

MAYOR AND CABINET		
Report Title	Lewisham Central Library Update	
Key Decision	Yes	Item No.
Ward	All	
Contributors	Director Regeneration and Place Director of Culture and Community Development	
Class	Part 1	Date: 26 June 2019

1. Purpose

- 1.1 On 21 November 2018, Mayor and Cabinet agreed – in the context of the *Revenue Budget Cuts 2019-2020* report – that the proposed cut in relation to Lewisham Library should be withdrawn and officers were asked to undertake a feasibility study of redeveloping Lewisham Library, to be brought back to Mayor and Cabinet for consideration as part of the 2020-2021 budget.
- 1.2 This paper updates Mayor and Cabinet on the work conducted to date.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Mayor and Cabinet considered a proposal for a £450,000 budget cut to the Library Service in Autumn 2018 under budget reference COM11. Mayor and Cabinet asked officers to explore whether a redevelopment of the Lewisham Library site could contribute towards this cut while protecting the front line delivery.
- 2.2 Aside from the budget considerations Mayor and Cabinet were also keen to explore the opportunity to develop the library to deliver a safe and welcoming service and additional residential accommodation.
- 2.3 Officers have explored the redevelopment option which is not considered financially viable at this stage. However, the Lewisham Library building needs attention in the short to medium term and this will be funded through the existing capital programme.
- 2.4 Officers will continue to explore options for further improvements of the building including ensuring that the Local History and Archives collections are safeguarded.
- 2.5 Any revenue cuts to the Library Service will be considered alongside all other proposals as part of the budget setting round for the 2020-2021 budget.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet note the report.

4. Policy Context

- 4.1 Within the Corporate Strategy 2018-2022, Lewisham has seven corporate priorities which outline the Council's historic legacy of working alongside residents and communities, voluntary and faith groups, termed 'the Lewisham way'. The Council aims to build on this to improve the quality of life and offer residents the best chance

to overcome barriers. In the context of this paper, relevant priorities include – among others – Tackling the housing crisis, Giving children and young people the best start in life and Building an inclusive local economy.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Lewisham library building and the Library Resources Centre on Hither Green Lane are both in relatively poor condition. They require attention in order to provide a library service that is fit for purpose to meet current demand and future expectations.
- 5.2 The library is currently situated in a former telephone exchange, built circa 1960 and converted into a public library in the 1990s. The library currently offers a total floor area of 3,356 sq m over four floors, of which 1,896 sq m is available to the public. Located on the ground floor is a small collection of new books, seating, public access computers, self-service terminals, a café, Baseline, and a touchdown office space for hire. The first floor houses the children's, teen, and adult book collections, the staff workrooms, seating, and PCs. The Archives and Local History Centre is located on the second floor, together with the reference library collection, quiet study spaces, more computers, and offices. The third floor houses a meeting room, the archives' "strong room", the staff room, and the library store.
- 5.3 The library is not purpose built, which results in underutilisation of the available space. For example, the escalator that runs through the centre of the building on the ground floor is unnecessary, and currently does not operate.
- 5.4 The Library Resources Centre, not open to the public, is mainly used for the storage and the sorting of books.

6. Short brief – Library

- 6.1 In order to inform the modelling on the feasibility of developing the site, it was necessary to give an indication of what sort of area might be occupied by a new library and the type of services and infrastructure that would be required with it. The factors taken into account are summarised below.
- 6.2 Lewisham is committed to the role that its free public libraries play in local communities as portals to "unbiased access to information, learning, and works of the creative imagination". However, they are much more than that, as they continue to be the interface between the council and residents, particularly in relation to the digital by default agenda. In this context, and given the expected continued growth in resident population, a new Lewisham Library should be a free, welcoming, trusted space that adds value to the borough's High Street, serving both as a cultural, social, and business destination.
- 6.3 The building should be built over two or three floors with open plan and flexible space which can be adapted to suit varying uses. The building should comfortably house circa 70,000 books and include ancillary space for staff operations and amenities. In addition, the building should include a children's library area, café, hireable spaces, room for 40 desktop PCs and a minimum of 100 study and laptop spaces. The requirements of the library service were central to the brief provided to the consultants instructed to carry out the options appraisals.

7. Redevelopment appraisal

7.1 Work began in early 2019 looking at the redevelopment potential of the existing site, by way of re-providing a new library and also providing housing. The options include the possibility of bringing the Library Resource Centre on Hither Green Lane into scope, both to help with the relocation of non-core services from Lewisham Library and the provision of further housing.

