

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	Cabinet	
DATE OF DECISION	25th September 2024	
REPORT TITLE:	Libraries Review	
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LEAD MEMBER:	Cllr Andy Stranack, Cabinet Member for Culture & Communities	
KEY DECISION? 0124CC	Yes	Decision significantly impacts on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more Wards
CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?	No	Public
WARDS AFFECTED:	All	

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report presents the findings from the public consultation on proposed changes to the Croydon's library service and considers how the service could be improved to reach more people and better meet needs in the borough.
- 1.2** The report makes recommendations that, despite the Council's challenging financial position, library service budgets should be retained, and investment should be made to increase staffing and improve the universal library service offer across the borough.
- 1.3** The paper outlines how the current model of part time opening across thirteen buildings, implemented following the £0.8m budget cuts from 2019 to 2022, is failing to deliver the Council's Best Value duty to run an efficient and effective service despite the best efforts of library staff. By closing four libraries and reinvesting money from library building costs to library services, the Council can adopt a better value and more sustainable service. All nine libraries will be open five days a week, including Saturdays. The proposed model includes an increase in staffed opening hours overall,

retaining and investing in nine buildings and establishing a dedicated resource to deliver outreach, events and books in other community settings to reach new audiences with library services.

- 1.4** In September 2023, the Council undertook a review of its library service which has performed poorly relative to other London boroughs for a number of years. Less than 10% of Croydon resident's use their local library. The review found that the service is currently failing to meet need in the borough and change is needed to improve the service, and the life outcomes for people in Croydon who could benefit from an improved service offer.
- 1.5** An analysis of need in the borough and a review of options for change were commissioned and proposals to improve the service were developed with consideration of the Council's statutory duty, under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, to provide a comprehensive and efficient service for people who live, work or study in Croydon.
- 1.6** The proposed service provision model outlined how budgets could be used more effectively by reducing the number of library buildings, extending opening hours and investing in the remaining sites, developing strategic partnerships to co-locate library services alongside a wider offer and creating capacity for a library offer to be delivered in a more agile way through outreach at other community venues and events. The proposals did not involve any staff redundancies.
- 1.7** The proposals also considered how the libraries could more effectively deliver against the national Library Universal Offers (Reading, Information and Digital, Health and Culture and Creativity). This includes supporting the legacy of the London Borough of Culture, taking learning from activities delivered in libraries during the 2023-24 programme "This Is Croydon."
- 1.8** On 31st January 2024, the findings of this review were reported to Cabinet who decided to commence public consultation on the proposed new Library Service model. A period of ten weeks consultation (8th February to 19th April 2024) was undertaken including a survey, a series of public events and outreach engagement across the borough.
- 1.9** The library service has reviewed the responses to the consultation and commissioned a full analysis to consider the proposals and opportunities to improve the service based on the findings of the consultation. Equality analysis has also been undertaken to assess the impacts of the proposals on specific groups and identify any mitigations needed.
- 1.10** This report outlines the findings of the public consultation on the proposed new Library Service model and makes a series of recommendations to improve the service overall by retaining and investing in a full time service delivered from nine libraries, establishing an outreach service to better reach residents who do not currently use libraries and who are less able to access a library building, and by investing in our digital offer. Also, by closing four libraries, the Council can reinvest the necessary resource to improve the universal service offer within existing budgets.

- 1.11** Whilst the decision to close libraries is a difficult one, it is a necessary decision as the current service has essentially been set up to fail and is neither efficient nor effective. The findings of the review indicate that Croydon residents can be better served overall by a full-time service and a wider offer delivered from fewer buildings with a balance of universal and targeted services to reach those with greatest need.
- 1.12** The proposed new model for the service will be able to more effectively meet the needs identified during the course of the review, including considerations of population density, deprivation, health inequalities and the impact on people with protected characteristics. The proposed new model will adopt a more sustainable approach, increasing opening hours in nine sites and creating the capacity for the service to work more closely with marginalised communities through outreach in other local settings which are embedded in the community.
- 1.13** This report, and its appendices, outline the reviews, needs analysis, consultation and equality impact assessments undertaken to inform the proposed Library Service model. For ease of reference, the report contains the following sections and appendices:

Section 2: Summary of Recommendations

Section 3: Rationale for Recommendations

Section 4: Background to the Library Service and the service review

Section 5: Summary of consultation activity and key findings

Section 6: Proposed Library Service model

Section 7: Contribution to the Executive Mayor's Business Plan

Section 8: Finance, Legal and Equalities Impact summaries

Section 9: Appendices including links to background papers from 31st January Cabinet and Phases 1 and 2 of the Library Service Review

Appendix A: Library Service Review – Phase 3 report

Summary of the context, response to the consultation findings and proposed new model

Appendix B: Library Service Review – Consultation Findings Report

Analysis of consultation feedback and key findings

Appendix C: Library Service Review – Review of Closure Options Report

Review of each library considering usage, local need, opportunity to deliver the service outcomes and recommendations on library closures

Appendix D: Equality Impact Assessments

Analysis of the equality impacts of the proposals and identification of mitigations including:

Di – North Area Libraries (Broad Green, Norbury, South Norwood, Thornton Heath)

Dii – South Area Libraries (Bradmore Green and Coulsdon)

Diii – South Area Libraries (Purley, Sanderstead, Selsdon)

Div - Central Area Libraries (Ashburton, Central, New Addington, Shirley)

Dv – Summary of all libraries

Appendix E: Community Engagement Plan in event of library closures

Outline of process to seek alternative community operators for any buildings no longer managed by the library service

Appendix F: Proposed new library opening hours

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

For the reasons set out in the report and its appendices, Cabinet is recommended:

- 2.1** To consider the assessment of local needs undertaken as part of the Libraries Review, detailed in Appendix A to the 31st January Cabinet - Phase 1-2 Report and outlined in paragraph 6.47 below
- 2.2** To consider the detailed consultation activity undertaken on the proposed Library Service model as outlined in Section 6 of this report and Appendix A titled Library Service Review Phase 3 Report and Appendix B titled Library Service Review Phase 3 Consultation Findings Report.
- 2.3** To consider the consultation responses and findings on the proposed Library Service model including the areas of concern raised by residents as outlined in section 6 of this report and Appendix B titled Library Service Review Phase 3 Consultation Findings Report and Appendix C – Review of Closure Options Report.
- 2.4** To consider the equality impact assessments of the proposed Library Service model including the proposed library closures and the action to mitigate the impact on groups with protected characteristics as outlined in Section 6 (6.47 to 6.67) and Section 8 (8.3.1 to 8.3.9) and Appendix D titled Equality Impact Assessment set, and Appendix C titled Review of Closure Options.
- 2.5** To consider the recommendations (if any) arising from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting on 17th September 2024 relating to the proposed Library Service model.
- 2.6** To consider whether the proposed Library Service model as set out in Section 6 below would meet the assessed local needs and the duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.
- 2.7** To agree to adopt the proposed Library Service model set out in Section 6 below and Chapter 5 of Appendix A Library Service Review Phase 3 Report and summary of which are as follows:
 - a) To keep open and increase the opening hours to a minimum of 5 days a week and Saturday opening, including a programme of activity aligned to the Library Universal Offers at the following nine libraries:
 - i) Central Library (Opening days to be increased from 5 to 6 days per week);

- ii) Ashburton Library (Opening days to be increased from 4 to 5 days per week);
- iii) New Addington (Opening days to be increased from 3 to 5 days per week*);
- iv) Selsdon Library (Staffed opening days to increase to from 3 to 5 days per week with two days self service access retained*);
- v) Coulsdon Library (Opening days to be increased from 3 to 5 days per week);
- vi) Purley Library (Opening days to be increased from 2 to 5 days per week*);
- vii) Norbury Library (Staffed opening days to increase to from 3 to 5 days per week with two days self service access retained);
- viii) South Norwood Library (Opening days to be increased from 2 to 5 days per week*) and
- ix) Thornton Heath Library (Opening days to be increased from 3 to 5 days per week)

All libraries will be open five days a week.

*including some self-service access. See 6.38 for proposed new timetable.

- b) To open all nine listed libraries above with staff on Saturdays.
- c) To extend self-service access to Coulsdon and Thornton Heath Libraries.
- d) To redevelop South Norwood Library in conjunction with the neighbouring Samuel Coleridge Taylor Youth Centre, delivering a library service alongside the existing Youth Centre and a new Family Hub, introducing self-service access and extending the opening hours to include Saturdays.
- e) To redesign the space at New Addington Library to improve the utilisation and alignment with existing Croydon Adult Learning & Training (CALAT) service and to extend the opening hours to include Saturdays.
- f) To invest in Purley Library to create classroom/event space for utilisation by CALAT and other VCFS partners and to extend the opening hours to include Saturdays.
- g) To develop an outreach service to enable the library service to engage more effectively with non-users, reach areas of need in the borough and mitigate the impact of library closures across the following three strands of provision, and as set out in paragraphs 6.41-6.45 and Chapter 5 of Appendix A – Phase 3 Report:
 - **Home Library Service** – a book delivery service for residents unable to visit a library building, care homes and school settings impacted by library closures.
 - **Community events** – library service information and promotion at community events and festivals and in schools and settings.
 - **Library Links** – a network of community book collections in local venues available alongside weekly drop in sessions of library events and activities.

- h) To provide a digital offer including the 24-hour online service offering an extensive collection of stock and materials, learning and reference help and a programme of digital skills support sessions delivered in the libraries and community venues as outlined in paragraph 6.46 and Chapter 5 of Appendix A – Phase 3 Report.
- i) To improve the promotion and marketing of the service to better inform and engage residents with the library offer.
- j) With effect from the 25th October 2024, to close the following four libraries: Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley.
- k) To approve the following general measures to mitigate the impact of the four libraries closures:
- Extended opening hours at the remaining nine libraries to a minimum of 5 days a week, including introducing Saturday opening at all nine libraries and evening opening at two libraries, increasing staffed opening hours overall to 344 per week;
 - Provision of a scheduled weekly accessible bus shuttle service for residents with access needs to visit their nearest library;
 - Delivery of an outreach service entailing community book collections and weekly events held in community venues with a particular focus on areas of higher deprivation raised during the consultation;
 - Provision of book collections for schools most impacted by the closure of libraries;
 - Schools local to a library proposed to close will be accommodated for class visits at the next nearest Croydon Libraries;
 - Investment in the library service digital offer including training and skills sessions;
 - Improved marketing and communication of the service offer to better reach local residents;
 - Access for users who are unable to visit a library to use the home library service.

2.8 To agree that the proposed model for the Library Service meets the assessed local needs identified and the duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service and as set out in paragraph 6.46 below.

2.9 To consider and approve the implementation plan outlined from section 6.73 and Chapter 7 of Appendix A Library Service Review Phase 3 Report for delivering the new model and which comprise a transition plan and full community mitigation measures for the four proposed libraries closures.

2.10 To agree to commence a process to consider community operation for sites no

longer required for delivery of the statutory library service

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Needs analysis

- 3.1** The current library service model doesn't meet need in the borough. The service currently only reaches a small proportion of the population, and residents want to see more weekend opening, more events, better marketing and more flexible hours for working people to visit. The new proposed model for the service will enable the Council to increase staffed library opening hours, including nine libraries open on Saturdays and expand the offer in our larger, better located libraries whilst also introducing dedicated resource to reach non-users through outreach in other community settings.
- 3.2** Library usage in Croydon has historically been low when benchmarked with other authorities across London with the service receiving the fewest visits per head and second fewest loans per head in 22/23. Less than 10% of the borough population are Active Users (members who have used their card in the last 12 months). Whilst usage has improved over the last twelve months, this is still from a low base and given the size and complex needs of the population, it is important to consider how a different model could reach more people and better meet need.
- 3.3** Analysis of the data also indicates lower usage of the library services in areas of higher deprivation, health inequalities and higher population density such as Broad Green, South Norwood and New Addington. Library services can play a significant role in strengthening communities and improving life outcomes but the current model is not achieving that.
- 3.4** The current model of 13 buildings, largely open part time, limits the opportunity to target resources and services in the most responsive way to local need, and to reach non library users who may not feel that the library service is relevant to them. By adopting the proposed new model, the Council can create capacity for a library service offer to be made available in other community spaces, meeting people where they are to provide access to services and build connections and engagement with libraries alongside the core offer provided through nine buildings.
- 3.5** Croydon's population is growing, particularly around its district centres. By investing in the libraries located in these growing centres and operating a full-time service from these sites, the Council can better serve these growing communities and reach more people who live, work and study in Croydon with thriving, accessible centres for culture and learning.

Financial sustainability and better use of resources

- 3.6** Investment in Croydon's libraries has also been low historically which, alongside previous reductions in the service staffing and opening hours have contributed to the lower performance. However, budgets remain significantly under pressure, and it is therefore important to consider how the limited budget can be spent most impactfully.
- 3.7** The Council's financial position remains challenging, not least because it is still dealing with the impact of historic problems in financial management and with a substantial general fund debt burden of £1.4bn. The annual cost of servicing that debt is £62m a

year and, as a result, the Council has sought the Government's approval for 'capitalisation directions', i.e., permission to fund current revenue deficits from capital resources. Those capital resources could either take the form of asset sales or further borrowing. Even with these measures, the Council must make substantial savings if it is to achieve a balanced budget.

- 3.8** This financial position means that all expenditure, must be reviewed to ensure it is being used in the most cost efficient and effective way, i.e. to meet the Council's duty of best value. The current allocation of resources across the 13 sites does not meet that. It is not possible to justify maintaining so many buildings which aren't well used and have limited space to develop as the best use of the limited taxpayer resources the Council has. It is clear to see that the previous attempt to reduce expenditure on the library service resulted in a poorer service.
- 3.9** The new proposed library service model involves retaining the library service budget and reinvesting savings from closing buildings to improve the offer in the remaining sites which, coupled with new approaches to delivery through outreach with partners, will deliver a more effective and sustainable service for more users. No further reductions to the library service budget are proposed in the Council's MTFS (Medium Term Financial Statement).
- 3.10** The Government appointed Improvement and Assurance Panel identified the library service as an area for improvement in their Exit Strategy. The Council is committed to adopting a library service model which delivers its statutory requirements and the duty of best value.

Service Development and Improvement

- 3.11** The proposed new model would enable the service to more effectively deliver the Universal Offers: Reading, Information and Digital, Health and Wellbeing and Culture and Creativity by adopting a more sustainable staffing model with resource to develop the events programme and support strategic partnerships.
- 3.12** The London Borough of Culture programme created an opportunity to activate the libraries as cultural venues, including family theatre performances, visual arts exhibitions and poetry workshops. Libraries have the potential to be key cultural infrastructure in areas of the borough which are otherwise underserved (particularly the South and East). The current model created a number of challenges including the loss of an established audience owing to the part time hours, limited opportunity to promote and market events owing to stretched capacity in the service and staff rotating between sites, meaning they have limited time to be present in the locality to promote events in person.
- 3.13** By reducing the estate to invest in the remaining sites, increasing opening hours and programme opportunities, the retained libraries' viability as cultural venues and their attractiveness to cultural partners would increase significantly, enabling the libraries to play a role in supporting the local creative economy.
- 3.14** The proposed new service model will also enable the libraries to work more closely with Voluntary Community Faith Sector (VCFS) partners through better utilization of

the retained buildings and the development of the library outreach offer to enrich existing community provision delivered by VCFS organisations.

