves. A space with free WIFI where you can spend time, feel safe and part of the wider community including an area specifically for children that will continue to offer access to books and reading for our younger residents.
- Reception for council business – efficiently and securely welcoming visitors to the council’s offices.
- Access Point – providing a customer service centre that offers face to face support for more complex transactions between the council and residents that cannot be resolved on the phone or online.

At the moment these three functions are managed separately. Over the next 2 months officers will explore how to integrate these functions with a joined up staff team, and a redesign of the layout to support the efficient management of the space whilst still delivering each of the three functions.’ The comments received during the consultation process in relation to Catford Library will be taken into consideration in the redesign.

8. Alternative proposals

8.1. During the consultation a number of alternative proposals for how to achieve the required £800k saving in employee costs were suggested. This section of the report explores the feasibility of these alternatives.

8.2. The table below summarises the two main alternative approaches set against the current practice and against the proposal of extending the community library model which was the favoured option put forward in the consultation document. The alternative proposals are then discussed individually.

	Current structure	Proposal	Reduction in staff but all libraries open	Reduction in staff and inclusion of volunteers at all libraries
Employee costs	£ 3,105,800	£ 2,305,800	£ 2,305,800	£ 2,305,800
Total weekly opening hours	637.5	666.5	443	637.5
Structural volunteer hours/week	0	0	0	600
No of Hub Libraries	7	4 (including Catford)	7	7
No of Community Libraries	5	8	5	5
What does it mean?	This is the current cost of providing the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Hub Libraries (Deptford, Downham, Lewisham), • Extension of Community Library Model to Forest Hill, Manor House, and Torridon Road, and separate solution for Catford to be developed. • Staff roles review and training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced opening hours at Catford, Downham, Deptford, and Lewisham to 50 h/w • Reduced opening hours at, Forest Hill, Manor House, and Torridon to 15-20 h/w. • No change to the existing community library (which would all be open longer than the council-staffed libraries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will reduce services from the Current set-up by replacing paid staff with volunteers. • The Service may have to manage a new infrastructure based on volunteers.

- 8.3. The current structure – The current structure covers the cost of running the library service at the seven buildings and the community engagement team that supports the current five community libraries.
- 8.4. The proposal – The Proposal would reduce staffing costs by £800,000. The Proposal includes the relocation of staff from four buildings (Catford, Forest Hill, Manor House, and Torridon Road) to the remaining three (Deptford, Downham, and Lewisham) Hub Libraries. Fundamentally, the Proposal maintains a library service provision within the buildings subject to the asset transfer (Forest Hill, Manor House, and Torridon Road) and in Catford. This would be based on a self-service infrastructure and the growth of the peripatetic service currently provided through the Community Engagement Team.
- 8.5. Reduction of opening hours – It is possible to retain staff at all the seven libraries currently operating in the borough after the reduction in staffing. However, the much reduced staffing levels may result in a 34% loss in opening hours. One in three opening hours will be lost, putting at risk the basic provision of library services.
- 8.6. Use of volunteers at all libraries – The full integration of new volunteer roles in the structure of the library service might provide an option to sustain current provision. This would have to follow the reduction in staff, proposing the replacement of paid staff with volunteers. The council has always viewed the third sector as distinct, supporting it and valuing its input as additional and complementary to the council's own. There is no indication that the council is minded to depart from the current position. This approach will also require the library service to develop an infrastructure to promote, recruit, manage, and develop volunteers. Such structure might further reduce the library specific staff, unless the new duties and skills are reassigned to re-trained staff.
- 8.7. Other alternative suggestions included approaches based on increasing income or external, one-off capital input, such as using council reserves or (prudential) borrowing to temporarily sustain the current level of provision.
- In relation to the former, to achieve the required level of income, takings would need to grow from £237,700 to up to £1,187,700 (+500%). While increased income is desirable, the level of growth required, given no other change in the business scope and practices, is unrealistic.
 - In relation to the use of reserves, the council would not be able to use reserves to structurally sustain a specific service. While reserves may be used in emergencies and one-off conditions, relying on them to balance revenue accounts would negate the core function of the reserves fund. Also, prudential or other forms of borrowing to sustain continued revenue costs would not resolve the fundamental issue of allowing the council to live within its means, which may lead to unmanageable debt levels.
- 8.8. Also, during the consultation, respondents mentioned two additional options, namely the potential outsourcing of the service to a third party or the spin-out of local authority control through the formation of an independent organisation, possibly a mutual. While both are potential options, it is unclear that either will provide the required level of savings in the timeframe. It is also plausible that each would require a full reorganisation and streamlining of the Service before its implementation. Without this, the incoming or fledgling organisation would be burdened with additional costs that the council is already trying to reduce through these proposals.

