

REPORT TO:	SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE 30 th March 2021
SUBJECT:	Review of Libraries public consultation - phase one
LEAD OFFICER:	Sarah Hayward Interim Executive Director of Place
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Oliver Lewis – Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Sarah Hayward Interim Executive Director of Place
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	Public

POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

This report arises from the proposal in the 25th November 2020 Cabinet paper to close or operate five libraries on a cost neutral basis as part of the Renewing Croydon savings targets.

This review is to ensure that the proposals align with the Council's New Ways of Working:

- We will live within our means, balance the books and provide value for money for our residents.
- We will focus on tackling ingrained inequality and poverty in the borough. We will follow the evidence to tackle the underlying causes of inequality and hardship, like structural racism, environmental injustice and economic injustice.
- We will focus on providing the best quality core service we can afford. First and foremost, providing social care services that keep our most vulnerable residents safe and healthy. And to keep our streets clean and safe.
- To ensure we get full benefit from every pound we spend, other services in these areas will only be provided where they can be shown to have a direct benefit in keeping people safe and reducing demand.

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This report has been included on the agenda to give the Scrutiny & Overview Committee the opportunity provide feedback on the first stage of the Library Public Consultation.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	The Scrutiny & Overview Committee is asked to review the information provided from the first stage of the Libraries Public Consultation and is asked for its feedback on the following:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The consultation activities undertaken so far. 2. Options for achieving the savings target within the Libraries service.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to outline the activities that have taken place to date as part of the first phase of the Libraries public consultation. The report will also cover the key feedback from the survey responses, webinars, and correspondence. The report will also engage feedback from Scrutiny on the results of the first phase of consultation. To conclude, the report will outline the next steps in the Libraries public consultation.
- 1.2. The findings contained in this report relate to the feedback from the Libraries public consultation that was held between 14th January and 14th March 2021. The consultation proposed the closure or cost neutral to the Council of five libraries at Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead, Shirley and South Norwood.
- 1.3. The report reviews the activities undertaken by the Council leading up to and during the first phase of consultation. This includes the rationale for the decision to select the five libraries in the proposal. It will also review how the Council has actively engaged with residents during a period of national lockdown, including public consultation through digital means.
- 1.4. Analysis of the 2,510 completed consultation surveys and the feedback from the quantitative and qualitative questions. This is considered on a library by library basis. The key feedback themes are:
 1. Services - residents value:
 - Book borrowing
 - Digital access (PCs, printing, internet)
 - Study/work space
 - Social space/community hub
 2. Equalities:
 - Closures will disproportionately impact deprived areas
 - Children, young families and the elderly will be most impacted
 3. Timing - communities need libraries post-lockdown
 4. Financial - residents feel that they are paying the price for financial mis-management
 5. Travel – resident cannot or would not
 6. travel to alternative locations
 7. Social:
 - “Heart of the community”, good for mental health and wellbeing
 - Members value activities and events in libraries
 8. Education – importance of literacy and attainment
 9. Anti-social behaviour:
 - A safe space for children and young people
 - Perception that crime and ASB will increase
 10. Opening hours:
 - Reduce hours to make savings
 - Others want longer hours/more convenient times to meet their needs

11. Publicity – needs to go wider, especially during periods of lockdown
12. Books:
 - More and better collection of books
 - Could not afford to purchase own books
 - Fear of fines deters loans
 - Longer loan periods needed
13. Shared space – collaborate with local schools, businesses
14. Operation:
 - Community and volunteer run an option
 - Value of professional library staff
15. Income generation ideas:
 - Café
 - Hireable meeting spaces
 - Chargeable desk space for small businesses
 - Ticketed cultural events

- 1.5. The report concludes with details of the next stages of the consultation process, culminating in a decision making stage. Following Scrutiny, a paper will be submitted to Cabinet on 12th April outlining the suggested options for further public consultation. Phase two of the consultation will begin on 7th May and conclude on 25th June 2021. A further Cabinet report will be presented on 12th July 2021 for a final decision.

Review of Libraries public consultation phase one

2. Background

- 2.1. Public library services are funded and either run or commissioned by local government. Library authorities (unitary, county or metropolitan borough councils) have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 *'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' for all those who live, work or study in the area* (section 7). The Act allows for joint working between library authorities and councils may also offer wider library services (for example, loaning devices, running activities or providing access to wifi and computers).