Public Consultation

- 3.15** During the consultation the Council listened to a range of different groups and demographics across the borough and received 3,614 responses to the survey. The feedback from the consultation has been considered in determining whether and how to proceed with the new proposed library service.
- 3.16** Overall, respondents felt that the proposals would have a negative impact on library service provision and understandably there was strong opposition to the closure of libraries. Whilst residents value the library service in principle there is low usage. Many residents see the benefits of their local library through the support of health and wellbeing, education and social connection provided by the building rather than the borrowing of books.
- 3.17** Many respondents expressed a desire for longer opening hours, better services, more events and better marketing and promotion. Though many respondents opposed library closures as a means of generating resource to achieve this, the alternative suggestions outlining how the improvements could be made are unlikely to be financially or operationally viable. These suggestions are explored in more detail in section 6.82 below.
- 3.18** Many respondents stated that the Council should spend more money on its libraries, though some did acknowledge the difficulty of the current financial position and that investing more in libraries would mean reducing funding for other services. As outlined above, the nature of the Council's financial position means that it is not possible to increase spending on libraries without reducing budgets from other key services and the current model does not present best value.
- 3.19** Multiple suggestions were also made that the library should generate income by hiring out space. However, there is very little marketable space across the network and low demand indicated.
- 3.20** Using volunteering more extensively and effectively was also proposed, with some respondents kindly offering their own time. However, from research with other boroughs and the local Voluntary Community and Faith Sector (VCFS), the pool of volunteers required to be sustainable would be a challenge to attract. Some respondents also stated that they did not want to see more volunteers used in libraries.
- 3.21** Residents also raised concerns about the equalities impacts for certain demographics, particularly older people, children and young adults, people with disabilities and people in areas of higher deprivation. 583 respondents state that they would not be able to travel to another library if their local library closed. Mitigations for this include a local outreach offer in other local venues, a weekly transport shuttle to the nearest library and partnership working with local schools. Further detail on the impact of closures and mitigations can be found in section 6.47, in Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessments and in Appendix C – Review of Options for Closure.
- 3.22** The installation of self-service access has been an important mechanism to extend opening hours at Norbury and Selsdon libraries, though take up has been relatively

slow and most users seem to prefer to visit during staffed hours. It is important to balance self-service access in reasonable proportion to a staffed offer to ensure sufficient access for under 16s and other users who require staff support.

- 3.23** When asked their views on self-service access, 21% of respondents said they would never use a library that was unstaffed, and 7% said they had tried self-service access and did not like it. Conversely, 17% said they had used self-service access and really liked it. 53% of respondents had not used self-service access but were open to using it in the future.
- 3.24** Users of Norbury and Selsdon library, where the technology has been trialed, are significantly more positive about its use, with more than twice the number of people saying they had used it and enjoyed it, compared to the overall responses. This suggests that over time, the concerns of a significant number of people can be addressed.
- 3.25** A number of people expressed positive views about using outreach to give more people access to library services. However, there were also concerns raised about the outreach model; how it would work; where it would go; who would be targeted for support, and how and when it would be implemented in relation to the proposed closures. The most popular options for convenient locations for people to access an outreach service were cafes, schools or nurseries, family hubs and leisure centres with a number of church venues and other existing sites run by volunteers suggested by respondents. The library service is developing the outreach programme with a focus on the priority services and venues which emerged during the consultation feedback.
- 3.26** Engagement during the consultation identified several local centres across the borough already available as local community centres, reaching high volumes of people and responding to need, including Purley Cross Centre, West Wickham and Shirley Baptist church and the Fieldway Centre. These potential partners were positive about the possibilities to work with the library service and embed a library outreach offer alongside their activities and spaces.
- 3.27** There is an opportunity for the library service to reach more residents and better serve them with a wider offer, including co-location with family services, health services, youth services, learning services and advice and information partners. It was made clear throughout the consultation that residents want to see the Council working in a more joined up way with other partners, and that library provision was important alongside other services the Council delivers.
- 3.28** The two most recent budget reductions in 2019 and April 2022, prior to the current Executive Mayor being elected, have reduced capacity and sustainability within the service, stretching the limited resource available and impacted the quality of the service that staff have been able to provide. It is important to adopt a sustainable model for the library service to enable staff to focus on developing and improving provision across the four universal offers: Reading, Health, Digital and Information, and Culture and Creativity.
- 3.29** The model and approach of delivering longer opening hours from fewer library buildings and an outreach service to deliver targeted local engagement offers the best value for residents and the Council to meet its statutory obligations and establish a sustainable library service model which is cost effective, efficient and able to deliver the outcomes needed to reach more people with an improved service.

- 3.30** The Council recognises the importance and value of the library buildings for their communities and the impact closure of a library building will have for those who use it. It is hoped with the implementation of all the recommendations that the closure of four sites will be mitigated and the new library service model will deliver a more efficient and effective service which can better respond to need within existing budgets. The Executive Mayor is committed to supporting the community and voluntary organisations to keep buildings, where the library is closing, in community use. The Council will be arranging a series of workshops, public meetings, and support sessions to support others to take on the buildings.

4 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

Current library service offer

- 4.1** Croydon Council currently delivers its statutory library services from 13 dedicated library buildings across the borough and via a home library service which provides books for residents unable to visit a library building. These are: Croydon Central, Ashburton, Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Coulsdon, New Addington, Norbury, Purley, Sanderstead, Selsdon, Shirley, South Norwood and Thornton Heath. Library service staff also deliver the Croydon Archives research room service from Croydon Clocktower two days per week.
- 4.2** The Council also jointly owns Upper Norwood Library building with Lambeth Council and provides a small grant to support the provision of library services at that site which is in Lambeth and serves Croydon residents.
- 4.3** The current library opening hours are detailed in the table below. Selsdon and Norbury Libraries are open for three days each via self-service access (highlighted in yellow in the table below). A security guard is currently also present during these hours following site security and fire safety assessments at these sites.
- 4.4** Self-service access is enabled through a system which requires members to activate their card in advance and enter the library by scanning their library card/pin. It is increasingly being used by libraries across the country to extend opening hours but it doesn't provide access to people without a library card or under 16's who are not able to use the service without an adult.

* Self-Service Opening is now available at Selsdon & Norbury Libraries.	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Ashburton Library Shirley Road, Croydon, CR9 7AL	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	9am-5pm
Bradmore Green Bradmore Way, Old Coulsdon, CR5 1PE	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED
Broad Green Library 89 Canterbury Road, Croydon, CR0 3HH	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED
Central Library Katharine Street, Croydon, CR9 1ET	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	9am-5pm
Coulsdon Library Brighton Road, Coulsdon, CR5 2NH	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	9am-5pm
New Addington Library Central Parade, New Addington, CR0 0JD	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	CLOSED
Norbury Library Beatrice Avenue, London, SW16 4UW	10am-6pm*	10am-6pm	10am-6pm*	10am-6pm	10am-6pm	9am-5pm*
Purley Library Banstead Road, Purley, CR8 3YH	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED
Sanderstead Library Farm Fields, South Croydon, CR2 0HL	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED
Selsdon Library Addington Road, CR2 8LA	10am-6pm	8am-6pm*	10am-6pm	8am-6pm*	8am-6pm*	9am-5pm
Shirley Library Wickham Road/Hartland Way, Shirley, CR0 8BH	CLOSED	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED
South Norwood Library Lawrence Road, South Norwood, SE25 5AA	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED
Thornton Heath Library Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath, CR7 7JB	10am-6pm	CLOSED	10am-6pm	CLOSED	CLOSED	9am-5pm

Croydon Libraries Performance and Benchmarking

- 4.5** Croydon's libraries have increased in usage over the last year (April 23 to March 24). Total visits were 683,224, representing an increase of 18.8% on the previous year (April 22 to March 23). Total loans (physical and digital) were 767,860, representing an increase of 12.3% on the previous year. Digital loans continue to be popular and now make up 30% of total loans.
- 4.6** There are currently 38,667 Active Users of the libraries (ie, members who have used their card at least once in the last twelve months to borrow or renew an item or to use a computer). This figure does not include people who use the library without needing to use a card (e.g. to study or attend an event) but it is a helpful indicator of the reach of the service. This figure increased by around 6% from 22/23 and now represents just less than 10% of the population.
- 4.7** Whilst the service performance is an improvement and a credit to the library staff, volunteers and loyal users, it is important to note that it comes from a very low base when benchmarked against other London boroughs. Using the most recent benchmarking data available (22/23) Croydon ranked second lowest in London for book loans and lowest for visits. Active Users are not counted in CIPFA statistics.

Previous library service changes

- 4.8** In 2019 the library service was restructured and a budget reduction of £300k was made. This change did not result in a reduction of library opening hours but did substantially decrease the number of staff employed to deliver those hours, creating pressure in the service capacity.
- 4.9** In November 2021, following the Council's financial collapse; the Council sought to make budget savings by remodelling the library service. A set of options were developed and consulted between January and July 2021. In October 2021 the Council took the decision to generate £504k savings by reducing library opening hours by 21% with a combination of fully staffed and self-service only access times and an increase in volunteering and partnerships. This budget saving was achieved with a reduction in staffing and the remaining team working across multiple sites. This loss of staffing has caused significant pressure on the service to deliver the full opening hours across the libraries and archives search room resulting in short notice closures at times of staff absence.
- 4.10** Owing to the budget reduction of £504k implemented from April 2022, library opening hours were initially reduced by 48%. With the introduction of self-service access at two sites in 2023, the total opening hours are now 39% less than in 2021/22. Volunteering and partnerships have had limited impact in being able to open up the libraries more to the public whilst the roll out of self-service took longer than originally forecast due to additional building works required.
- 4.11** As part of the implementation process for the model adopted from April 2022 it was proposed that a review of the new model would be undertaken after a period of time to ascertain the impact and assess the outcome of the approach and the Libraries Service

Review was initiated in Spring 2023 and the work undertaken was presented in a report to Cabinet on 31st January 2024.

Library Review Process

4.12 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires the local authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Where changes are proposed to the statutory provision these should be supported by public consultation, together with an assessment of needs and a rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of the proposals. Officers have engaged with local residents across Croydon and the proposals are supported by a detailed Needs Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment.

4.13 The Library Service Review has been undertaken in the following phases:

Phase	Summary of purpose and outcomes
Phase 1: Discovery (July to October 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking managers and staff to contribute their thoughts and ideas to help the Council continue to deliver the best services possible within the money it has available. • Talking to local politicians, senior leaders and key partners to help us explore their ambitions for these vital public services, as well as understand what has worked well (and less well) in the past.
Phase 2: Option development (September to October 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking a 'needs and asset analysis' to assess how well the library service was now performing. • Taking the ideas suggested to us so far to help the Council develop a set of possible future options for the services. • Preparing these future options ready for public consultation.
Phase 3: Public consultation (February to April 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking with Croydon's residents, politicians, senior leaders and key partners to seek their feedback on proposals and understand the potential impact of the proposed changes.
Phase 4: review and analysis (May to September 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse feedback from consultation. • Review implications of feedback for the proposals. • Develop final recommendations following consultation.

Phase	Summary of purpose and outcomes
Phase 5: Implementation (October 2024 onwards)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed by the feedback from consultation, a decision on the new library service will be made. • Beginning to implement any changes to the service from October 2024 onwards. • Continuing to keep Croydon’s residents informed on any changes to services, with the intention of reflecting on the impact of these changes, again in discussion with Croydon residents, within the next 12-24 months.

4.14 We have used the Library Universal Offers framework (developed by Libraries Connected, the national sector support organisation for public libraries) as a guide to exploring the impact and opportunity for the library service in Croydon. The Universal Offers are: Reading, Information and Digital, Culture and Creativity and Health.

4.15 The project team commissioned specialist consultants, Activist, to support this work to identify need, consider options for improvements and develop a proposed library service model to reflect the most impactful and best value service possible within the constraints of current budgets. The Council’s library service management have worked with the consultants to analyse the responses to the consultation and review the options for improving the service.

4.16 The first phases of the review identified the following outcomes for the new service model. A range of options were then considered to enable the service to meet these outcomes within budget. Further detail on the work in Phase 1 and 2 of the review and the Options considered can be found in Appendices B and C of the original Cabinet report (31st January 2024).

Primary outcome	Supporting outcomes
1. We are reaching more people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people are using our library service. • We reach the people who need us most in Croydon. • People know what we're offering.
2. We have improved our service to the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a wide range of activities on offer. • People enjoy what's available. • Our facilities are welcoming and attractive.
3. Our service is more efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are delivering better value within the resources we have • We generate more income from events and venue hire. • More people are willing to help.

The recommended model for the service to consult on identified a new proposed library service model delivered over four strands of provision.

- **Library Hubs**

Central, Ashburton, Selsdon, Coulsdon, Thornton Heath, Norbury

A smaller network of more accessible and welcoming buildings delivering an extensive offer of books, wi-fi, PCs, study space, events and a Library Universal Offers programme. Open 5-6 days a week including every Saturday, with the majority of hours staffed and extended hours with self-service access available from at least four sites

- **Community Hubs**

Purley, South Norwood, New Addington

A library situated in a shared venue as part of a wider service offer for residents, for example as part of a Family Hub, Adult Learning Hub, Health and Wellbeing Hub or VCFS Hub.

These sites would include dedicated library space to hold a range of book collections for children and adults, provide Wi-Fi and public computer access and host events and activities. The service offer and opening times would be developed in response to local need and would include weekend provision.

It was envisaged that that this model of embedded co-location and partnership would attract more people to engage with the library service offer and would provide a more holistic service for residents. The delivery of this offer could include developing existing library buildings into Community Hubs, relocating a library service into a different building or exploring different models of delivering the library offer through partnership with other services or groups.

- **Library Outreach**

We proposed that this is delivered over three strands:

- Local community venues hosting weekly library activity, which could include community book collections, events and digital support sessions.
- Developing our Home Library service including work with care homes and sheltered housing accommodations
- Library service visits to community events, health settings, school and education settings to promote the library offer and support with digital access

- **Library Online**

An extensive digital offer including e-books and magazines, online learning and training resources and access to the Museum and Archives collections available 24/7.

4.17 The new model was proposed to provide at least the same number of staffed opening hours in the service as at present but delivered from fewer buildings. This would enable the service to operate sustainably and for staff teams to deliver a more responsive local service. All sites were proposed to be open on Saturdays and the overall opening hours

were proposed to increase through further use of self-service access and co- location with other services.

4.18 Open hours were proposed to be increased further through an extension of self-service access. All retained sites would be assessed for the viability and opportunity to install self-service access and we proposed to offer the service from at least four sites.

4.19 In order to make improvements to the network and service overall without any spending increase on libraries, the initial phases of the review proposed closing some library buildings to enable building and staff costs from those sites to be reinvested in improving the rest of the service.

4.20 Each library site was assessed against a set of criteria as outlined below:

Criterion	Factors to consider
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage including visits and issues. • Event attendances and attendances for other activities. • PC hours in use. • Unit costs, ie cost per visitor.
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The visibility and prominence of the building. • The level of natural footfall in the vicinity. • Public transport access for users.
Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability of the building to accommodate the full range of library uses (ie Universal Offers).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The adaptability of the building allowing for various uses. • The overall condition of the building and the extent of remedial work required.
Impacts of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approximate size of the population served. • The extent of deprivation in the catchment area. • Other public facilities in the vicinity, including other libraries. • The extent of existing community group use. • The number of volunteers.

4.21 Following this review, four library buildings were proposed to close: Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley.

4.22 A more detailed summary on the original proposals can be found in Section 6 of the 31st January Cabinet report. The analysis of libraries and proposals for closure can be found in Appendix C of the 31st January Cabinet report.

DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) Superintendence

4.23 The Library Review programme has been developed in alignment with the non-statutory guidance issued by DCMS, titled 'Libraries as a statutory service' (April 2022) This has included:

- Engagement with the DCMS libraries team to inform and update them on the work and seek their views on:
- The approach, during the development of the review project in March 2023
- The initial findings during the research phase in August 2023
- The emerging outcomes, options and proposals following their development in November and December 2023.
- The initial consultation findings and emerging recommendations in May 2024
- The consultation analysis and new proposals in September 2024
- Development of detailed options for consideration, outlined in Appendices B and C to the original Cabinet report (31st January 2024)
- Extensive consultation activity as outlined in Section 5.
- A review of any alternative proposals to improve the library services made during the consultation, detailed in Section 6.
- Analysis of local need and the capacity and performance of the library service in responding to this need in current and future models, detailed in Appendix A – Phase 3 Report and Appendix C – Review of Closure Options of this report, and Appendices A and C to the original Cabinet report (31st January 2024).
- A detailed EQIA of the proposals including findings through the consultation period included as Appendix D to this report.

