Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

11th February 2025

Title:	**EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION - TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY LIBRARIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICES**
Lead Member:	**Councillor Saima Suleman – Cabinet Member - Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism**
Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee:	**Councillor Shabrana Hussain, Chair of Neighbourhoods Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
Has this report been shared with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair?	**Will be shared 3rd February 2025 (Neighbourhoods O&SC 5/2/25)**
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Authorised by:	**Richard Brooks Executive Director, Corporate Services (Acting)**
Is this a Key Decision?	**Yes**
	Forward Plan Reference: 013452/2024

Reason(s) why not included on the Forward Plan and confirm who has authorised it to be considered:	**Not Applicable**
Is this a Late Report?	**No**
Reason(s) why Late and confirm who has authorised it to be considered:	**Not Applicable**
Is this decision eligible for 'call in?'	**YES**
If 'call-in' has been dis-applied, please provide reason(s) and confirm who has authorised:	**Not Applicable**
Wards:	**All wards**
Does this report contain exempt or confidential information?	**No**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks approval for an amalgamated Community Libraries and Neighbourhood Advice & Information Service. The new service, to be called Connected Communities, will deliver library services alongside wider support for local communities. The proposed delivery model uses library buildings to provide a footprint of universal spaces within communities to respond to the challenges facing citizens early before they fall into crisis, holding a strong focus on good outcomes for citizens.

1.2 This report seeks approval for a revised core and comprehensive offer for the provision of library services within the city. The proposed offer reflects analysis of needs, current demand and the demographics of the city; statutory requirements and public consultations undertaken between 4th April and 12th December 2024 in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964; and the completion of an Equality Impact Assessment.

1.3 The proposals are consistent with the council's overall financial situation and requirements. They deliver £2.285m recurrent revenue savings from 2025/26 onwards. Initial work has been undertaken to evaluate the capital requirements relating to buildings and an asset review with the Corporate Landlord function will follow approval of the decisions in this paper, which relate to the service model. £7.650m is allocated for neighbourhood and community assets, including libraries, over the next 2 financial years in the Capital Programme, with year 1 of this programme included in the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan. This paper sets out the service model and pattern of provision but does not make commitments to the continuation of specific buildings.

2. COMMISSIONERS' REVIEW

2.1 Commissioners support the recommendations set out in this report. There will still be significant work to do through the implementation process, but the strategy proposed provides a blueprint for the way forward. Commissioners note the importance of securing partner-led proposals in line with the saving assumptions and the requirement for BCC to review the existing library asset base and develop a service-specific asset strategy to ensure the service is adequately accommodated. It will be essential to manage any approved capital programme to stay within budget and not allow mission creep to ensure that the overall outcome is delivered. This is, however, a significant step forward.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

3.1 Notes the outcome of the public consultation.

3.2 Approves the recommendation set out in section 4.71 "High Level Proposed Library Services Offer – Recommended Model" of this report, including the establishment of Community Hubs and revised hours of provision for library services.

3.3 Approves the Strategic Vision, Framework and intended outcomes set out in Appendix A.

3.4 Separately to making the decision on the recommendation set out in section 4.71, Cabinet is also asked to make a separate decision to approve a further recommendation to increase the opening days of all part-time library provision, which was proposed to be reduced to two days (as proposed in section 4.71), to a minimum of three days per week, as detailed in Appendix H.

3.5 Delegates authority for implementing the recommended service model to the Executive Director, Corporate Services (Acting) in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Social Justice, Community Safety & Equalities and Transformation, Governance and HR.

3.6 Notes that the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan will propose a capital allocation for neighbourhood and community assets review including libraries; that further work will be undertaken with the Council's Corporate Landlord function to develop an asset strategy and proposals, and that all decisions with capital implications will be subject to the council's spending and capital gateway controls.

4. KEY INFORMATION

The thinking behind the proposal for libraries and advice services

4.1 The thinking behind the proposal put forward in this report is that the council's Community Libraries will change as we build upon their traditional strengths. Central to this is a shift from 'Libraries as Buildings' to 'Library Services' that are delivered in more flexible ways and the efficient use of our corporate estate as the physical location for delivering a wider range of services for citizens.

"Our Community Libraries will provide safe and universal spaces across the city for people to visit, study, read, borrow books and other materials, connect, or seek help without fear or judgement".