In providing this service, councils must, among other things:

1. encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service (section 7(2)(b))
2. lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area (in accordance with section 8(3))

- 2.2. Croydon Council solely owns thirteen libraries across the borough, and jointly owns Upper Norwood Library with Lambeth Council. These libraries are relatively evenly distributed throughout the borough. The borough is divided into north, central and south; with each area containing a large hub library, medium sized branch libraries, and smaller branch libraries.

- 2.3. In January 2018 the Libraries service was in-sourced following the operator Carillion going into administration. The Council harmonised terms and conditions, and restructured the service to achieve £300,000 of savings.
- 2.4. In 2019, the Council published the Libraries Plan 2019-28 with a vision to Involve, Inform, and Inspire through the libraries provision in the borough. The themes were:
1. A library service designed around the needs of our residents and communities
 2. Croydon Libraries as the 'front door' of the Council enabling services to be delivered locally
 3. Libraries at the heart of Croydon's cultural offer, celebrating the written and spoken word in particular
 4. Modern, welcoming, inclusive and accessible library facilities and buildings
- 2.5. Alongside the Libraries Plan 2019-28, there was a commitment to invest £5.2m over three years to refurbish and refresh libraries buildings. Over the summer of 2019 Selsdon Library was refurbished. In November 2019 works began to undertake a roof replacement and major refurbishment at Norbury Library, which was completed in December 2020. Plans were also in place to move South Norwood Library to a new development on Station Road. In addition, by January 2020 the ICT infrastructure had been upgraded at all thirteen libraries, including full fibre broadband, new PCs, and improved Wi-Fi.

3. National and Local Usage

- 3.1. Nationally, there have been a significant increase in the number of libraries closed or handed over to community organisations to operate following the introduction of austerity. In 2013 Croydon made the decision to outsource the Libraries service, while local authorities across the country decided to close or community operate parts of their service.
- 3.2. Over the last decade the number of users of libraries nationally has been in decline. In Croydon there has been a reduction in visits and book issues of 50% in the last 10 years, which follows the national trend. This decrease in usage is despite an increase in population of over 20% in the last 20 years. This decrease is due to a number of factors.
1. The way that people access information has changed, with the rise of the internet at home, smart phones, and cheap and quick access to books through services such as Amazon.
 2. Spending per person by Libraries has reduced over the last 10 years. In 2010/11 the service had a total budget of £7,500,000, equating to £20.56 per person. In comparison, by 2019/20 this had decreased to a budget of £3,500,000, equating to £9.05 per person. This is currently the lowest per person across London boroughs.

3. Croydon's book fund remained static for 10 years, before being increased by 9% in 2019. The price of books and the demand for digital content has increased during this time, which has forced the Libraries service to find greater value for money through consortia purchasing power.
 4. In contrast, the demand for free, reliable IT services have increased from residents who do not have access to a computer or the internet at home. Access to IT in libraries helps to bridge the digital divide for many residents within the borough. The ICT equipment was upgraded in 2013 but over time became slow and unreliable, which has contributed to a downturn in visitor figures. A full upgrade to full fibre broadband, new PCs and Wi-Fi in January 2020 has considerably improved the digital service provision. Due to Covid the benefits of this service have not yet been fully realised.
 5. Feedback from residents following the in-sourcing of the service from Carillion highlighted that the buildings are looking tired and in need of refreshing. The Libraries Plan 2019-28 programmed for all thirteen libraries to be refurbished to make them 'modern, welcoming, inclusive and accessible' spaces. To date, Selsdon and Norbury libraries have been refurbished.
- 3.3. Croydon's libraries are used for events and activities. These range from Rhymetime and Storytime, homework clubs and study space for younger residents, to digital access training, job clubs, reading groups, knit-and-natter for older residents. Prior to Covid, Libraries were being used as the 'front door to the Council', where other services could come alongside residents in a safe space to deliver activities and information. This involved coordinating Council or voluntary support services at times when residents were using the building for other activities to help increase access to advice and information.