4.24 Following initial analysis of the consultation findings, a high-level briefing was provided to DCMS in a virtual call. DCMS noted the extensive consultation activity and the key findings. They also welcomed the Council’s intent to review its library service in consideration of current and future need and to ensure that the service is relevant and able to meet local need. It is important that the Council clearly defines its statutory library service provision and is explicit about any support available to assist other partners to take on buildings no longer managed by the Council following conclusion of this process and who wish to provide a library offer. This is outlined in section 6.62.

4.25 Following consultation, it is the role of The Executive Mayor and Cabinet to take a considered view on the best approach based on the evidence and advice given. It is important that the Council makes efforts with honesty and transparency to deliver its duty of best value. A robust process to understand and mitigate the equality implications of any changes is integral to this process. This is explored further in section 8.3 and Appendix D – Equality Impact Analyses.

4.26 DCMS also indicated that it would be helpful for the Council to set out clearly how progress and the impact of the new model will be monitored and reported on through implementation and adoption. This is outlined in section 6.75.

5 CONSULTATION

5.1 Following Croydon Cabinet’s decision on 31st January 2024 (see 10.1 for links to further detail and the 31st January Cabinet report pack), the library service commenced consultation on the model set out above using a mixed methodology to ensure residents and partners were informed of the proposals and had the opportunity to respond and share their views. The consultation was launched with a public webinar

on 7th February outlining the proposals and responding to questions from the public. An online survey and portal with detail on the proposals was then launched on 8th February with paper copies of the survey available from the 13th February in all libraries, together with printed copies of all the papers, and with telephone request line and librariesconsultation@croydon.gov.uk email address available to support public with access.

5.2 In total there were 46 events held during the ten weeks consultation period between 7th February and 19th April reaching an audience of over 1,680. There were ten core forms of activity, as summarised in the following table.

Consultation method	Detail	Attendance / Response
Survey	Available online and in print	3614 total (328 in print)
Email	Email inbox established for residents to give feedback on the proposals	152 feedback emails received which were included in consultation along with 12 attachments plus 7 petitions.
Public meetings and workshops	Public meetings: Shirley, Sanderstead, Bradmore Green, Broad Green Workshops: Purley, South Norwood	316
Library drop ins	All proposed Library Hubs had one drop in (x6) All libraries proposed to become Community Hubs or proposed to close had two drop ins (x14)	667
Community meetings	Library staff attended community meetings to outline the proposals, answer questions and promote the consultation These included: We Love SE25, RENA, Learning Disability Alliance Croydon and Local Community Partnership meetings (North West and Central).	213

Webinars	<p>The consultation was launched with a general open webinar on 7th Feb attended by 90.</p> <p>A further webinar was held on 26 March with the Community Managed Library network (CMNL) to provide information and case studies from community managed libraries. 13 joined the live webinar which was also recorded and made available on the CMNL site</p>	103
Outreach	<p>Targeted outreach with children and young people included library staff visiting holiday activity camps in South Norwood and Fieldway and the youth engagement bus in Tollers and Shrublands and a dedicated session with primary school children at Coulsdon Church of England school.</p> <p>Staff also attended an activity session in sheltered housing accommodation to talk to older residents there.</p> <p>5 sessions of library and on street outreach took place to engage residents with the consultation outside of the library buildings or in nearby highstreets at Norbury, Thornton Heath, New Addington and Central Library</p>	156 4 221
Meetings with library staff, trade unions and Council members	Two webinars were delivered for Council members at the beginning of the consultation to ensure they were briefed on the proposals and able to promote the consultation.	
	A staff webinar was also held in addition to three online staff drop-in sessions to allow for feedback during consultation, A meeting with the trade union representatives was held ahead of consultation and following conclusion.	
Meetings with partners and community organisations	Meetings were offered to community partners and voluntary sector organisations with the Cabinet lead for Culture and Communities and library management.	

5.3 All available Council communication channels were used to promote the consultation and encourage people to complete the survey and attend the events. This included:

Communication channel	Detail	Reach
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Consultation webpage	https://www.getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk/libraries-services-consultation Linked from the Council's home page and Croydon Libraries home page	Over 14,500 visits
Posters and flyers	Physical displays in all libraries with full information on proposals and needs analysis Community display of posters in some shopping centres and other local noticeboards	Displays in 13 libraries - approximately 154,945 visits during the consultation period
Press releases	Consultation launch press release and news story on news.croydon.gov.uk Webinar press release and news story	1,664 views 808 views
Social media posts	Croydon Council Accounts Twitter / X Ten posts Facebook Eight posts Instagram Two posts Six stories	7,239 impressions 24,606 impressions 768 impressions 1,751 impressions
	Croydon Libraries accounts Twitter / X Two posts Facebook Three posts Instagram Two posts Newsletter 3 sent out delivered to 2289 email addresses	1777 impressions 2616 impressions 7655 impressions
Nextdoor	Eleven posts Three posts targeted the whole borough, and eight were listed as events targeted at each drop in session area: Bradmore Green, Sanderstead, South Norwood, Purley (x2), Thornton Heath, Shirley and New Addington.	25,345 impressions

Your Croydon weekly bulletin	Included in eleven editions of the Council's weekly Your Croydon bulletin that goes to over 80,000 email addresses with the link to the survey receiving 884 clicks	80,000 distribution 884 clicks
Croydon Libraries newsletter	Three E-newsletters sent to share detail of the consultation and proposals and encourage people to respond Email sent to 34,000 Croydon Library members	2289 newsletter distribution list 34,000 Croydon Library members (eligible to contact)
Voluntary and Community sector distribution	Email to community groups, residents associations, faith groups etc	300 distribution
Staff intranet	For staff an article was included on the intranet and in the staff Our Croydon bulletin.	

5.4 The service also received following petitions:

Petition source	Petition aim	Date received	No of signatures
Norbury Green Residents Association	Petition for more Saturday opening and access to the community hall	Tabled at Croydon Cabinet meeting, 24 th April	994
Bradmore Green - 240412- Petition Bradmore Green Library	Petition against the proposed closure of Bradmore Green library.	12 April 2024	421
Bradmore Green - Young Voices Petition April 2024	Petition Against the proposed closure of Bradmore Green library.	April 2024	259
Broad Green - Petition_15042024111547	Petition against the closure of Broad Green	15 April 2024	169
Broad Green - Petition2_18042024164910	Petition against the closure of Broad Green	18 April 2024	214
Sanderstead - 240417- Save Sanderstead Library Petition	Petition against the closure of Sanderstead Library	17 April 2024	1141

Shirley Library	Petition for a fully funded, properly staffed and stocked public library available to all members of our community.	13 September 2024	3300
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- 5.5** Printed versions of the surveys were made available for collection in libraries or available via telephone request for home delivery. The library service distributed 800 printed surveys. The home library service proactively engaged its 100 customers by enclosing a letter with their deliveries detailing how to access the consultation either online or by requesting a paper copy via the Home Library Service phone line.
- 5.6** Community partners were asked to help share the detail of the consultation to reach their networks, including people who were not digitally connected. The online consultation platform enabled translation of the survey questions into different languages and a member of staff attended an event at Broad Green Library to assist people whose first language is not English to complete the survey. The online survey was also compatible with screen reading technology.
- 5.7** We sought to reach a representative sample of Croydon’s population and particularly hear from people more likely to experience barriers to accessing library services. This included targeted engagement with older residents in sheltered housing and residents with learning disabilities and outreach to areas of higher deprivation including Tollers and Shrublands estates. We also undertook focused engagement with children and young people through outreach to holiday activity clubs, the youth engagement bus and engagement with children at a local primary school.
- 5.8** During the process we received some feedback and complaints regarding the consultation process itself, summarised and responded to below. For further detail and review see Chapter 4 in Appendix A – Phase 3 Report:

- Insufficient print promotion to reach people not digitally enabled**

The Council no longer produces regular print materials for mass distribution. However, printed material was available in libraries and partners were asked to help disseminate information. We were informed that several residents associations had distributed to their networks and local residents had also been active in sharing information locally. We also sought to reach people digitally excluded through outreach and events in non-library spaces. A dedicated telephone number was provided so those who could not visit a library would be able to receive a survey posted to their home.

The consultation programme of events was developed dynamically involving key partner contacts – starting with re-contacting the core partner group from the previous consultation and sending out meeting updates to those who

communicated by email. A database of contacts was developed from meetings in person and online for further marketing of events, as well as advertised online, and through posters in all libraries. From insights gained during the first round of meetings about reaching more groups who would be affected by the proposals, follow-up activities were planned and publicised. For the libraries proposed to close, meetings were held during the mornings, in the afternoons after school, and public meetings in the evening to reach different groups.

- **Insufficient time for promoting events**

Cabinet consented for consultation to commence on the proposals at the meeting on 31st January 2024. Given the complexity of the proposals and the research the library service then sought to commence consultation with a webinar to present the proposals and answer any initial questions. This was held on 7th February (promoted from 2nd February) followed by a series of public meetings between 15th and 20th February. This was a relatively short timescale for publicity, driven by a priority to enable meaningful consultation activity to commence as soon as possible. All of the initial events were well attended. Events later in the consultation did have a longer run in for promotion and most events were well attended.

- **Insufficient time for the consultation period overall**

The consultation ran for ten weeks and elicited a response of 3,614 surveys and an audience at events and engagements of over 1,000. This is significantly higher than in the previous two library consultations undertaken in Croydon which received 2510 responses (Phase 1 – March 2021) and 1411 (Phase 2 – July 2021).

- **Insufficient consultation with schools, children and young people**

A small number of participants complained that insufficient consultation had been carried out with schools. Engagement with children and young people in consultation is always challenging, particularly through schools during term time. However, the library team did take proactive steps to gather the views of children and young people both directly and indirectly.

All schools were contacted by email and sent information on the consultation through the head teachers' newsletter. The Council reached out to schools local to libraries proposed to close and held a visit at Coulsdon CofE to talk to (over 100) children there about the library and their views. Drop in Meetings at each of the libraries proposed to close were scheduled in afternoons after school in order to engage with school children.

In addition to regular staff promoting the consultation during visits and at regular events focused engagement activity was undertaken including visits to HAF clubs (Holiday and Food), Coulsdon CofE primary school and the youth service outreach bus.

A young people's petition in relation to Bradmore Green Library was also received (reported in Appendix B).

Responses from children and young people engaged more with the range of the offer in libraries including the types of activities they would like to see and the value they place on libraries, rather than the details of the proposed model including opening hours, closures and outreach. Children and young people

who were engaged did report that they wanted Saturday openings for their libraries and more open days

- **Word limits in survey free text boxes too restrictive**

Respondents were directed to share any further thoughts and feedback to the service via the librariesconsultation@croydon.gov.uk email address at the end of the survey and during consultation events and publicity. 152 emails were received to this email with further comments and proposals, in addition to the survey responses.

- **Survey response options limited on question about the impact of the Library Hubs proposal**

This question asked:

The six proposed library hubs would be open 5 to 6 days a week, with the majority of hours staffed, and extended hours with self-service access.

What difference would this make to your ability to use the library more often?

The options given were:

It will make no difference to me

It will make it a bit easier

It will make it much easier

For other questions options were also given for respondents to select:

It will make it much worse

It will make it a lot worse.

The more limited choice on this question was chosen to enable the service to understand the impact of each aspect of the proposals in isolation, and only seeks views on the impact of extending the opening hours at these six sites, rather than the model overall. Logically, extending access at some sites when considered on its own should not make it harder for people to access. A separate specific question was included regarding the overall impact in addition to free text boxes and an email address to enable respondents to express their views on the proposals overall.

- **Lack of clarity in terminology**

Large number of participants, through all channels, registered lack of understanding, scepticism or cynicism about some of the definitions and rationales used in the consultation. The primary definition which was questioned was the use of the term 'hub' in different contexts to categorise six libraries as 'library hubs' and three libraries as 'community hubs'. Many participants were confused about these labels and the model of service each implied, and their use alongside existing 'hub' models like 'family hubs'.

The 'library hub' and 'community 'hub' labels were developed to distinguish between those six libraries where it was intended the library service would be leading a multi-service facility in the current sites and the three 'community hub'

sites where it was envisaged the facility might be operated by another service or provider, potentially at a new site, though the library offer across the nine would be of comparable scale and scope. As the 'community hub' model was at an early stage of development it became clear during the consultation that the distinction, particularly from the perspective of a library user was not the most helpful. In future all nine sites will be designated as 'libraries' and operated by the Council, in some cases alongside co-located partners.

- **Further information needed on breakdown of building costs**

Documentation was updated to the webpage outlining the breakdown of operating costs for buildings, in addition to the headline figure published in the site profiles for further clarity.

- **Site profile documents issued with different datasets**

The Library Profile document was collated to provide a snapshot of each library including site assessment details, current usage and operating cost. They also contained some charts outlining historic data on loans and visits. Three site profiles were populated in error with historic New Members data instead of loans (Purley, Shirley and Thornton Heath). A revised document with the historic data for loans and visits was updated to the site towards the end of the consultation for clarity, but this historic loans data was not used a key metric to inform the proposals and as such we do not consider it a prerequisite for respondents to be able to make an informed decision and response to the proposals.

5.9 The range of consultation activities and responses generated a rich and complex dataset. Overall, we received a higher response rate from regular library users and particularly to be expected, from users of three of the libraries proposed to close (Bradmore Green, Sanderstead and Shirley) plus South Norwood. Usage at these four libraries makes up a minority of the overall library usage and therefore during the survey analysis we have considered responses in absolute terms and weighted proportionate to library usage. The below table highlights survey response rate when compared with proportionate library usage. Libraries in green are overrepresented in the responses and libraries in red are significantly underrepresented.

Library	Survey response	Performance Statistics		
		Active users	Visits	Issues
Ashburton Library	5%	5%	7%	10%
Bradmore Green Library	14%	2%	4%	3%
Broad Green Library	3%	3%	2%	2%
Central Library	13%	52%	49%	33%
Coulsdon Library	7%	4%	5%	7%
New Addington Library	2%	2%	2%	2%
Norbury Library	4%	6%	4%	6%
Purley Library	5%	4%	3%	6%
Sanderstead Library	18%	3%	3%	7%
Selsdon Library	7%	7%	11%	14%
Shirley Library	7%	2%	2%	3%
South Norwood Library	12%	5%	2%	4%
Thornton Heath Library	4%	8%	5%	6%

5.10 The survey asked questions about the frequency and location of current library use, primary motivations for accessing library services, the views and potential impact of the proposals, alternative suggestions to improve the library service and anonymous demographic information. The survey asked four key questions as a general indication on the impact of the proposals:

	Negative		Neutral		Positive	
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
Overall	66%	52%	6%	9%	28%	39%
Visit a library at a convenient time	49%	27%	20%	31%	31%	42%
Visit a library close to me	50%	27%	25%	39%	25%	34%
Access other Council services	41%	23%	39%	51%	20%	26%

5.11 We have also analysed the survey responses according to the proposed change for the respondent's primary library. Understandably respondents from libraries that are proposed to close were much more likely to consider the changes to be negative. Respondents from proposed Library Hubs and Community Hubs were less negative about the changes, although still generally evenly split between positive and negative, suggesting considerable solidarity with those using libraries proposed for closure and the difficulty of assessing the proposed changes as positive until they are implemented. Among users of proposed library hubs and community hubs there were

significant proportions of people who thought the proposals would make little difference.

