

Library Review: Appendix E

Community Engagement Plan with partners in the event of library closures

IMPORTANT: The process outlined below only applies if the Council decides to withdraw the library service from any of the current libraries in the borough.

Background

The Council has recently concluded a consultation on the future of the library service. Part of the proposal put forward involves the closure of four libraries (Bradmore Green, Broad Green, Sanderstead and Shirley) in order to release funds to invest in the remaining nine. If the Council does decide to pursue this option, it is the Executive Mayor's aspiration that the buildings remain in use for community benefit and Council officers will do their very best to unearth viable interest for alternative community uses from the borough's partners. These partners include local Friends Groups, Resident's Associations, the Voluntary, Community & Faith Sector (VCFS), social enterprises and any potential residents' groups.

The proposals put forward in this note are being prepared before the decision has been taken so that there is a clear plan of action already in place if it does. Should Cabinet, when it meets on 25th Sept, decide not to close any of the four libraries, then this note becomes redundant.

The Council is proposing to run an active programme of engagement including in-person meetings, site engagement, and pro-active support for partners to realise the Executive Mayor's aspiration for each building to remain in community use.

The purpose of the proposed engagement

1. To publicise the opportunity for viable partners to consider ways they can keep the building in community use.
2. To identify interested partners, including those that came forward during the consultation.
3. To identify any opportunities for partners to collaborate.
4. To provide support and advice partners.

Considerations - Process

- The process needs to be well documented, equitable and transparent (e.g. any answers provided by the Council to questions raised during the engagement should be redacted to anonymise them and then added to a dedicated and publicised webpage).
- Faith groups are able to apply but any faith activity has to be subordinate to the primary use as a community-wide facility.
- Where the local 'Friends of' group or Resident's Association are not engaged as a possible partner for a library, they will be engaged on the potential shortlist.

Considerations - Assets of Community Value (ACVs)

- Sanderstead Library already has ACV status (full list of ACVs here [Microsoft Word - Croydon Register of Assets of Community Value 8th May 2024](#)). We have received a nomination for Shirley Library which was agreed on Tuesday 17th September 2024 and Shirley Library has been added to the ACV register.
- We welcome applications for ACV status for the other buildings

Considerations – Financial Sustainability

- Partners will need to be fully aware that the minimum requirement in any business case will be to operate the building in a way that is cost neutral to the Council.
- Relating to the above, colleagues from the library service will provide indicative running costs for each of the four libraries as part of the materials associated with this engagement.
- Non-residential buildings need to meet a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating before the Council is legally able to let them. Updated EPC assessments will be made as part of the process and the Council will seek to address any issues identified as required to achieve the minimum EPC prior to the lease commencing using CIL funding for any necessary capital works.
- The Council may consider making 'Transitional Costs' grants.

What will the engagement look like?

If needed, this engagement should run for a 3-month period and be led by the Communities Team with support from other Council services as required, including libraries, assets, communications and planning. It will comprise the following –

- A dedicated, webpage on the Council's website where relevant information can be easily accessed.
- A document for each of the four libraries that contains a description, site plan, running costs, photos, floor plans etc (similar to an estate agents marketing details).
- Information notices placed at each of the four libraries advising new arrangements.
- An article on the Council's website and an article in Your Croydon.
- An email to partners advertising the potential opportunities.
- Advertised 'Open House' sessions at each of the four libraries where interested parties are able to view the whole building.
- A virtual meeting where partner organisations can ask questions.
- A meeting in the Town Hall where partner organisations can ask questions.
- An advice service, that runs for the full 3-months, accessed via communityrelations@croydon.gov.uk