The intention is that library and advice services will work with communities across the city to deliver services closer to more people, with a greater focus on earlier intervention and prevention. To do this we will:

- Deliver a network of co-located services from Community Library Hubs through collaboration with stakeholders and local communities, to try as hard as possible to ensure that the offer responds to the needs of all our communities and is flexible in meeting the evolving needs of the city.

- Seek to modernise the service through continued creation of partnerships with community groups, businesses, corporate sponsors and educational establishments to build a service offer which is fit for the current and future needs of our city.

- Increase the promotion of library services through social media and Birmingham City Council's website. Additionally, we will collaborate with the community and partners across the city, including other council services, to connect with individuals who currently do not utilise library services.

- Ensure the libraries and advice service offer is data-led and subject to regular reviews to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the city. It will address inequalities or gaps in provision and will identify patterns and trends in usage and access which may require adjustment to the way in which services are delivered at local level.

Not everyone agrees that this proposal is appropriate: see paragraph 6.44 below for percentages of people approving and disapproving. Many people have stated that they do not think there should be any reduction to the services operated directly by council employees. Perceived negatives to this proposal are further noted in paragraphs 4.78, 4.95, 4.98 and section 5 below. Those concerns are not repeated here.

A new model for library services

4.2 The new service model requires a different approach to the use of library buildings. Some existing Community Library locations will act as Hubs with relatively longer opening hours and a wider range of services. Other locations for library services will operate with reduced opening hours. Some of what is currently provided by the council will need to transfer with its associated costs to other organisations or be replaced by mobile provision.

4.3 Neighbourhood Advice & Information Service (NAIS) has operated two advice centres in Erdington and Northfield, offering an advice service from Monday to Saturday. The service provides immediate help at the reception desk or scheduled appointments within 10 working days for more complex issues. There are no similar physical advice centres serving other high needs areas of the city, although NAIS runs a weekly advice surgery at Druids Heath Library every Thursday on a first-come, first-served basis. NAIS also collaborates with other council services to support at-risk individuals and new tenants.

4.4 The proposals in this paper seek to address this gap in coverage of advice services whilst seeking to increase their overall efficiency. The Erdington office has now closed, with the staff working from home or other council locations. This has released the building to the Corporate Landlord programme, generating additional value for the council.

4.5 Since 2017, the current 'as is' pattern of library provision across the city comprises:

- The Library of Birmingham.
- **35 Community Libraries** (two buildings are currently closed, one due to planned refurbishment and one due to health and safety).
- **1x mobile library vehicle.**
- A digital offer
- Library Services at Home.
- A prison library service funded via a government grant.

The current core offer includes access to books and other lending and reference materials, free digital access, a virtual online access, public computers, free Wi-Fi, printing facilities, self-service options, community hire spaces, wellbeing support sessions, arts and cultural events activities, organised by library staff in conjunction with partner agencies.

4.6 The proposed 'to be' pattern of service provision across the city would comprise:

- The Library of Birmingham
- **27 Community Library service locations** provided by the council, comprising:
    - 10x full-time Community Library Hubs open 4 days a week providing full library service offer, a range of activities and events and a dedicated specialist advice team advising on a range of services including debt, benefits, housing and employment.
    - 13x part-time library services open 3 days a week providing full library service offer, a range of activities and events and digital self-service.
    - 4x co-located part-time library services open 3 days per week providing full library service offer, a range of activities and events and digital self-service.
- **7x partner-led opportunities.**
- **2x mobile library vehicle.**
- **1x library closure** (Spring Hill, which is already closed).
- An expanded digital offer, retaining Library Services at Home and the prison library.

4.7 The proposed model involves the amalgamation of two existing council services: Community Libraries and NAIS. In the proposed model, both services will be delivered through the same physical footprint of buildings. This will significantly increase the availability of advice services to residents across the city by delivering them from a larger number of more local venues.

4.8 Both library and advice services are important and involve significant specialist expertise. In the case of libraries, this is reflected in the retained role of Head of Library Services and Chief Librarian for Birmingham, who is the head of the profession in the city. The value placed on advice services is reflected in continuing funding for this non-statutory function, based on the positive impact for citizens and the value for money of this spending.

4.9 This paper does not address the Library of Birmingham, which is very different from the network of Community Libraries in terms of its size, role, range of services and funding arrangements, and will be the subject of future review.