		All responses			Proposed closure			Library Hub			Community Hub		
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Overall	%	66%	6%	28%	97%	2%	1%	48%	9%	43%	48%	6%	46%
	n	2334	220	998	1271	26	18	588	111	538	283	34	270
	Total	3552	3552	3552	1315	1315	1315	1237	1237	1237	587	587	587
Visit a library at a time convenient for me	%	49%	20%	31%	93%	5%	2%	18%	31%	52%	35%	20%	45%
	n	1754	733	1092	1221	64	32	221	387	646	207	120	263
	Total	3579	3579	3579	1317	1317	1317	1254	1254	1254	590	590	590
Visit a library close to where I live, work or study	%	50%	25%	25%	93%	4%	3%	19%	42%	39%	36%	27%	38%
	n	1784	896	887	1225	46	42	239	520	491	209	157	222
	Total	3567	3567	3567	1313	1313	1313	1250	1250	1250	588	588	588
Access other council services or community activities	%	41%	39%	20%	77%	21%	2%	15%	55%	29%	29%	36%	35%
	n	1442	1393	705	999	278	23	191	688	363	168	212	206
	Total	3540	3540	3540	1300	1300	1300	1242	1242	1242	586	586	586

5.12 Key feedback and findings from the consultation are:

- a) The consultation reached a significant number of people across the borough and the rate of engagement compares well to similar consultations on changes to public libraries both previously in Croydon and in other local authorities.
- b) Inevitably, the consultation engaged mainly those currently using libraries.
- c) Engagement with a number of groups with protected characteristics who may be more affected by the proposals in a number of communities, is lower. Therefore, further analysis was undertaken regarding the impact of the proposals to inform any decisions on the service model.
- d) Current library users are strongly supportive of the library service and a large number of people reject the Council's rationale for the proposed closures on a variety of grounds, principally that the previous reduction in hours has partly caused the service weaknesses identified in the previous report. A number of people questioned the analysis of performance at several libraries.
- e) Understandably, users of the four libraries proposed for closure are most negative about all aspects of the proposals. While users of those libraries where opening hours are to be extended are more positive about the benefits to them, there is considerable solidarity with users of libraries proposed for closure.
- f) The survey received 3,614 responses. There was a clear majority which felt the overall impact of the proposals would be negative (66%). Among users of libraries proposed for closure 97% of respondents felt the overall impact would be negative. Among users of proposed library hubs 48% said the impact would be negative as opposed to 43% positive. Among users of proposed community hubs the equivalent figures were 48% negative and 46% positive.

- g) Compared to the overall number of active users registered at each library users of libraries proposed for closure were over-represented in the survey responses. When weighted by the number of active users at each library, responses were more evenly balanced, with a small majority (52%) which said the overall impact was negative.
- h) There is a clear divergence between those who prefer the convenience of being within easy walking distance of a library and those who would prioritise longer opening hours at fewer sites with an expanded offer. A large number of current users of libraries proposed for closure would prefer continued part-time opening to closures which release resources to improve the library offer at other sites, even with the mitigations proposed.
- i) Longer opening hours were extremely popular with many respondents, particularly those who use or could use the libraries where this is proposed (with the caveat that a number of people do not want this to be at the expense of closing other libraries). The most cited or sought-after benefits of longer opening hours included a larger programme of activities for children and adults, and safe, quiet space for work or study at more convenient times.
- j) Feedback from children and young people during the consultation included a need for more activities, especially arts and reading clubs, more space for study and access to safe quiet spaces and computers after school.
- k) There was evidence of uncertainty around the definition of the proposed model including the distinction between 'library hubs' and 'community hubs', the extent to which longer opening hours will be staffed or enabled by Open+, and scepticism about what 'outreach' will amount to and how feasible it will be to find suitable locations in the communities affected by closures.
- l) The legal obligation to consult with residents at a formative stage and develop the proposals through consultation and engagement with residents and partners informed this approach and more detailed proposals have now been developed in response to findings through consultation activity.
- m) There are also considerable questions about how the proposals will be implemented, particularly the proposed mitigations for library closures, with the experience of the previous round of changes cited as evidence. A detailed transition and implementation plan has been developed to ensure the proposed model is fully scoped and can be delivered.
- n) There is considerable positivity among respondents about the benefits of self-service access (Open+). While a small but significant proportion of users say they would never use a library when it is not staffed, a larger proportion of respondents who haven't used it previously say they would be prepared to try it in the future. Responses from users of Selsdon and Norbury where it has been trialed, indicates much higher levels of satisfaction.
- o) Among those who use or live near to the four libraries proposed for closure who took part in the consultation, there was almost universal opposition to closures and a number of key concerns expressed about using other libraries, including

accessibility without a car, parking, safety in areas like Central Croydon and Coulsdon, and the impact on particular groups who would not be able to travel. These varied across the four libraries, but the main groups cited everywhere were children, working parents, particularly those with small children, the disabled, the isolated elderly, and residents in particular estates and among particular communities from the global majority.

p) Many people suggested alternatives to the closure proposals as they currently stand. These included: revisiting the library budget; generating additional income for the library service through commercial partnerships, lettings and fundraising; maintaining the current part-time opening hours; investigating community-managed models, encouraging more volunteering to support library capacity. These options are considered below in section 6.73.

q) Encouraging more volunteering was one of the most frequently cited alternatives people suggested to avoid library closures, with many people criticising previous or current efforts by the Council to engage volunteers in libraries. However, discussions with the local volunteer agency by Council officers suggest that volunteering in Croydon is at an all-time low since the pandemic and has yet to recover.

5.13 A detailed analysis of the consultation responses and findings can be found in Chapter 3 of Appendix A – Phase 3 Report and in Appendix B – Phase 3 Consultation Findings Report.

5.14 In addition to feedback on the proposals, the consultation also sought alternative ideas and suggestions for improving the service. These are summarised below in Section 6.77.

6 PROPOSED LIBRARY SERVICE MODEL

6.1 It is clear through the consultation responses that library users feel passionately about their libraries, both as service points to connect with the library offer, and as local landmark buildings for connection with the community.

6.2 The analysis undertaken during this review has identified significant areas of need in the borough including population density and growth, deprivation, education and health inequalities. Library services, through their universal offers, can play an important role in addressing these needs and it is the duty of the Council to consider the best model to enable this.

6.3 Whilst library usage has increased over the last twelve months, take up is still low and represents a small proportion of the population. It is also clear that the current service is not effective at targeting areas of highest need with low take up in areas of higher deprivation and from some communities at higher risk of health inequalities. It is, therefore, necessary to change the model to better respond to changing need and growth within the borough.

- 6.4** The Council’s financial position remains under significant pressure with a debt burden of £1.4bn and increasing demand on core services including adult social care and homelessness prevention. Further savings are required to be made across other areas of the Council in order to set a balanced budget and as a result any improvements to the library service must be made within existing budgets. The Council estimates needing to save £100m over the next four years to ensure budgets remain balanced as demand increases.
- 6.5** The model and approach of delivering longer opening hours from fewer library buildings and an outreach service to deliver targeted local engagement offers the best value for residents and the Council to meet its statutory obligations and establish a sustainable library service model which is cost effective, efficient and able to deliver the outcomes needed to reach more people with an improved service.
- 6.6** The table below outlines how the proposals have been adapted following feedback received during the consultation:

Initial proposal	Key consultation findings	Revised proposal
Close four libraries (Broad Green, Bradmore Green, Sanderstead and Shirley) to enable investment in the remaining nine	Whilst investment in the buildings and extending opening hours was welcome, the majority of respondents objected to this being delivered by closing libraries.	<p>Although the majority opposed library closures, analysis of the alternative suggestions made to improve the offer does not indicate that they would be viable.</p> <p>Therefore, in order to introduce further Saturday opening, a wider offer and improve the marketing and engagement of the service to meet assessed local need, we recommend closure of the four libraries proposed and reinvestment of those building costs into the service.</p>
Remodel three libraries (Purley, New Addington and South Norwood) as Community Hubs, co-locating with other services and considering relocation of libraries. The delivery of this offer could include developing existing library buildings into Community Hubs, relocating a	Some respondents were unclear about what a Community Hub might mean for their library and wanted to ensure library provision wasn’t downgraded. Many people felt that the language of community hubs wasn’t clear	<p>All three sites will remain as libraries maintained by the Council and with a full service across the library Universal Offers including staffed Saturday opening.</p> <p>The service will seek strategic partnerships to co-locate and</p>

<p>library service into a different building or exploring different models of delivering the library offer through partnership with other services or groups.</p>	<p>and is already used to mean too many different things.</p> <p>There was some support for co-locating services where there is a complimentary link, for example, adult learning and health.</p> <p>People felt passionate about the library buildings at South Norwood and Purley and wanted them to remain. Some people in New Addington felt that the library building was cut off from the wider community and more should be done to connect with other existing hubs in the area.</p>	<p>develop the offer from each site including progressing work with the Council's adult education and family services.</p> <p>Investment is recommended to proceed in the current South Norwood Library site, alongside the adjoining Samuel Coleridge Taylor Youth Centre.</p> <p>The offer in New Addington will be developed alongside the wider VCFS networks and community services</p>
<p>Develop an outreach service to provide access to libraries services in other community venues.</p>	<p>Respondents weren't sure what this would look like and where it would be. There were concerns about libraries being replaced with a just a shelf of books.</p> <p>A number of partnership opportunities arose through engagement with other community services which are reaching local people in priority areas and were interested in hosting a library service offer.</p>	<p>A weekly schedule will be developed and publicised for outreach activities and venues to access community book collections, using potential venues proposed during the consultation as a starting point.</p> <p>The vision for the service and the offer available is proposed to be piloted in Autumn 2024 as outlined below.</p>
<p>Develop the online digital offer</p>	<p>Users of the service were generally positive though there were UK wide issues with the app during the consultation period (now resolved) which generated criticism from some users.</p>	<p>The Council will continue to invest in digital stock and online services through membership of The Libraries Consortium and will develop the digital skills programme across the retained libraries and community outreach venues through partnership with the VCFS.</p>
<p>Review the use of self-service access ahead of extending further</p>	<p>The consultation responses indicated mixed feelings regarding self-service access though a large proportion of respondents were open to</p>	<p>We recommend installing self-service access at Thornton Heath Library and as part of wider refurbishment works at South Norwood and Coulsdon</p>

	trying it and users at Norbury and Selsdon where its already in place were more positive	Library, working closely with local users and communities to develop and promote the service.
Seek alternative community use for any buildings no longer used by the library service to remain for community benefit	There was some interest from the voluntary, community and faith sector to take on library buildings for alternative community use but concern regarding the viability and condition of the buildings and the capacity of community groups to take on the full operating costs.	It is recommended that any buildings no longer managed by the Library service be retained for alternative community use. Appendix F outlines the proposals to realise this.

6.7 The responses received in regards to the proposed Community Hubs (New Addington, Purley and South Norwood) indicated some confusion regarding the terminology. This language was adopted to represent a different approach for the three libraries with high need but lower usage and to enable consideration of a wider range of options for these libraries including different models of delivery through partnership and relocation. There were concerns from some respondents that this could diminish the library offer and that more work could be done to link the libraries with existing hubs. To address these concerns, we no longer propose to distinguish between the different categories of library. Whilst opportunities to co-locate and bring services together alongside the library offer will be pursued, including progressing partnership with CALAT at Purley and South Norwood, this would not be at a loss or detriment to the core library service. We will develop the offer in each library based on local need and opportunity, as outlined below.

6.8 It is therefore proposed that the Council’s statutory library services would entail the following:

Nine Libraries

6.9 **Central Library** is the largest and busiest library in the network accounting for half of all visits and a third of all physical issues. It is situated in the Croydon Clocktower complex alongside the Museum of Croydon and Croydon Archives. It needs significant investment to upgrade access facilities such as the escalators, and to increase the flexibility to allow for more events and generate space for hire. The first floor of the library is currently being developed for refurbishment through funding from Arts Council England’s Libraries Improvement Fund. This work is expected to be completed by spring 2025.

6.10 During the consultation, users of Central Library were under-represented in responses overall. From those who did respond, respondents said they valued the range of activities and space available in the Clocktower and the central location, but wanted to

see more programming and a refresh of the design and furniture.

- 6.11** The recommendation for Central Library is to increase the opening hours to six days a week (Mon-Sat) and utilise the planned first floor digital and event space to build on cultural programming and partnerships initiated during the London Borough of Culture year.
- 6.12** **Ashburton Library** is one of the largest and best performing libraries which serves a large catchment area. The library opened in 2013 and is in good condition but would benefit from some minor improvements to enable full delivery of the universal offers.
- 6.13** During the consultation we heard that users at Ashburton Library wanted longer hours, including Sundays. Responses from users at Ashburton overall were relatively low, including at the drop in meeting, and it was acknowledged by users that an extension of their opening hours could be a loss for users of libraries proposed to close.
- 6.14** The recommendation for Ashburton Library is to increase the opening hours to five days a week with an additional weekday and to deliver a wider programme of events and activities including more targeted engagement with local schools and local voluntary and community networks.
- 6.15** **Thornton Heath Library** is the third largest library in the network and benefited from a substantial refurbishment in 2010. The library has good facilities for hire and has a community garden to the rear but would benefit from some minor reinvestment to improve the condition of the rooms for hire.
- 6.16** During the consultation we heard that users of Thornton Heath wanted to see more arts and culture events and digital support sessions. Some users didn't agree with library closures but there was recognition of the challenging financial position that the Council is in.
- 6.17** The recommendation for Thornton Heath Library is to increase the opening days to five per week and install self-service access to extend total opening to six days. The service is currently piloting delivery of Family Hub services on the ground floor and we recommend continuing to activate these spaces through partnerships. The library service will also engage with parking services to explore the potential to increase disabled parking access in the area, supporting more residents to access.
- 6.18** **Norbury library** is generally in good condition following a major refurbishment in 2020/21 but the library building has under-utilised space including the café area and community hall. There is an opportunity to engage with local partners and residents to identify the best approach to activating these spaces and improving the overall offer for residents in this community.
- 6.19** During the consultation we heard Norbury is a much valued local library and most users have been positive about the introduction of self-service access. However there remain concerns about access for children and young people during these hours and staffing

on Saturdays was suggested to improve this. Respondents also wanted to see the community hall being used much more by the library and for local groups.

- 6.20** The recommendation for Norbury Library is to open the library with staffing on Saturdays and to deliver a wider programme of events and activities, working with local partners and community groups to activate the hall, and re-market the café opportunity. Increased staffing will also enable the service to undertake outreach to reach communities in areas of higher deprivation in proximity to the library.
- 6.21** **Selsdon library** is part of the local Sainsburys complex and is the second highest performing library. The general condition and design of the library is good but investment in signage in the complex and on the exterior of the site is important to increase visibility of the library.
- 6.22** During the consultation we heard that users appreciate the convenience of the library and the self-service access available. Users liked the selection of books available and the digital offer and wanted to see more children's events taking place. Staff found that many users are unaware of the self-service offer and this could be better promoted through more staff time on site to engage visitors and users in the wider Sainsburys centre.
- 6.23** The recommendation for Selsdon Library is to increase to four staffed days, alongside two self-service days, in response to the high demand and usage and the impact this will have in promoting signups for self-service access days. We also propose installing additional signage on the exterior of the site to increase the visibility of the library.
- 6.24** **Coulsdon library** is well located for the local high street and benefits from a large garden at the rear which is being developed by a local community group. The library performs relatively well but it is in need of investment to the building to create accessible toilets and generate space for events, community hire and other services.
- 6.25** During the consultation we heard concerns from library users about parking availability at Coulsdon (particularly from users of Bradmore Green) and safety in the local area. We also heard that the under 5's session is popular and there was concern about the capacity to deliver more sessions to accommodate visitors from other libraries. We also heard positive feedback about the community garden and opportunities to build closer links between the library and the The Hive community group.
- 6.26** The recommendation for Coulsdon Library is to extend the opening hours to five staffed days initially, with self service introduced to increase the offer to six days a week, and to refurbish the site to address essential maintenance, increase capacity for events and hires and better enable self- service access to be installed. The service will continue to work with The Hive and seek wider partnerships to develop the offer. The library service will also engage with parking services to explore the potential to increase disabled parking access in the area, supporting more residents to access.

New Addington Library

- 6.27** During the consultation people wanted the Council to work with and support existing hubs (such as Pathfinders and the Fieldway Centre), rather than duplicating or developing something new. Respondents also emphasised the importance of study space, work space and provision for young people and children attending the holiday activities at the Fieldway Family Centre expressed a desire for more books and a quiet space for reading there.
- 6.28** There was also a proportionally low response from people using New Addington Library, suggesting additional engagement and analysis of other data related to need is required in developing the model further for this community.
- 6.29** The recommendation for New Addington Library is to retain a base in its current premises providing a core offer of books, IT and study space alongside CALAT's learning programming, but reconfigure the space to be more flexible and better utilised. Staff resource will be remodelled through more self-service access for the library offer, enabling more outreach to be delivered from other venues including the Fieldway Centre, Pathfinders and the leisure centre. The library building will be open with staff for five days including Saturdays with staff working on additional community outreach and engagement in other local hubs.