9. The soft market test

- 9.1. The Council conducted a soft market test to gauge the interest in the transfer of the Forest Hill, Manor House, and Torridon Road buildings to potential partners. The Test attracted a number of organisations from the commercial, public, and voluntary sectors.
- 9.2. Given the outcome of soft market test that resulted in eight organisations expressing an interest, it is reasonable to assume that a formal procurement will attract suitable partners interested in the transfer of the library buildings.
- 9.3. It also emerged that community groups, local residents and stakeholders would welcome further engagement during the formal procurement phase. It is proposed that this is done through the Local Assemblies structure and engaging with relevant groups in the vicinity of each building.

10. Potential impact of the proposed changes and equalities implications

- 10.1. The specific impact on protected characteristics and a full Equality Impact Assessment are available in Appendix 2. Overall the equalities impact is assessed as low given that the library service would continue to operate in all of its current locations. However, it is recognised that the service being delivered will change and that the needs of individual protected characteristics will need to continue to be taken into consideration as the proposal is implemented.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 makes provision for regulating and improving library services. Section 7(1) sets out the duty of every library authority to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. Section 7(2) provides that, in fulfilling its duties, a library authority should have regard to the desirability “of securing ...by any other appropriate means” that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, pictures, records, films and other materials in sufficient number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements of adults and children. Section 9(1) provides that “a library authority may make contributions towards the expenses ofany person providing library facilities for members of the public”.
- 11.2. Recent judgments by Courts have indicated that where a consultation exercise is undertaken by public bodies in relation to proposals to cut services which are provided pursuant to Statute then that for it to be lawful consultation should conform to certain requirements , namely that it should:
 - be undertaken at a time when the relevant proposal is still at a formative stage;
 - give sufficient reasons for particular proposals to permit of intelligent consideration and an intelligent response;
 - give consultees adequate time for consideration and response; and
 - the product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account when finalising any proposals.
- 11.3. The consultation process is at the discretion of the public authority and provided it is fair there are no prescriptive rules which have to be followed subject to the principles outlined at 11.2 above being observed.

Equalities Legislation

- 11.4. The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 11.5. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 11.6. The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.
- 11.7. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>
- 11.8. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:
1. The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
 2. Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
 3. Engagement and the equality duty
 4. Equality objectives and the equality duty
 5. Equality information and the equality duty
- 11.9. The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

12. Financial implications

- 12.1. This report relates to savings proposal L6 considered by Mayor and Cabinet on 16th September 2015. The proposal is for a reduction of £1m against the current net library budget of £4.18m, phased £400k in 2016/17, £600k in 2017/18.

12.2. The report sets out the results of public consultation on the proposals and recommends that the further work required to achieve the saving be undertaken.

13. Crime and disorder implications

13.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

14. Environmental implications

14.1. There are no direct environmental implications in this report.

15. Conclusion

15.1. The consultation on the proposed changes to the Library and Information Service attracted a strong response from residents. Respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to the proposal. A number of alternative proposals were put forward, the majority of which, would be unlikely to achieve the required £1million saving. On balance, taking into account the strong opposition to the proposal and having considered the alternatives, it is felt that the preferred option laid out in the consultation paper builds on the experience that the council has developed since 2010 in relation to the asset transfer of the buildings and the delivery of library services through the Lewisham Community Libraries Model. The Model is sound and is sustaining a library service that has increased the satisfaction of Lewisham residents. The link that the council has established with local organisations has proven mutually beneficial, attracting increasing visitors to the community libraries. While it is recognised that the issuing of books has reduced, which requires further efforts from the Library and Information Team across the whole service, this is one of many functions that the libraries provide.

Background Papers

1. May 2011 Report + EIA:

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=1443andISATT=1#search=%22library%22>

2. Mayor and Cabinet Report from HCSC 18 January 2012

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=7306>

3. HCSC report 14 December 2011

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=6983>

4. Mayoral response to the comments of the Healthier Communities Select Committee on the Library and Information Service

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s8101/Response%20on%20Community%20Libraries%20to%20Healthier%20Communities%20SC.pdf>

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