4. Public Consultation

- 4.1. In September 2020 the Council issued a Section 114 Notice (S114) due to financial challenges. The request of Libraries services was to find £500,000 of savings from an operating budget of £3,410,000 (2020/21), effectively a 15% reduction. The service is already lean, and has on average more library buildings than our peers.
- 4.2. A review of the service identified some key points:
 1. Five of our libraries (38%) produced less than 15% of the footfall and book issues across the service.
 2. They all had another library within 1.5 miles.
 3. All of the buildings had maintenance requirements in the next three years that would require capital expenditure from the Council. Some of the remedial works were significant and did not provide value for money.
- 4.3. The five libraries identified are:
 1. Bradmore Green

2. Broad Green
3. Sanderstead
4. Shirley
5. South Norwood

- 4.4. In December 2020 a meeting with colleagues from the Department of Communities, Media and Sport (DCMS) was held to discuss the process for reducing Libraries service provision in the borough. This outlined the requirement of a two-stage process of public consultation. The first stage should include a formative proposal, and be subject to meaningful feedback from residents, business, community groups, and both members and non-members of the library. The second phase should be more specific, focusing upon a few options, and provide full details of the impact that the changes will have on the service.
- 4.5. The proposal was to close five libraries (Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead, Shirley, and South Norwood), or find an alternative that would not require any council funding.
- 4.6. The first phase of the Libraries public consultation was launched on 14th January 2021, to run until 7th March 2021, but extended mid-consultation by one week to allow for delays in the postal service brought about by Covid restrictions.
- 4.7. The consultation was primarily undertaken online due to the third national lockdown. The Council followed recently updated consultation guidance from government on holding public consultations during lockdown restrictions. An online survey was created on the Libraries consultation website, with paper copies available on request via a dedicated answerphone.
- 4.8. At the start of the consultation a fact sheet of information was shared on each of the libraries in the proposal. Additional information was provided throughout the first phase of consultation, either on request from residents or as it became pertinent to feedback.
- 4.9. Halfway through phase one, the Council hosted seven webinars to provide further detail, respond to frequently asked questions, and answer live questions through a Q&A. The webinars were held outside of usual working hours to allow as many residents as possible to attend. The first webinar, on Saturday 20th February, covered the impact on the Libraries service as a whole. This was followed by a webinar with the Community Run Library National Peer Network, and demonstrated six models of community run library from across the country. On the evenings 22nd-24th February webinars were then held for each of the five libraries included in the proposal. There were 304 live attendees at these events, and a further 477 views of the webinars afterwards.
- 4.10. Additional information was updated on the consultation website after the webinars. This included recordings of the webinars and the presentation slides, FAQs, floor plans, and more detailed library usage information.

- 4.11. During the consultation, and especially after the webinars, a number of community groups and individuals approached the Libraries service expressing an interest in a community run library. Expressions of interest have so far come from:
1. Asian Resource Centre Croydon
 2. Friends of South Norwood Library
 3. West Wickham Baptist Church
 4. Sanderstead United Reform Church
 5. Coulsdon Primary School
 6. Shirley Children's Centre
 7. Museum of Diversity
- 4.12. The first phase of public consultation closed at midnight on 14th March 2021. There were 2,487 completed surveys, of which 38 were paper forms and two completed over the telephone.
- 4.13. In addition, a petition containing 4,007 signatures was received from Save Croydon Libraries Campaign.

5. Survey Feedback – Key Findings

- 5.1. The overwhelming majority of respondents were members of Croydon Libraries (90%). In addition, feedback from the free text question identified that many non-members were the parents of children who are members; use Libraries for other activities that do not require membership; have previously been a member or plan on becoming a member after lockdown.
- 5.2. When asked if they had volunteered at one of Croydon's libraries, 6.5% identified that they had.
- 5.3. The majority of respondents confirmed that they had broadband access at home (95%).
- 5.4. To access the internet people said that they used smart phone (79%), home laptop (69%), tablet (54%), and home computer (36%). In response to the free text question residents highlighted that although they did have access to the internet from home that they were aware that other local residents did not have internet access at home and that the library helped to bridge the digital divide.
- 5.5. When asked the Library services used prior to the first lockdown, residents said: browsing and borrowing books (85%); children's activities (37%); space to sit and relax (31%); for work or research (31%); printing (28%); Storytimes (27%); computers (24%). In addition, the comments from the free text question identified that residents value the information and specialist knowledge held by Libraries staff. Further, comments identified the value of libraries as social spaces, publicising local events and activities, training activities, and access to newspapers.