6.30 Purley Library

- 6.31** During the consultation, respondents at Purley were positive about co-location of services if there was a synergy with the library offer and enthusiasm for Saturday opening and a wider programme of events, particularly for families.
- 6.32** The recommendation for Purley Library is to develop the offer through co-location with CALAT in the current site to make better use of space and extend the opening hours and offer. A staffed library service will initially be delivered from the site for five days a week, including Saturdays. Partnership working with MIND in Croydon has already introduced new health and wellbeing activities to the library which have been well received by users, and there is an opportunity to develop this further to activate the library during the additional days of opening.

6.33 South Norwood Library

- 6.34** During the consultation we heard from South Norwood users that communal, multi-use spaces for residents to connect and for intergenerational activity in the context of a community hub were important alongside Saturday opening as a crucial local offer for families.
- 6.35** The recommendation for South Norwood Library is to develop provision and the building as part of a wider offer alongside a new Family Hub, youth services and a wider offer delivered with VCFS partners. The library site will be connected through refurbishment with the adjoining Samuel Coleridge Taylor Youth Centre to enable more efficient sharing of resources and a wider offer for residents, subject to planning

consent. A staffed library service will initially be delivered from the site for five days a week, including Saturdays, with self-service access to library areas enabled at other times alongside other services at the centre.

6.36 Following a decision on the recommendations, work will commence to develop the spatial designs and scope the works required.

6.37 We will continue to work closely with Friends Groups and other local partners in all three localities (North, Central and South) to develop the design and offer for each site.

6.38 Proposed new opening hours

6.39 The new model will enable the service to increase staffed weekly opening hours from April 2025 by 15% to 344, with a universal library offer of 5 days a week opening including Saturday at every site. The service will also pilot introducing evening opening at Norbury and Selsdon with the opportunity to further develop and extend this provision if in demand through engagement with local residents as part of the new model.

6.40 It is anticipated that opening hours will be able to increase further with the planned addition of self service access at Thornton Heath, Coulsdon and South Norwood and the development of the partnership with CALAT at Purley and New Addington. However, given capital works will be required to introduce this offer, this increase will come after April 2025. An extension of self-service is proposed to enable a further extension of opening hours, rather than as a facilitation of further reductions in staffed hours.

Current opening hours

	Central Hub				North Hub				South Hub				
	Ashburton	Central	New Addington	Shirley	Broad Green	Norbury	South Norwood	Thornton Heath	Bradmore Green	Coulsdon	Purley	Sanderstead	Selsdon
Monday	10-6	10-6	10-6	Closed	10-6	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	10-6
Tuesday	10-6	10-6	Closed	Closed	Closed	10-6	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	8-6
Wednesday	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	Closed	Closed	10-6	10-6
Thursday	10-6	Closed	10-6	Closed	10-6	10-6	Closed	Closed	Closed	10-6	10-6	Closed	8-6
Friday	10-6	10-6	10-6	10-6	Closed	10-6	10-6	Closed	10-6	10-6	Closed	10-6	8-6
Saturday	9-5	9-5	Closed	Closed	Closed	9-5	Closed	9-5	Closed	9-5	Closed	Closed	9-5

New model timetable– April 2025

	Central Hub			North Hub			South Hub		
	Ashburton	Central	New Addington	Norbury	South Norwood	Thornton Heath	Coulsdon	Purley	Selsdon
Monday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6
Tuesday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Wednesday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Open+ 9-7	Closed	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6
Thursday	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Friday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6
Saturday	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5

Library Outreach

- 6.41** The library service will also deliver three forms of outreach service provision:
- Home Library Service – a book delivery service for residents unable to access a library building, care homes and some school settings
 - Community events – library service information and promotion at community events and festivals and in schools and settings
 - Library Links – a network of community book collections in local venues available alongside weekly drop in sessions of library events and activities

- 6.42** The service has identified a number of community partners and locations to support delivery of a more agile library service offer which can better reach people who are less likely to visit a library building and for whom a more targeted, localised approach is needed. This programme would involve community book collections and events delivered in other venues including general public access locations (e.g. community centres, faith centres) and targeted programmes in venues for a specific audience (e.g. children’s centres, schools, sheltered accommodation).

Example 1: A dedicated space in a local community centre will be provided to hold a collection of books, loaned from and refreshed by the library service. Local residents will be able to access and borrow items from the collection on an honesty basis during the opening hours of the community centre (at least one day per week). Every Monday library staff and volunteers will host a programme of activities including a rhymetime for under 5’s, a knitting group and a reading group. The staff will also be able to register people to join the library service, demonstrate access to the digital collections online and provide a basic enquiry service.

Example 2: A dedicated space in a local children’s centre to hold a collection of books for children and families accessible for visitors to use on an honesty basis. On a weekly basis library staff and volunteers will work at the centre to deliver activities for children and families, register people to join the library service, demonstrate access to the digital collections online and provide a basic enquiry service.

Example 3: Library staff will visit sheltered accommodation settings as part of the regular programme of activities delivered by the housing and communities team on a regular basis to provide access to books and materials and deliver appropriate

activities such as shared reading sessions and digital skills support.

- 6.43** Several locations and partners were identified and suggested as convenient locations to access an outreach service offer during the consultation and we will aim to develop the offer in these venues where possible: cafes, schools and nurseries, leisure centres, community and faith centres.
- 6.44** The offer will continue to be developed through local engagement and piloting over the next six months to respond to local need and demand and ensure a local library offer is available for communities most impacted by library closures.
- 6.45** The outreach service will also include the home library service which will be extended to include more work with care homes and sheltered housing settings. This service will also be available for users of libraries proposed to close who are unable to visit the nearest library.

Library Online

- 6.46** The service will also continue to develop the digital offer in terms of quality and reach. Available resources include e-books, e-audio, magazines and newspapers and online learning and reference tools. The new model will enable better promotion of the digital offer and targeted support through the outreach service to support residents to develop the skills and confidence to access the service independently. The libraries will continue working in partnership with community and voluntary sector partners such as Clear Community Web to support residents to develop their digital literacy and increase digital inclusion including through device loan programmes.

Needs Analysis

- 6.47** A comprehensive needs analysis was undertaken as part of the Library Service Review to inform the development of the proposals. This analysis used the national Library Universal Offers to consider how the current service was meeting need and where improvement is needed in addition to considering general need in the population using Indices of Multiple Deprivation. This is detailed in Appendix A of the 31st January 2024 Cabinet report titled Library Service Review – Phase 1 and 2 Report. Further consideration of the need following feedback during the consultation can be found in Appendix A – Library Review Phase 3 Report and Appendix C – Review of Closure Options Report.

The key findings of that review are summarised below with consideration as to how the proposed new Library Service model can address them:

Theme	Key findings of the analysis	Impact of the proposed new model
Population	While the overall level of deprivation has fallen between	The new model will improve the service offer in some areas of

Theme	Key findings of the analysis	Impact of the proposed new model
	<p>the IMD 2015 and the IMD 2019 there are five neighborhoods in the borough which fall within the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the country. These are situated in Thornton Heath, Broad Green, Selhurst, New Addington and Shirley North. The North and East of the borough continue to be more deprived than the south overall.</p> <p>The social and economic changes of recent years have created challenges for library services but they also generate opportunities to reach new audiences with a library offer and make sure libraries are relevant to more people's lives</p> <p>Croydon's levels of deprivation and population wellbeing have improved overall but entrenched inequalities remain, particularly in the North and East of the borough and this needs targeted attention</p> <p>It's important to build a wide coalition of partners and residents to deliver services which understand and respond to local need and can deliver best value with limited funding available</p> <p>Population growth and demand will continue in the borough. We need to be creative about how a library offer can have the greatest impact and recognize it wont be possible to do everything</p>	<p>highest deprivation in the borough with Thornton Heath and New Addington benefitting from additional opening hours and a new approach to develop the offer alongside the local community sector.</p> <p>Although Broad Green and Shirley Libraries are proposed to close, the analysis of usage indicates that they are not currently meeting local need well with a limited offering and local areas of deprivation could be better served by outreach to engage nonusers with the library offer alongside extended hours and programmes in the next nearest libraries.</p> <p>The new model also creates capacity through dedicated staff roles for the library service to develop strategic partnerships and work more closely with local communities and residents to develop the library offer and respond to need.</p> <p>The new model also increases opening hours and capacity in the areas of population growth including Purley and Thornton Heath to be able to better meet growing need as the population grows.</p>

Theme	Key findings of the analysis	Impact of the proposed new model
	<p>The reductions made to the library service budgets in 2021 have impeded recovery of library usage and services post Covid-19 with rates of use recovering more slowly than in neighbouring boroughs</p>	
Reading	<p>There are particular geographic areas of lower literacy and lower educational attainment in the borough and the most effective approach would involve targeted work in these areas</p> <p>There is a trend of a drop off in attainment from Foundation stage to the later Key Stages</p> <p>Many children are not benefiting from the funded early years childcare provision</p> <p>Whilst the growth in loans of digital resources may have helped to offset the impact of the reduction in hours it is not clear that these resources are being used by those who need them most</p>	<p>The proposed new model enables the service to work more closely with schools and education settings by increasing opening hours in nine libraries, enabling an increase in schools visits and engagement with local schools.</p> <p>Schools which currently use libraries proposed to close will be supported through the new outreach service which will offer book collections and visits from library staff.</p> <p>The new model will also enable closer working with early years services and the opportunity to align the library offer with wider family support services through partnership with Family Hubs at South Norwood and Thornton Heath libraries and outreach at Byron and Shirley children's centres.</p> <p>The model also creates dedicated resource for outreach engagement and marketing including promotion of the digital offer and a wider</p>

Theme	Key findings of the analysis	Impact of the proposed new model
		offer of digital skills support through partnership with the VCFS.
Health and Wellbeing	<p>There are a number of health inequalities across the borough and between demographic groups. New Addington and Broad Green consistently feature as the areas with the highest prevalence of inequality.</p> <p>Community led approaches have been effective in delivering services and engaging residents and health partners to focus on local need.</p> <p>There are opportunities to deliver a health offer which allows for both universal access and targeted support through libraries. However, more work needs to be done to integrate the library offer with Croydon's public health strategies and make better links with health services such as social prescribing provision.</p>	<p>New Addington will benefit from additional opening hours at the library as well as outreach and better partnership working with local VCFS partners in New Addington and Fieldway.</p> <p>Although Broad Green library is proposed to close, the low usage of the library suggests a new approach is needed to have more impact on local health and wellbeing. The service will work with current partners delivering activities in the library, and VCFS partners in the community to maintain and rehome existing library programmes and seek opportunities for the library service to support other local initiatives through outreach.</p> <p>The new model creates capacity for the library service to work more closely with Croydon's public health team the One Croydon Alliance and the Local Community Partnerships to develop the library health offer in response</p>

Theme	Key findings of the analysis	Impact of the proposed new model
		to local need.
Information and Digital	<p>There are digital exclusion risk spots highlighted in the east and south of the borough but more comprehensive local data is needed to understand the reality of the need and priorities for support.</p> <p>Partnership working models have been effective in developing the library service offer as evidenced through provision of digital skills training for staff and residents through working with CCW</p> <p>The digital offer needs to keep evolving to match the changing digital and technological landscape.</p>	<p>The new model proposes extending library opening hours and access to computers and wifi in Coulsdon, Selsdon and Purley in the South of the borough. PC use is low in Bradmore Green and Sanderstead libraries suggesting that the current offer is not meeting local need.</p> <p>The proposed model will enable closer working with VCFS and community partners in delivery of the outreach service and the service has already identified opportunities to collaborate with local partners exploring device giving schemes with the digital skills programme delivered by Clear Community Web.</p>
Culture and Creativity	<p>There is a geographic disparity in cultural infrastructure with the south and east of the borough particularly underserved.</p> <p>Libraries can play a supporting role within the cultural ecosystem by partnering with grassroots and smaller cultural organisations to build their skills and ability to reach audiences.</p> <p>There is an established audience for events in libraries but the current condition and design of the library buildings limits the possibilities.</p>	<p>The new model will increase the viability of libraries as cultural venues and enable the service to operate three sites 4-6 days a week in the south of the borough at Purley, Selsdon and Coulsdon.</p> <p>Larger, well connected venues which are open and accessible with an established audience and space to accommodate a variety of events and exhibitions will be more able to meet need and demand in the borough for more cultural programmes and to better</p>

Theme	Key findings of the analysis	Impact of the proposed new model
		attract partners and funder support.
Employment and Learning (considered as an additional key service provided by libraries)	<p>There is a need for more targeted support for young people to develop skills and access employment.</p> <p>There are particular areas of need within the borough to target support and resource towards addressing unemployment.</p> <p>Some funding is available through grants and development schemes to support employment and economic development and there is an opportunity for the library service to play a more active role in these projects.</p>	<p>The new model proposes greater partnership working with CALAT to develop an adult learning offer alongside library services at New Addington, South Norwood and Purley.</p> <p>By opening nine buildings for more hours, the libraries can also provide more study space and support for young adults and students across the network.</p> <p>The model also creates dedicated capacity for service development and fundraising which can work closely with colleagues in adult learning, economic development and employment support services to develop the contribution of libraries in this space.</p>

6.48 The provision outlined above would enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service through:

- Maintaining nine library buildings open full time across the borough with three libraries in each geographic area (North, Central, South);
- Creating the capacity for a more targeted, localised approach to better respond to local areas of need;
- Increasing the library opening hours overall and the number of days of library opening, especially Saturday openings;
- Improving the service to enable residents to access more services through their local library, in line with the Universal Offers;
- Developing the libraries as cultural venues to deliver the legacy of the London Borough of Culture ;
- Making more efficient use of library buildings;

Library Service Closures

6.49 In order to realise the improvements needed to the library service model and generate resource to reinvest in the service, it is recommended to close the library service at Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley libraries and reallocating building costs and staff hours from these sites into the wider service. These libraries have been recommended for closure following an assessment using the criteria below, reviewed again following the outcome of the consultation. Further detail can be found in Chapter 4 of Appendix A – Phase 3 Report and Appendix C – Review of Closure Options Report.

Criterion	Factors to consider
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage including visits, issues and numbers of users. • Event attendances and attendances for other activities. • PC hours in use. • Unit costs, ie cost per visitor.
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The visibility and prominence of the building. • The level of natural footfall in the vicinity. • Public transport access for users.
Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability of the building to accommodate the full range of library uses (ie Universal Offers). • The adaptability of the building to allow for various uses. • The overall condition of the building and the extent of remedial work required.
Population and need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The population in a library's geographic catchment area. • The extent of deprivation in the catchment area. • Other public facilities in the vicinity, including other libraries. • The extent of existing community group use. • The number of volunteers.

6.50 The impact of the closures will be mitigated by:

- Extended opening hours at the remaining nine libraries including introducing Saturday opening at all nine libraries and evening opening at two libraries, increasing staffed opening hours overall to 344 per week.
- Provision of a scheduled weekly accessible bus shuttle service for residents with access needs to visit their nearest library.
- Delivery of an outreach service entailing community book collections and weekly events held in community venues with a particular focus on areas of higher deprivation raised during the consultation.
- Provision of book collections for schools most impacted by the closure of libraries.
- Schools local to a library proposed to close will be accommodated for class visits at the next nearest Croydon Libraries.

- Investment in the library service digital offer including training and skills sessions.
- Improved marketing and communication of the service offer to better reach local residents.
- Access for Croydon residents to use libraries in neighbouring boroughs.
- Access for users who are unable to visit a library to use the home library service.

6.51 Bradmore Green library is Croydon's smallest neighbourhood library serving a relatively small population in an area of low population density. The library performs well proportionate to its size ranking at 10/13 for loans and 7/13 for visits. However, the building is small and is unsuitable to deliver the full range of the library service offer. Mapping of library user data suggests that many local residents also use Coulsdon Library.