7.2 The study focussed on four options for the existing library site:

- 3 storey library with 31 private sale homes;
- 3 storey library with 31 PRS homes (all market rent)
- 2 storey library with 30 private sale homes
- 2 storey library with 30 PRS homes (all market rent)

All options were fully costed and modelled financially over a 40-year cash flow period.

The results are summarised in Table 1. All the options show a financial deficit, having taken into account potential income from sales or rental, that the Council would need to bridge before progressing.

Site	Proposed Scheme	Deficit (£)
Library	Three Storey Library and 31 Private Flats	£3.9m
Library Resource Centre	17 Affordable Flats and Storage	£1.3m
	Total	£5.2m
Library	Three Storey Library and 31 PRS	£5.6m
Library Resource Centre	17 Affordable Flats and Storage	£1.3m
	Total	£6.9m
Library	Two Storey Library and 30 Private Flats	£1.2m
Library Resource Centre	17 Affordable Flats and Storage	£1.3m
	Total	£2.5m
Library	Two Storey Library & 30 PRS	£1.9m
Library Resource Centre	17 Affordable Flats & Storage	£1.3m
	Total	£3.2m

Table 1

7.3 The study focussed on one realistic option for the Library Resources Centre site, which would have re-provided a single storey library storage facility with 17 social rent homes. It is possible to decouple the Library and Library Resource Centre developments by taking the Library Resources Centre out of the equation. This would reduce the deficit but would leave no affordable housing being delivered through the scheme, although it would still leave the benefits that residents would receive from a new Lewisham Library.

7.4 The smallest deficit of £1.2m would only deliver a two storey library which is a significant loss of floor space against existing provision. Purely financially, the current options suggest a gap of between £1.2m and £5.6m. This gap cannot be bridged given the current resources and commitments.

7.5 In addition the redevelopment could only partly meet the revenue saving required, thanks to a smarter layout and better operations. However, it is unlikely that these will match the required levels of savings.

7.6 For the reasons presented above, it is proposed that the redevelopment does not take place at this time and this option is not recommended.

8. Alternative options

8.1 Other options were considered that included relocating temporarily the library to the Lewisham Shopping Centre, with the view to develop a new library as part of the Land Security town centre development.

8.2 This approach would require capital investment of between £300,000 – £500,000 to fit out a new facility and ongoing revenue costs to be determined for renting a new facility in the shopping centre. The Council would have the ability to design with Land Securities a purpose-built facility on a footprint to be agreed with them, rather than the fixed site of the existing library.

8.3 Financially, some revenue savings could be achieved in the short term as a result of a reduced operation, while longer term, the Council would need to negotiate a new facility through Section 106 rather than committing funding or borrowing into a project.

8.4 This option could deliver some, limited, revenue savings through a reduced, interim operation. The temporary facility would not be purpose built, but a compromise solution until a long-term facility is built. Longer term, however, the Council would have designed a purpose-built facility in line with its future requirements. This approach would release the existing library site for housing or other uses.

8.5 However, discussions with Land Securities regarding their timetable for bringing forward the first phase of the town centre plans have indicated that this is unlikely to happen imminently, which means that any relocation would be long term and present a significantly reduced service for this period. Accordingly, this option is not recommended.

9. Next Steps

9.1 Given the considerations above, the preferred option would be that of retaining the existing building until a new purpose-built library comes forward either with Land Securities, as part of the Catford redevelopment, or other future opportunity.

9.2 This would require investing in the current building, either fixing the issues or finding a way of redeveloping the existing site to a more limited extent such as to fix the issues with the roof and other building plant issues, as well as reconfiguring the spaces to generate more income.

9.3 The revenue savings this approach might generate have not been fully explored, but the overall business planning for the capital works and service delivery which would be required has already begun as there is an urgent need to ensure that the current building is fit for purpose and that the existing Archives are safeguarded as they are currently under threat due to water ingress.

9.4 In relation to the other key objectives, the existing library could be adapted in the short term until a permanent facility comes forward.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 There are no specific financial implications at this stage. However, if it is not possible for the service to deliver the savings sought, alternative savings will need to be identified elsewhere in the Council's overall budget.
- 10.2 The report notes that work to explore the possibility of remodelling Lewisham Library has begun. The revenue and capital implications of any changes will be considered at the appropriate time.
- 11. Legal implications**
- 11.1 There are no direct legal implications arising as a result of this report.
- 12. Crime and Disorder Implications**
- 12.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising as a result of this report.
- 13. Equalities Implications**
- 13.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising as a result of this report.
- 14. Environmental Implications**
- 14.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising as a result of this report.

For queries relating to this report please contact
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