- 5.6. When asked which services they have used since the service reopened in July 2020 respondents said: browsing and books (53%); select and collect (26%); online virtual library (21%); other (17%); computers (10%); and My Library app (10%). Of the comments supplied in addition to this question many residents highlighted that they had been unable to use the Libraries service because of shielding/advised not to travel, or they did not realise that the service had reopened.
- 5.7. To the free text question “Is there anything you feel is missing from our library service?”, residents identified: more books; access to refreshments; longer opening hours/outside of normal working patterns; improved promotion of events and activities; modern and welcoming spaces; improved furniture; contactless/card payment.
- 5.8. Of the 2,114 respondents to the question “Which is your local library”; 18% from Sanderstead; 17% from South Norwood; 13% from Shirley; 11% from Bradmore Green; and 5% from Broad Green. This shows a proportionately higher return rate from the libraries in the proposal, which is to be expected given the nature of the proposal.
- 5.9. When asked how they travel to their library the majority of people said that they walked (83%), with a driving (22%) and public transport (21%) the next most popular choices. Concerns have been raised about the impact of having to walk much further to the next nearest library, especially for those with mobility issues or young children. Also, in some instances there are no direct public transport routes, increasing time taken and cost of travel for users.
- 5.10. When asked how they would travel to the next nearest library if their local library was to close, respondents said: car (40%); public transport (36%); walk (18%); not sure (15%). Of note, 12% said that they would have no other way of accessing the next nearest library.
- 5.11. There were a series of questions about specific libraries: South Norwood (34%); Sanderstead (32%); Shirley (26%); Bradmore Green (23%); Broad Green (14%). Residents have commented that they would be less likely to use, or stop using entirely, Library services if their local library was closed.
- 5.12. When asked for alternative options that would not require any Council funding, residents suggested: paid events and activities; hiring of space within libraries; café; joint use of space with other services/organisations; increased use of volunteers; make buildings more energy efficient to reduce utility costs; community groups to run libraries; fundraising; sharing staff across multiple sites to reduce hours; reduce library hours across the whole service. In addition, some respondents felt that they were not qualified to answer this question. Others stated that the Council should financially support all libraries because they provided wider education, employment and social benefits to the borough.

- 5.13. Some respondents have identified that due to the Covid lock down that this is an inappropriate time to hold a public consultation. They have suggested that some library users are unaware of the public consultation and that those without digital access have not been able to complete the survey.

To clarify, the public consultation has followed updated government guidance on public consultation during Covid restrictions. Residents have been able to request paper copies of the information documents and survey via a dedicated answerphone number, managed by Libraries staff.

6. Equalities Feedback

- 6.1. Of the 1,397 respondents who answered the question on their gender: male (25%); female (71%); other (0.2%); prefer not to say (4%).
- 6.2. When asked for their age range: under 18 (1%); 18-30 (5%); 31-40 (24%); 41-50 (19%); 51-60 (15%); 61-70 (18%); 71-80 (10%); 81+ (2%); prefer not to say (5%).
- 6.3. To the question 'Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?': Yes, limited a lot (4%); yes, limited a little (11%); no (77%); prefer not to say (8%).
- 6.4. When describing their ethnic origin: white British (61%); white other (7%); Indian (5%); Asian other background (2%); black African (2%); black Caribbean (3%); prefer not to say (10%); other ethnic backgrounds (10%).

7. Options

- 7.1. Feedback is welcomed from Scrutiny on:
1. The consultation activities undertaken so far.
 2. Options for achieving the savings target within the Libraries service.
- 7.2. The options being considered for discussion at April Cabinet are:
1. Close five libraries (Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead, Shirley, and South Norwood).
 2. Reduce hours across all libraries sites by one/two days per week.
 3. Community run models at five libraries (Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead, Shirley, and South Norwood).
 4. Outsource to a social enterprise the whole Libraries service.
- 7.3. DCMS guidance recommends that the second stage of consultation should focus on a reduced number of options. It is, therefore, recommended that only two options should be proposed in the next phase of consultation.

8. Next steps

- 8.1. A paper will be presented at April Cabinet on the options proposed for the stage two public consultation.

- 8.2. Due to the purdah regulations the second phase of public consultation cannot commence until after the local elections. It is proposed that the consultation will begin on 7th May and run until 25th June 2021.
 - 8.3. Analysis of the feedback and a recommended option will be presented to July Council for decision.
 - 8.4. Implementation of the decision will commence during the summer and autumn to achieve budget savings from the middle of the financial year.
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