6.52 The Council received two petitions opposing the closure of Bradmore Green with one specifically representing the voices of young people.

6.53 During the consultation we heard about the physical challenges residents would experience visiting Coulsdon Library, particularly families with young children and people with disabilities. The lack of parking in Coulsdon and community safety concerns regarding taking the bus from the stop near Coulsdon College were also raised. Many parents in the community, and the school leadership at Coulsdon CofE next door to the library were concerned about the impact on the loss of local provision for children after school. The library service also held a visit at the school to listen to schoolchildren there share the importance of their local library. Some school children at the school wanted the library to be open on Saturdays as they were unable to go after school due to other activities and others wanted access to computers after school for homework support. 44% of respondents reported that they wouldn't be able to travel to another library if Bradmore Green closed. Respondents stated that if the library was closed they would most prefer to access a library offer from Coulsdon (46%), out of borough (11%) or Purley Library (7%)

6.54 Mitigations to address the impact of the closure include:

- Extension of opening hours and events at Coulsdon and Purley Libraries
- Engagement with regular groups held at Bradmore Green Library to support them to relocate to another venue
- Provision of a weekly bus shuttle from Bradmore Green Library to Coulsdon Library for residents with access needs
- Delivery of a local outreach service including exploring opportunities with partners suggested during the consultation (Tollers Community Centre, the Congregational Church, Coulsdon College, Byron Children's Centre and the Centre for the Retired)
- Further engagement with the local school to explore other opportunities to provide access to books and library services to the children through outreach collections
- Invitations to local schools to visit Coulsdon Library
- The library service will also engage with parking services to explore the potential to

increase disabled parking access in the Coulsdon area, supporting more residents to access.

6.55 **Broad Green** library is the second smallest library in the network and ranked 12/13 for book loans and 10/13 for visits. It serves an area of high deprivation but there is significant overlap with the catchment areas for Central and Thornton Heath libraries. Equality impact analysis also suggests that there are significant local communities who are not represented in library usage data currently suggesting a different service model in this area could be needed to reach across the local community.

6.56 There was a low response rate to the survey from Broad Green users and lower attendance at the consultation events around this library than others but the Council did receive two petitions from local residents opposing the closure of this library.

We also heard of the impact of closure on the local groups who use the library, particularly the Tamil community group who run a range of activities on site. Respondents stated that if the library was closed they would most prefer to access a library offer from Central Library (30%), Thornton Heath Library (10%) or Norbury Library (8%). However 58% of respondents reported that they wouldn't be able to travel to another library if Broad Green closed.

6.57 Mitigations to address the impact of closure include:

- Extension of opening hours and events at Central and Thornton Heath libraries;
- Engagement with regular groups held at Broad Green Library to support them to relocate to another venue;
- Provision of a weekly bus shuttle from Broad Green to Central Library for residents with access needs;
- Delivery of a local outreach service including exploring opportunities with partners suggested during the consultation (CVA, Broad Green Local);
- Further engagement with the local school to explore other opportunities to provide access to books and library services to the children through outreach collections;
- Invitations to local schools to visit Central or Thornton Heath library;
- The library service will also engage with parking services to explore the potential to increase disabled parking access in the Thornton Heath area, supporting more residents to access.

6.58 **Sanderstead** library is another small site, with 4/13 for loans and 8/13 for visits. However, the catchment area of the library is largely covered by the catchment area for Purley and Selsdon libraries. The library is also lacking in accessible toilet facilities and would require significant investment to expand in size.

6.59 Sanderstead residents expressed strong opposition to the closure with a particular emphasis on the impact that this would have for older people at risk of isolation, local health and wellbeing and local schools who may not be able to travel to visit the next

nearest library. 43% of respondents reported that they wouldn't be able to travel to another library if Sanderstead closed. Respondents stated that if the library was closed they would most prefer to access a library offer from Selsdon Library (40%), Purley Library (12%), Central Library (11%)

6.60 The Council also received a petition opposing the closure of Sanderstead Library. Following the end of the consultation, during the period of review and analysis of findings a further submission was made by the Sanderstead Women's Institute (WI) noting the work they have done on tending to the gardens over many years and expressing a wish for the library to remain open.

6.61 Mitigations to address the impact of the closure include:

- Extension of opening hours and events at Selsdon and Purley Libraries.
- Engagement with regular groups held at Sanderstead Library to support them to relocate to another venue.
- Provision of a weekly bus shuttle from Sanderstead to Selsdon Library for residents with access needs.
- Delivery of a local outreach service including exploring opportunities with partners suggested during the consultation (Sanderstead United Reform Church, Borough Grange sheltered accommodate centre).
- Further engagement with local schools to explore other opportunities to provide access to books and library services to the children through outreach collections.
- Invitations to local schools to visit Selsdon, Purley or Central Libraries.

6.62 **Shirley** library is a small site which requires significant investment to improve and is limited in the flexibility and opportunity to deliver a more extensive offer. Library usage was ranked 11/13 for loans and 13/13 for visits. Parts of the catchment area are also catered to by Ashburton Library and West Wickham Library (Bromley).

6.63 Shirley residents also raised concerns about the impact on closure of the library for older people and people with disabilities for whom travel to Ashburton, the nearest library, could take two buses. Some concern was also raised about the location of Ashburton library within a secondary school with one respondent having previously been hit by a ball while accessing the library. Respondents also expressed concern for the loss of provision to residents in more deprived areas including the Shrublands estate and the loss of a local landmark which provided an important meeting point and social activity for local people. 44% of respondents reported that they wouldn't be able to travel to another library if Shirley closed. Respondents stated that if the library was closed, they would most prefer to access a library offer from Ashburton Library (28%), outside the borough (21%) and Central Library (18%)

6.64 Following the end of the consultation, during the period of review and analysis of findings further submissions were made from the recently formed Friends of Shirley Library group further highlighting the importance of the library for the local community and its cultural, social, ecological and material value. An application for "Asset of

Community Value” (ACV) for the Shirley Library Building was made by local groups, and this was granted on 17th September 2024 and added to the ACV asset register.

6.65 Mitigations to address the impact of the closure includes:

- Extension of opening hours and events at Ashburton and Central Libraries.
- Engagement with regular groups held at Shirley Library to support them to relocate to another venue.
- Provision of a weekly bus shuttle from Shirley to Ashburton Library for residents with access needs.
- Delivery of a local outreach service including exploring opportunities with partners suggested during the consultation (West Wickham and Shirley Baptist Church, Shirley Childrens Centre, Shirley Community Centre and local care homes and sheltered accommodation settings) with a particular focus on reaching residents on the Shrublands estate.
- Engagement with local schools to explore other opportunities to provide access to books and library services to the children through outreach collections.
- Invitations to local schools to visit Selsdon, Purley or Central Libraries.
- Engagement with Oasis Academy to address any concerns raised regarding safe public access to the library at times when students are playing in the vicinity.

6.66 The library service will seek to work with the library friends’ groups to continue developing the service and shared aims to increase access and engagement with libraries.

6.67 Further detail on the equality impacts raised in the consultation and the mitigations for the impacts of library closures can be found in Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessments and Appendix C – Review of Closure Options.

Future use of buildings no longer operated as libraries

6.68 It is understandable that those who regularly use or live near to the libraries proposed to close will experience the proposed changes to the model as a loss. We have heard how important the libraries are as a space for the community to come together and for people to come alone and be welcomed into a universal, accessible, secular space. We have also heard how in some cases, the library is the only publicly owned building in the area and the only touch point with Council services.

6.69 During the consultation the service welcomed expressions of interest from parties who may be interested in operating buildings no longer used by the library service for alternative community benefit, including other purposes and functions, separate to library activity. We received some limited interest from community sector organisations and library friends’ groups, though concerns were raised regarding capacity for groups to take on the sites without support.

6.70 Given the level of response from the consultation highlighting the community use of

these buildings, and the role they play in their neighbourhood, we are proposing that a dedicated process be put in place to allow for local community groups, voluntary and faith groups, or groups that form in response to this proposal, to be able to take over the buildings to operate them as community facilities. The Executive Mayor's ambition and aim will be to ensure each building remains a community resource.

- 6.71** The Council is proposing to run an active series of engagement including in-person meetings, workshops, site engagement, and pro-active support for partners to realise the Executive Mayor's aspiration for each building to remain in community use. This process is outlined in Appendix F and will run from October to March 2025.
- 6.72** The Council will consider two-year grant funding of up to £20k for each site through CIL (subject to the Council's procedures and via a funding agreement) to assist parties to cover a proportion of the core building costs during a transitional period to a new funding model, subject to a viable business plan and operating model being submitted, and subject to relevant meeting relevant funding conditions. Following this initial phase, the site must be sustainable and viable without ongoing financial support from the Council.

Implementation

- 6.73** The implementation of the new model will be undertaken through the following workstreams:

Workstream	Key Milestone	Indicative timescale
Transition to the new staff model.	Review of staff roles and locations Staff consultation Recruitment and training	Sept-Oct Oct-Nov Dec-March
Development of operating models for partnership services delivering in libraries	Development of partnership agreements Review of capital works needed New offer launches	Oct Nov-March April
Development of the outreach offer.	Partner engagement Pilot programme Launch new model outreach schedule	Sept Oct-March April
Extension of Open+ and opening hours.	Conduct site assessments of retained libraries. Scope capital investment requirements. Commission and complete capital works. Commence installation and extension	Sept-Oct Nov-Dec From April 25 From April 25
Delivery of transitional library service offer (Nov-March)	Introduce weekly bus shuttle service from closed libraries for residents with access needs Pilot outreach activity	Nov Nov Jan 25

	Implement interim extension of hours Extend outreach activity Implement new proposed hours Communications campaign to promote	Jan 25 April 25 From Oct
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A detailed implementation plan can be found in Chapter 7 of Appendix A – Phase 3 Report.

6.74 A two stage transitional period will be required to enable the library staff to decommission any closed libraries and recruit additional staff to deliver the new offer. As resource is needed to be released before the offer can be extended, mitigations for the impact of library closures will also be developed in a two phased approach.

Interim opening hours for the service and the transitional offer for users of libraries proposed to close are outlined in the tables below.

- Subject to consideration by the Executive Mayor and Cabinet and the decision being taken; Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley libraries will close on 24th and 25th October.
- During Oct library staff will engage with local library groups from Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley to identify new venues for them to take place and will contact library and members to update their home library.
- A public communications plan will run from October to communicate the interim offer and enable residents to continue to access services.
- During November and December the impact of the closures will be mitigated through provision of a weekly accessible bus shuttle service from the closed libraries to the next nearest library for residents with access needs, through outreach at local venues and through the Home Library and digital collections.
- An interim timetable will be introduced from January 2025 extending opening hours and increasing the library events across the library network alongside outreach at local venues.
- A period of recruitment will be required to increase the frequency of Saturday opening which is expected to be introduced at all nine retained sites from 1st April 2025.
- All Libraries will be open five days a week from April 1st 2025, including Saturday opening hours. Central Library will be open six days a week reflecting its heavy usage.
- Capital investment plans will also be developed to enable further installation of self-service access and improve the facilities in libraries from September, commencing with South Norwood, to take advantage of external grant funding opportunities.
- A pro-active process of engagement with any potential partners will be run from October 5th to March 2025 to identify, work with and support community usage of the four library buildings to close. This can include local residents associations, faith groups, voluntary and community groups, or groups that form expressly to use the buildings. This will include Community Asset Transfer but is not limited to this option.
- If no viable alternative operations are identified in this period, the sites will then be considered for disposal.

Opening hours From 28th October – December 2024

	ASH	CEN	NEW	NOR	SOU	THO	COU	PUR	SEL
Monday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6
Tuesday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Closed	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Wednesday	Closed	Staff 10-6	Closed	Open+ 9-7	Closed	Staff 10-6	Closed	Closed	Staff 10-6
Thursday	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Friday	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Closed	Closed	Staff 10-6
Saturday	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Closed	Open+ 9-5	Closed	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Closed	Staff 9-5

Opening hours January-March 2025

	ASH	CEN	NEW	NOR	SOU	THO	COU	PUR	SEL
Monday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6
Tuesday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Wednesday	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7	Closed	Staff 10-6	Closed	Closed	Staff 10-6
Thursday	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Friday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6
Saturday	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Closed	Open+ 9-5	Closed	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Closed	Staff 9-5

Opening hours April 2025

New model timetable– April 2025

	Central Hub			North Hub			South Hub		
	Ashburton	Central	New Addington	Norbury	South Norwood	Thornton Heath	Coulsdon	Purley	Selsdon
Monday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6
Tuesday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Wednesday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Open+ 9-7	Closed	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6
Thursday	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Closed	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Open+ 9-7
Friday	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6	Staff 10-6
Saturday	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5	Staff 9-5

Services to mitigate the impact of library closures for users of Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley

Library area	October	Nov-Dec	Jan-March	From April 2025
Bradmore Green	Engagement with library groups to enable them to continue in an alternative venue Development of the outreach	Three days per week opening at Coulsdon Library Additional weekly rhymetime at Coulsdon Library Weekly bus shuttle	Five days per week opening at Coulsdon Library Additional weekly rhymetime at Coulsdon Library Weekly bus	Five days per week opening at Coulsdon Library Additional weekly rhymetime at Coulsdon Library Weekly bus

	<p>offer with local partners</p> <p>Notification to users to update home library and reservation collection points: universal and targeted engagement</p> <p>Public information packs available in libraries with service information</p> <p>Promotion of the digital offer including drop in sessions in libraries to support people to access</p>	<p>service to Coulsdon Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to Caterham Hill and Caterham Valley Libraries through The Libraries Consortium</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Digital library drop in session to support people to access the library online</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Monthly pilot of library activity in a local venue</p> <p>Reading group to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>	<p>shuttle service to Coulsdon Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to Caterham Hill and Caterham Valley Libraries through The Libraries Consortium</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and monthly outreach activities available in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people with the library offer</p> <p>Reading group to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>	<p>shuttle service to Coulsdon Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to Caterham Hill and Caterham Valley Libraries through The Libraries Consortium</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and weekly outreach activities in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people with the library offer</p> <p>Reading group to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>
Broad Green	Engagement with library groups to enable them to	Three days per week opening at Thornton Heath Library; Five days	Three days per week opening at Thornton Heath Library; Five days	Five days per week opening at Thornton Heath Library; Six days

	<p>continue in an alternative venue</p> <p>Development of the outreach offer with local partners</p> <p>Engagement with library groups to enable them to continue in an alternative venue</p> <p>Development of the outreach offer with local partners</p> <p>Notification to users to update home library and reservation collection points: universal and targeted engagement</p> <p>Public information packs available in libraries with service information</p> <p>Promotion of the digital offer including drop in sessions in libraries to support people to access</p>	<p>per week opening at Central Library Rhymetime capacity increase at Thornton Heath Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Thornton Heath Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Digital library drop in session to support people to access the library online</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Monthly pilot of library activity in a local venue</p> <p>Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>	<p>per week opening at Central Library Rhymetime capacity increase at Thornton Heath Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Thornton Heath Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and monthly outreach activities available in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people with the library offer</p> <p>Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>	<p>per week opening at Central Library Rhymetime capacity increase at Thornton Heath Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Thornton Heath Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and weekly outreach activities in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people with the library offer</p> <p>Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>
Sanderstead	Engagement with library groups to	Six days per week opening at Selsdon Library (Four with	Six days per week opening at Selsdon Library	Six days per week opening at Selsdon Library

	<p>enable them to continue in an alternative venue</p> <p>Development of the outreach offer with local partners</p> <p>Notification to users to update home library and reservation collection points: universal and targeted engagement</p> <p>Public information packs available in libraries with service information</p> <p>Promotion of the digital offer including drop in sessions in libraries to support people to access</p>	<p>staff; Two with self service access)</p> <p>Two days a week opening at Purley Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Selsdon Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to Warlingham Library through membership of The Libraries Consortium</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Digital library drop in session to support people to access the library online</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Monthly pilot of library activity in a local venue</p> <p>Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>	<p>(Four with staff; Two with self service access)</p> <p>Two days a week opening at Purley Library</p> <p>Access to Warlingham Library through membership of The Libraries Consortium</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Selsdon Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and monthly outreach activities available in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people with the library offer</p> <p>Library groups to be supported to</p>	<p>(Four with staff; Two with self service access)</p> <p>Five days a week opening at Purley Library</p> <p>Additional weekly rhymetime at Purley Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Selsdon Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Access to Warlingham Library through membership of The Libraries Consortium</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and weekly outreach activities in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people with the library</p>
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			take place at an alternate location	offer Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location
Shirley	<p>Engagement with library groups to enable them to continue in an alternative venue</p> <p>Development of the outreach offer with local partners</p> <p>Notification to users to update home library and reservation collection points: universal and targeted engagement</p> <p>Public information packs available in libraries with service information</p> <p>Promotion of the digital offer including drop in sessions in libraries to support people to access</p>	<p>Four days per week opening at Ashburton Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Ashburton Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Five days per week opening at Central Library</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Digital library drop in session to support people to access the library online</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Monthly pilot of library activity in a local venue</p> <p>Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location</p>	<p>Four days per week opening at Ashburton Library</p> <p>Five days per week opening at Central Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Ashburton Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Additional weekly rhymetime activity at Ashburton Library</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and monthly outreach activities available in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to engage people</p>	<p>Five days per week opening at Ashburton Library</p> <p>Six days per week opening at Central Library</p> <p>Weekly bus shuttle service to Ashburton Library for people with access needs</p> <p>Additional weekly rhymetime activity at Ashburton Library</p> <p>Access to the library online offer including e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines and online learning</p> <p>Access to the Home Library Service for people unable to visit a library building</p> <p>Community book collections and weekly outreach activities in a local venue</p> <p>Visits to schools and sheltered housing offered to</p>

			with the library offer Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location	engage people with the library offer Library groups to be supported to take place at an alternate location
Communications Summary	Promotion of the interim opening hours and the online offer Notice of library closure dates Communications to members to update home library location	Promotion of the interim opening hours and the online offer Local communication on services for those with access needs Promotion of local outreach activities and signposting to other local services	Promotion of the interim opening hours and the online offer Local communication on services for those with access needs Promotion of local outreach activities and signposting to other local services	Promotion of the new offer and hours and outreach schedule Local communication on services for those with access needs Promotion of the online offer

Monitoring and engagement

- 6.75** The service will develop a detailed set of performance metrics, outputs and outcomes to measure the impact of the new model against the new service outcomes outlined at 5.15. Progress against these outcomes will be reported to members and published to enable public scrutiny of progress and an open and inclusive approach to developing Croydon’s library services.
- 6.76** It is also important that the library service offer continues to be developed meaningfully through engagement with residents and partners and that opportunities to galvanise support and collaboration to improve the service and reach more people are taken up. A library users forum of residents and partners will be established which can act as a regular sounding board for library service development and support the library service management to better promote the offer and connect with communities across the borough. Further links will be developed between the library services and the Local Community Partnerships to ensure the library service can develop strategically and responsively to local need and priorities identified through these forums.

Alternative Options

- 6.77** The service received the following suggestions of alternative options to improve the

library offer during the consultation. These options have been fully considered and their likely viability and impact is summarised below. Further analysis can be found in Chapter 4 of Appendix A – Phase 3 Report.

6.78 Do nothing

Many residents who currently use the libraries, particularly those proposed to close, expressed a preference to retain the current model of thirteen libraries open fewer days. Whilst usage of the libraries in the current model is slowly increasing and regular users have adapted to the reduced hours, this option would still limit the capacity of the service to reach more people as libraries open two and three days a week with limited weekend's would remain inconvenient to access around working patterns. The current model is not working for Croydon residents, given that less than 10% use the libraries, and the Council is not meeting its Best Value duties to deliver an efficient and effective service with such low usage and buildings only being opened two days a week. It would also not create capacity within the service to improve the offer and better respond to unmet need, particularly in areas of higher deprivation and lower take-up such as New Addington and South Norwood.

6.79 Increase revenue budget for the library service

Some respondents also suggested the Council reprofile its budgets and increase expenditure on libraries, including exploring charging other council services for which libraries may contribute to preventing demand such as adult social care services. Whilst this could enable service improvements to be made and avoid library closures, additional income allocated to libraries would need to be taken from other budgets. As the Council continues to be in severe financial distress, most services are already reduced to essential operations only and there is little scope to reallocate core funding without significant adverse impact on other statutory services. Some respondents also proposed use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to maintain the library service, however it is not legally permissible to use this fund as core budgets to deliver ongoing core revenue services.

6.80 Adapt the current opening hours to introduce more Saturday opening hours

Some respondents suggested that existing opening hours could be adapted to include more open days on Saturdays and reduce the amount of weekday opening. Additional budget resource would be required to increase the number of staff as currently multiple libraries are staffed by the same team who can only be in one place at a time. It is more challenging to recruit and retain staff in posts which involve working every Saturday and it is important to have a degree of continuity between weekend staff and weekday staff for consistency of the service offer.

Whilst this could enable more residents to visit, the low usage overall also indicates that more significant change is needed to enable the service to reach more people and a reduction in weekday opening hours would impact school visits and other groups using the libraries.

6.81 Hire out space to generate income

Many respondents suggested hiring out space in the library to subsidise operations. The library service have already sought to do this as part of the current model but as there is very little flexible space in the current building configurations across the network the market is limited. Given the limited facilities available for hire and the 'cost of sale' in marketing it, there is no indication that this would generate sufficient income to support service development and improvement.

6.82 Partner with health services to retain library buildings

As part of the review process, we have engaged with the Council's Public Health services, the One Croydon Alliance, VCFS partners and the local NHS Trust to explore opportunities to co-locate. Whilst we have identified opportunities to host services (eg family hub health services) in libraries, health partners are not seeking to invest and share the operating costs of buildings.

6.83 Use more volunteers, including drawing on local groups to help fundraise or volunteer resources

Some respondents also suggested the service should make more and better use of volunteers to run libraries, in some cases recommending reducing library staff and retaining 13 sites with more volunteers. Some existing library volunteers offered to do more and others said they may be interested in becoming volunteers. However, other respondents were critical of any approaches to enable volunteers to deliver library services and strongly preferred a professional staffed service. The library service currently has 70 regular volunteers, mostly supporting events and activities. Whilst it is true that volunteer recruitment and development has been adversely impacted by a lack of capacity and resource within the service to manage and support them, research with other services which operate an integrated volunteer model suggests this would require a much larger pool to sustain a regular library service and it is unclear that this would be feasible or sustainable as a model in Croydon. Whilst volunteer supporter groups could generate some funding to support with library events and projects it is unlikely to yield funding to cover core service costs and there has been limited historic support from local library friends of groups. The limited staff capacity in the current model also limits the meaningful engagement which is needed to adopt a successful partnership model with voluntary groups.

6.84 Explore alternative delivery models

Alternative delivery models could include outsourcing the service to a third-party provider. This was considered as an option in the initial phases of the review and was ruled out as too high risk and time-consuming for uncertain returns given that there is not a competitive market for library outsourcing. Croydon Libraries' recent experience of being outsourced to Carillion's Cultural Community Solutions did not generate an improvement in service or investment in the estate.

Another alternative model is a hybrid of Council and volunteer managed libraries. There are many different variations of this model in operation but in hybrid approaches Councils typically retain responsibility for buildings and stock and volunteer groups provide staffing. When consulted on as an option for Croydon in 20/21 the response rate was 57.83% against proposals at that time for a hybrid service model of five community libraries and eight staffed libraries with reduced hours. The Council did not receive any proposals from groups in this consultation proposing to manage a library in this way. Given the limited budget for the service, any ongoing investment in the four library buildings proposed to close would detract from improvements which could be made to the rest of the network catering to larger catchment areas and areas of greater need. It is therefore recommended that a hybrid model is not pursued but a package of support is put in place, as outlined at section 6.69 above, to improve the sustainability of any transition of closed libraries to alternative community use.

6.85 Redevelop site to extend / subsidise new library spaces

A minority of respondents proposed site redevelopments as a way of improving and extending existing library buildings proposed to close or replacing them with a new space as part of a wider development. Whilst these options could improve the efficiency and opportunity in the building's themselves, they would not address the pressure on staffing in the service created by too small a team operating too many sites. The proposals may also require significant capital investment into sites and services which are not currently well used and as such may not represent value for money.

6.86 Increase use of self-service access

Some respondents suggested extending the use of self-service access to libraries proposed to close as a way of maintaining the service there with less staff. However, self-service access alone also does not enable universal access or the full library service offer and under 16's would not be able to access the library unaccompanied. This would also still entail the Council maintaining the liability and building costs of 13 sites which would limit the resource available to reinvest in and improve the service. Installation would require significant capital investment in some sites which are not currently well used.

7 CONTRIBUTION TO THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR'S BUSINESS PLAN:

This project has the potential to support delivery of many strategic goals and priorities in the Plan:

- 7.1 The Council balances its books, listens to residents and delivers good, sustainable services** through development of a more impactful, sustainable and efficient library service which reduces the maintenance costs on buildings and targets resource where its most needed through ongoing engagement with residents and

partners.

- 7.2 Croydon is a place of opportunity for business, earning and learning** through a modernised library estate and community outreach offer which provides access to space, books, resources and support over six days a week with targeted employment, digital skills and business support programmes.
- 7.3 Children and young people in Croydon have the chance to thrive, learn and fulfil their potential** through open, accessible buildings and outreach programmes which support contextual safeguarding, literacy development, cultural and learning programmes and family support services.
- 7.4 People can lead healthier and more independent lives for longer** with library hubs that provide health information, advice and programmes to support living well for longer including lifelong learning, physical activity and clubs which promote social connection and reduce isolation and community-based initiatives to take library services beyond the buildings to reach people where they are.
- 7.5 The Future Croydon Transformation Plan** outlines how the Council will work towards becoming the most cost effective and efficient Council in London. These proposals can support delivery of that plan by utilising our buildings in a more efficient way, using technology to extend and improve the offer and creating the flexibility within the service to respond to local need and demand through open, welcoming buildings and outreach in local community spaces.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1.1** The libraries revenue budget was reduced by £0.300m in 2019 and £0.504m in April 2022. Following these reductions, the net expenditure budget held by the library service is £2.840m.
- 8.1.2** Croydon's library service is already benchmarked as the lowest cost per head across London and further reductions could risk compromising delivery of our statutory obligations. The Council must ensure that the service meets the Council's best value duty of delivering service outcomes in an efficient manner.
- 8.1.3** Approximately £2.000m of the budget is currently profiled for staff costs with the remainder allocated for buildings, digital infrastructure, soft facilities, transport and materials. Library stock materials are currently supported separately through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) with £0.300m allocated per annum for three years (2022-2025).
- 8.1.4** Some costs and budgets of the library service building operations are held centrally

for some utilities, some business rates, maintenance and repair of library buildings. The total figure for this is estimated at £0.800m.

8.1.5 The Council will continue to look at opportunities to improve income generation (such as through room/venue hire) however requires capital investment and would not provide significant extra income in the short term to improve or extend the library service offer. Therefore, the proposed model reinvests some premises related savings through closure of library buildings to increase the staffing budget to support the service being viable and sustainable. This total figure is forecast at £0.75m.

8.1.6 Further premise related efficiencies will be made overall through a reduction in the asset base, liabilities and long-term operating costs for the closed sites, many of which have a significant maintenance backlog. Modernisation of the retained estate would also generate income generation opportunities for the Council in the medium to long term. The Council will also operate a more efficient estate by seeking to partner library services with adult learning and family hub services and seeking partnerships with VCFS organisations to share sites and costs.

8.1.7 The proposed budget profile of the new service model is detailed below:

Subjective	Budget (£000's)
Staff costs	2,160
Other operating costs	779
Total expenditure	2,939
Library Income	(38)
Reinvested building costs from library closures to increase staffing, additional to existing budget	(75)
Grand total	2,838
Library Stock budget (CIL funding)	300

8.1.8 The income generation forecast above is prudent and based on current hires and general library income through printing and fines. It is likely that this figure would increase following a period of refurbishments and modernisation of the library estate to establish a more extensive offer of space for hire, yielding further savings in future

years. Through engagement with neighbouring boroughs, we understand that the greatest contribution to library income streams comes through hires of space, both ad hoc and through leases. The proposals would also seek to maximise current income generation opportunities such as leasing on longer term operating arrangements the café at Norbury Library and generating more active bookings and use of the community hall spaces at Norbury Library.

8.1.9 These figures also assume that the budget for library stock and reading materials can continue to be funded through CIL. A further proposal for the next funding period will be developed and submitted to the Infrastructure Funding Group in 2024/25.

8.1.10 A capital investment programme will be required to invest in the retained estate of statutory libraries to undertake essential improvements including rewiring, installation of accessible toilets and improvements to heating, cooling and plant equipment. £1.6m is currently allocated in the capital programme with an additional £530k allocated for South Norwood Library and £0.200m allocated in 24/25 from the Shared Prosperity grant fund. By reducing the number of buildings retained by the libraries service we can ensure that this investment is targeted to locations of highest impact and reduce the need for further capital requests to improve the accessibility and condition of the full estate.

8.1.11 Some additional capital investment will also be required to extend the provision of self-service access from more sites. The costs for this vary by site depending on the nature and design of the building, access points and emergency escape routes. There is a small revenue cost of approximately £2k per site for the access system. The Council will otherwise seek to minimise revenue costs spent on security for this provision by utilising CCTV and technological security systems where possible over security guards.

8.1.12 Any assets no longer required for delivery of the statutory library services will be reviewed for alternative use by other Council services and voluntary sector and community groups in line with the process outlined in at section 6.60. A financial support package of up to £0.080m (£20k per site) in grant funding is proposed to be funded from CIL to support the transition of the buildings to viable alternative use which can be sustained without Council funding. Additional capital expenditure may be required to bring the sites up to the minimum EPC rating to enable lettings.

8.1.13 Comments approved by Nish Narendran, Finance Manager on behalf of the Director of Finance. (02/09/2024)

8.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.2.1 Cabinet is being asked to decide on the proposals for library service provision in the borough following public consultation. There is extensive information gathered and analysed from the Library Service Review (Phases 1 to 4), the public consultation and the equality impact assessment that must be considered in making the decision

and the Council's statutory duties.

8.2.2 Section 7 (1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (PLMA) provides that it shall be the duty of every library authority, in this case the Council, to "provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof....". The duty applies to those who live, work or study full time in the authority's area. Section 7 (2) provides that, in fulfilling this duty, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability–

- “(a) of securing, by keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and
- (b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and
- (c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.”

8.2.3 The Act does not define “comprehensive” and “efficient” library service. However, the Courts have interpreted this as:

“A comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. Comprehensive has therefore been taken to mean delivering a service that is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on Council resources. Decisions about the Service must be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws upon evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the borough”

“The key is reasonable ability to access the service by all residents of the county. This means that distances and time taken to reach a library must be reasonable and any particular problems, whether physical disabilities, or created by age or family considerations, must be capable of being met” (Draper v Lincolnshire County Council in 2014 EWHC 2388 (Admin))

“the availability of resources is highly material to the question of what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service. The section 7 duty cannot be exempt or divorced from resource issues and cannot in law escape the reductions which have been rendered inevitable in the light of the financial crisis engulfing the country.” (R (Green) v Gloucestershire City Council [2011] EWHC 2687 (Admin)).

8.2.4 The duty under Section 7 and referred to in the non-statutory guidance below requires the Council to undertake an assessment of the local needs for library services in the

borough. This serves to inform the Council's decision on whether any proposed provision is comprehensive and efficient.

8.2.5 Library premises are defined as:

- “(a) any premises which are occupied by a library authority and are premises where library facilities are made available by the authority, in the course of their provision of a public library service, to members of the public;
- (b) any vehicle which is used by a library authority for the purpose of providing such a service and is a vehicle in which facilities are so made available; (Section 8(7))”

Therefore, a library service does not have to be provided from fixed premises, commonly called a “library”.

8.2.6 Section 9 of the Act permits a library authority to make contributions towards the expenses of another library authority “or of any other person providing library facilities for members of the public”.

8.2.7 Section 20 of the Act permits library premises to be used for meetings and exhibitions, film shows, concerts and other events of a cultural or educational nature, for which the local authority may charge.

8.2.8 Under Section 1 of the Act, the Secretary of State (SoS) for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has a duty to “superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service...and to secure the proper discharge” by local authorities of their library functions. That is supported by the default power in Section 10 whereby, on complaint to the Secretary of State that a library authority has failed in its duties under the Act, he can cause a public inquiry to be held and, if satisfied as a result that there has been a failure by the library authority in its duties, he can make an order “declaring it to be in default and directing it for the purpose of removing the default to carry out such of its duties, in such manner and within such time, as may be specified in the order.”

8.2.9 Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 provides that local authorities must make arrangements for ensuring that their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The s.11 duty requires that the welfare of children is “actively promoted”.

8.2.10 The DCMS has produced a non-statutory guidance for local authorities considering library service provision and titled ‘Libraries as a statutory service’ (April 2022) available at [Libraries as a statutory service - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/107117/libraries-as-a-statutory-service.pdf). The guidance includes the following:

“4. Role of Councils

...Every Council in England is required to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service under the Act. It must do so in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available. The public library service is not a national service, but a local service. What a comprehensive and efficient service means will differ between Councils, and will depend on the needs of each area. It is therefore the role of Councillors and officials at a local level to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their service. This must be done:

- in consultation with their communities
- through analysis of evidence around local needs
- in accordance with their statutory duties

Councillors need to make decisions about how money is invested in the interests of the whole community. They will have competing priorities across a wide portfolio of local service provision and Councillors and officers must reconcile these matters against the background of their legal requirements. Councils can take their available resources into account when deciding how to deliver their public library service.

Councils therefore have the freedom to design their library service, based on their analysis and assessment of local needs. There are no longer prescribed national standards, which risked ignoring the specific circumstances or needs of individual library authorities....”

8.2.11 The guidance requires local authorities considering changes to their library service to: a) inform the DCMS Libraries team about their proposals before public engagement or consultation; b) demonstrate plans to consult with local communities alongside an assessment of their needs (including any projections of need), consider range of options (including alternative financing, governance or delivery models) to sustain library service provision in their area and a rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of their proposals; c) evidence that proposals would continue to meet local needs and should engage with the community when designing the library service to meet local needs within the available resources; d) an assessment of the equality impact on all ‘protected groups’ as specified in the Equality Act 2010 and e) consider the use of the Council’s scrutiny process to better inform decision making.

8.2.12 Paragraph 4.23 of this report confirms that the Council has engaged with the DCMS Libraries team on the proposed changes to library services prior to and post public consultation.

8.2.13 Paragraph 6.47 of this report and Cabinet Report of 31st January 2024 Appendix A titled Library Service Review Phases 1-2 Report and Appendix C titled Analysis of Closure Options sets out the analysis of local needs and the capacity and performance of the library service.

8.2.14 The Council has a duty to consult with residents, communities and other stakeholders that are likely to be affected by the proposals for the provision of library services in the borough. The consultation must take place at a time when the proposals are still at their formative stages. The Council must provide the consultees with sufficient information to enable them properly to understand the proposals being consulted upon and to express a view in relation to it. The information must be clear, concise, and accurate. The consultees must be given adequate time to consider the proposals and to respond. Section 5 of this report and Appendix B titled Consultation Findings Report sets out the consultation undertaken and feedback and in discharge of this duty. Further, Section 6 of this report and Appendix A titled Library Service Review Phase 3 Report and Appendix C titled Analysis of Closure Options sets out the analysis, responses and findings arising from the consultations. The feedback from the consultation should be taken into account when finalising the proposal and an explanation given of how these responses have informed the proposal. These are set out in this report, in particular, at Section 6 Paragraphs 6.6 to 6.45 and 6.50 to 6.66 and Appendix A and C.

- 8.2.15 As part of its decision-making process on the proposals, the Council must have “due regard” to the public sector equality duty (PSED). Under Section 149 Equality Act 2010, the Council in exercise of its function to provide library service, must have “due regard” to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it in order to tackle prejudice and promote understanding. The protected characteristics are age, gender reassignment, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Council is required to give serious, substantive, and advance consideration of what (if any) the proposals would have on the protected group and what mitigating factors can be put in place. This exercise must be carried out with rigour and an open mind and should not be a mere form of box ticking. These are mandatory considerations. Pursuant to its PSED, the Council have undertaken Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) of the proposals on the protected groups that includes measures to mitigate the impact of the proposals and are set out in Section 6 (6.46 to 6.66) and Section 8 (8.3.1 to 8.3.9) and Appendix D titled Equality Impact Assessment and Appendix C titled Review of Closure Options. This includes measures to mitigate the impact and promote the educational welfare of children affected by the proposals.
- 8.3.16 To better inform the decision making on the proposals, there is a pre-decision scrutiny by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee (SOC) on 17th October 2024. Under Section 9F Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000), SOC have the powers to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken in connection with the discharge of any executive and non-executive functions and to make reports or recommendations to the executive or to the authority with respect to the discharge of those functions. SOC also has the power to make reports or recommendations to the executive or to the authority on matters, which affect the authority’s area or the inhabitants of its area. Under Section 9FE of the LGA 2000, there is a duty on Cabinet to respond to the scrutiny report, indicating what (if any) action Cabinet proposes to take, within 2 months of receiving scrutiny report and recommendations.
- 8.3.17 The local needs assessment, feedback from the consultation, the equality impact assessment of the proposals in particular relating to the libraries closures and the measures to be taken to mitigate the impact on groups with protected characteristics, scrutiny recommendations, the statutory duties of the Council and the non-statutory guidance referred to above, all must be considered before Cabinet makes its decision on the proposals. Cabinet must be satisfied that the proposed Library Service model meet the assessed local needs and the duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. The report, in particular, at Paragraphs 6.47 to 6.48 sets out how the proposed provision meets the local assessed needs.
- 8.3.18 The report sets out, at paragraphs 6.68 to 6.72, the proposals to engage with VCFS organisations regarding potential acquisitions, including by way of Community Asset Transfers (CAT), of the Library buildings proposed for closure. The Council has adopted a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy, which sets out the process under which the Council may consider transfers of properties to community groups; the Council may also consider transfers/ leases by other means. Any such transfers will likely be classified as ‘disposals’ and will be subject to the Council’s decision making processes and powers. Under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has a statutory duty to dispose of land (other than short tenancies not exceeding 7 years) at the best price reasonably obtainable (“best consideration”),

unless it has the consent of the Secretary of State or subject to exceptions set out in the General Disposal Consent (England) 2003. Any decision to dispose of land, including by utilising the CAT policy, will need to consider the Council's best consideration duty and, if disposed of at less than best consideration, any relevant General Consents. In addition, any decision to provide financial assistance (such as a grant) to a VCFS organisations as part of any transfer/ lease, will need to consider the Council's obligations under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 to ensure that such financial assistance is not a subsidy or, if it is, that it is a lawful subsidy.

Comments approved by the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer.
(Date 09/09/2024)

8.3 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.3.1 The Council has a statutory duty, when exercising its functions, to comply with the provisions set out in the Sec 149 Equality Act 2010. The Council must, in the performance of its functions, therefore, have due regard to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Equality Impact Analyses (EQIA) has been undertaken to consider:

- the impact of the four proposed library closures
- the impact of the proposed model for the wider geographic areas around libraries proposed to close
- the impact of the proposed model overall for the borough

The EQIA's have also been used to consider mitigating provision to be implemented as part of any service changes.

8.3.2 Overall, the Libraries Review found that the current service is failing to meet need with a very low proportion of the population using the library services. Croydon libraries had 37,847 Active users in 2023-24, which is 9.7% of Croydon's population of 390,724, and benchmarked lowest for visits and issues in London. We have found that many residents are unable to access the library service due to the limited opening hours and the service is unable to effectively engage communities and promote the offer due to limited resources in the current model.

8.3.3 In regards to people with protected characteristics we have found that certain communities are already underrepresented in their local library usage including the Black community at Bradmore Green and Broad Green libraries, working age people (aged 20-64) across the network and older people (aged 65+) at New Addington, Norbury, South Norwood and Thornton Heath.

8.3.4 Our analysis indicates that unmitigated library closures would have a high negative

impact for the people who use them, through the loss of a local accessible facility at a convenient location.

- 8.3.5** However, the active users of each of the libraries proposed to close represents a small proportion overall of the population in the local catchment area indicating that the current model of provision is failing to effectively meet need. 66% of respondents to the consultation who primarily use a library proposed to close reported that they could use another Croydon Library.
- 8.3.6** The negative impacts of the closures are proposed to be mitigated in the following ways:
- Extended opening hours at the remaining nine libraries including introducing Saturday opening at all nine libraries and evening opening at two libraries, increasing staffed opening hours overall to 344 per week.
 - Provision of a scheduled weekly accessible bus shuttle service to enable residents with access needs to visit their nearest library
 - Delivery of an outreach service entailing community book collections and weekly events held in community venues with a particular focus on areas of higher deprivation raised during the consultation and working in partnership with local community partners suggested during consultation.
 - Provision of book collections for schools most impacted by the closure of libraries
 - Schools local to a library proposed to close will be accommodated for class visits at the next nearest Croydon Libraries
 - Investment in the library service digital offer including training and skills sessions
 - Improved marketing and communication of the service offer to better reach local residents
 - Access for Croydon residents to use libraries in neighbouring boroughs
- 8.3.7** Our analysis found that the improvements to the model overall could have a potential positive impact for residents with protected characteristics by increasing the staffed opening hours in nine libraries, extending the programme of events and activities, introducing a library outreach service which can support residents who aren't in close proximity to a library building to access the service and enable more effective marketing and promotion of the offer.
- 8.3.8** Dedicated staff resource within the service to develop partnerships would also enable the library service to better serve residents with protected characteristics through developing relationships and service improvements with community and faith sector organisations.
- 8.3.9** The table below highlights the key protected characteristics identified to have a high impact and the mitigations proposed to address this. Although not a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act, we have also considered the impact of the proposals on areas of higher deprivation and we received significant feedback from residents with concerns on how library closures would impact people living in more deprived areas. Further detail can be found in Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessments and Appendix C – Review of Closure Options.

Demographic	Impact	Mitigations
Age: Older people	<p>Library closures can cause a greater risk of isolation and digital exclusion for older people living in those areas. Older people represent a significant proportion of the population in Sanderstead and Bradmore Green.</p> <p>Extending the opening hours in the other libraries can support older people in those more densely populated areas to access services.</p> <p>Older people are more likely to also have mobility disabilities, vision or hearing impairments or other health issues, limiting their travel.</p>	<p>Opening hours and activities will be extended at the nearest libraries. Residents also have access to use libraries in neighbouring boroughs.</p> <p>A schedule of weekly accessible transport will be provided to enable local people with access needs to visit their nearest Croydon library.</p> <p>A local outreach offer will be provided in other community spaces, targeted to local need.</p>

	<p>Delivering an outreach service can better serve older people who are currently unable to visit our library buildings by bringing access to books and events to other local venues and sheltered housing sites.</p>	
<p>Age: Children and young people</p>	<p>Library closures can limit access to services for children and young people living in those areas to be able to use services with a consequential impact on literacy, reading and wellbeing.</p> <p>Extending the opening hours in the other libraries can support children and young people in those more densely populated areas to use the services and provides the opportunity to host more activities for young people including. Closer partnership working with Family Hubs at South Norwood and Thornton Heath libraries will better serve families and young people with a cohesive offer.</p> <p>Delivering an outreach service can serve schools and education settings with book collections for use</p>	<p>Opening hours and activities will be extended at the nearest libraries. Residents also have access to use libraries in neighbouring boroughs.</p> <p>A local outreach offer will be provided to support schools and education settings with book collections.</p>
<p>People with disabilities</p>	<p>Library closures can limit opportunities for people with disabilities who live in those areas to access the service.</p>	<p>Opening hours and activities will be extended at the nearest libraries. Residents also have access to use libraries in neighbouring boroughs.</p>

	<p>Extending the library service offer and opening hours in the other sites can support people living with disabilities in those areas to visit the service more.</p> <p>An outreach service could reach people with disabilities with a library service offer at a different local venue.</p>	<p>A schedule of weekly accessible transport will be provided to enable local people with access needs to visit their nearest Croydon library.</p> <p>A local outreach offer will be provided in other community spaces, targeted to local need.</p>
Race: Black, Asian and White communities	<p>The closure of Broad Green library in particular would impact Black and Asian communities disproportionately within the local community. Users of this library reported the highest rate of not being able to access alternative libraries and people who speak English as an additional language are a key user group currently which could lose access to local support and provision.</p> <p>The closure of Bradmore Green and Sanderstead libraries would disproportionately impact White communities who use the services more</p>	<p>Opening hours and activities will be extended at the nearest libraries</p> <p>A local outreach offer will be provided in other community spaces, targeted to local need and with local partners</p>

Comments approved by Helen Reeves, Head of Strategy and Policy.
(03/09/2024)

8.4 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

8.4.1 Croydon's libraries are currently used or connected to a number of other services within and external to the Council including but not limited to Croydon Music and Arts (CMA), One Croydon Healthy Communities hubs, Asian Resource Centre of Croydon (ARCC), Clear Community Web digital support, health partners, local schools and community groups who all use the library either inside or outside of current public opening hours. Changes to library services will naturally impact on the

current reach and delivery of these organisations and services and impact the future capacity of the libraries to deliver a broader community offer and support smaller organisations and services to reach residents.

- 8.4.2** However these proposals have been developed with the aim to transform the library buildings into vibrant community hubs which are designed and equipped to host a broader range of services. The new staffing model also establishes resource for the development and co-ordination of partnerships to strengthen and improve services for residents. Consequently, we anticipate that the new service would enable a growth in partnership working overall.
- 8.4.3** The delivery of this project continues to enable opportunities to connect and find shared solutions with other concurrent projects, most notably the Family Hubs development programme and the review of Croydon’s adult learning services. Both services have synergies with the library offer and project teams are collaborating to design joint service offers, particularly at the three proposed Community Hubs.
- 8.4.4** As in previous reviews, the proposals and consultation attracted significant interest from resident groups, library friends groups and other VCFS organisations in addition to individual residents. We want to continue actively engaging with and involving these groups in shaping the library service model to ensure it best meets the needs of people who live, work or study in Croydon.

Approved by: Kristian Aspinall, Director of Culture and Community Safety
(20/08/2024)

9. APPENDICES

9.1 A Library Service Review – Phase 3 Report

B Library Consultation Findings Report

C Analysis of Closure Options

D EQIA SET:

Di North Area: Broad Green, Norbury, South Norwood and Thornton Heath

Dii South Area 1: Bradmore Green and Coulsdon

Diii South Area 2: Purley, Sanderstead and Selsdon

Div Central Area: Ashburton, Central, New Addington and Shirley

Dv All Libraries

E – Community Engagement Plan in event of library closures

F – Proposed new library opening hours

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

10.1 Supporting reports from Phase 1 and 2 of this review process (23/24):

Cabinet paper 31st Jan 2024 – Outline of Library Service Review proposals and consultation plan

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/s53446/Final%20Cabinet%20paper%20-%20Libraries%20Service%20Review.pdf>

Appendices to the 31st Jan Cabinet

paper: A - Library Service Review

report (including needs analysis)

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/s53336/Appendix%20A%20-%20Library%20Service%20Review%20-%20Phases%201-2%20report%20-%20Cabinet.pdf>

B – Options for change

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/s53337/Appendix%20B%20Options%20for%20Change%20Cabinet.pdf>

C – Analysis of closure options

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/s53338/Appendix%20C%20-%20Analysis%20of%20Closure%20Options%20Cabinet.pdf>

10.2 Previous reports from past library service review processes (20/21):

Cabinet paper 17th May 2021 – Outcome of first libraries consultation

[https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=183&MId=21](https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=183&MId=2174)

74 Council paper 11th Oct 2021 – Outcome of second libraries consultation

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=2535>