Finances, savings and partner provision

4.10 Birmingham City Council (BCC) is reducing its overall spending so that it becomes financially sustainable. The proposals in this paper deliver a significant revenue saving for the council at the same time as changing the service model. Following the issue of a Section 114 Notice in September 2023, a £2.285m reduction in Community Libraries and NAIS annual spending for 2025/26 onwards was proposed through redesigning and amalgamating the services. These proposals were approved by City Council as part of the 2024/25 Council Budget and planned to be phased in over two years.

4.11 The base budget for the Community Libraries and NAIS services combined in 2023/24 was £6.160m. This reduced to £4.763m in 2024/25. This will reduce further to £3.872m in 2025/26 on an ongoing basis, generating a recurrent revenue saving of £2.288m subject to the proposals in this paper being accepted.

4.12 The savings will be made from a reduction in the combined workforce (subject to staff consultation) plus reductions in building costs and supplies, and increased income. The overall saving is split across these categories as follows:

Overall Savings Summary				
	23/24 Budget (pre saving)	**2024/25 Base Budget (£1.397m target savings)**	**New budget 25/26 onwards (total 2.288m savings)**	**Saving**
Staffing	6,421,330	4,974,330	4,757,366	-1,663,964
Premises	1,658,940	1,658,940	1,233,224	-425,716
Supplies	489,935	489,935	430,000	-59,935
Grants	428,218	428,218	428,218	0
Income	-2,838,439	-2,788,439	-2,976,861	-138,422
Grand Total	**6,159,983**	**4,762,983**	**3,871,947**	**-2,288,036**

4.13 The staff saving is generated by reducing the combined workforce of the two services from 148 to 110 staff, reflecting reduced opening hours for some locations. A Section 188 consultation

process with staff and trade unions, including a detailed business case for new staffing arrangements is now underway to enable these changes. Once the proposals in this paper are approved by Cabinet, the staffing changes, associated savings and change in the operating model will be implemented. The staff changes are shown in the following table.

Staff Changes			
Grade	**Current, as-is Structure**	**To-be Structure**	**Difference**
G7	2	1	-1
G6	1	3	+2
G5	9.82	6	-3.82
G4	39.51	26	-13.51
G3	25.89	20.4	-5.49
G2	58.42	53.8	-4.62
G1	13.92	0	-13.92
TOTAL	**150.56**	110.2	-40.36

Combined staffing for Libraries and NAIS services: 'as-is' and 'to-be'

4.14 £ 0.426m of the revenue saving is delivered through reductions in building running costs. This is achieved through the transfer of responsibilities for seven Community Libraries to other forms of partner-led operation, and one library closure, detailed in the following table:

Library	**New Model**	**Cost Saved**	**Risk**	**Mitigation**
Sutton Coldfield	BCC retained – fully funded by Royal Sutton Town Council	£255,451	Low	Mobile Van
Walmley	BCC retained – fully funded by Royal Sutton Town Council	£33,219	Low	Mobile Van
Boldmere	BCC retained – fully funded by Royal Sutton Town Council	£28,692	Low	Mobile Van
Glebe Farm	Community Asset Transfer – full repairing and insuring lease	£20,671	Medium	Mobile Van
Bloomsbury	Community Asset Transfer – full repairing and insuring lease	£5,000	Low	Mobile Van
Frankley	Early collaboration with local stakeholders and community group to find funded solution.	£22,054	High	Mobile Van
Bartley Green	Community Group to run via Management Agreement. Building	£14,155	Medium	Mobile Van

	may stay with BCC as in trust. Corporate Landlord advising regarding legalities.			
Spring Hill	Closure	£46,475	Low	N/A

4.15 Any Community Asset Transfers will need to be agreed on a transparent case-by-case basis, ensuring that council assets are protected and additional financial liabilities are avoided (for example, through the use of full repairing and insuring leases).

4.16 Engagement has taken place with Royal Sutton Town Council regarding the continuation of library provision in Sutton Coldfield, this includes Sutton Coldfield, Walmley and Boldmere Libraries, through a formal agreement. There will be an exploration of alternative site provision for Sutton Coldfield Library due to the current condition of the building, post cabinet report. It is proposed that BCC will continue to fund Mere Green as the Community Library Hub. The intention is that BCC will retain the ownership of all assets and that Royal Sutton Town Council will meet service responsibilities related to staffing and building maintenance/repairs etc, through a proposed service level agreement.

4.17 Over a number of years there has been close collaboration with three community organisations that have supported the delivery of library services and activities within Glebe Farm, Bloomsbury and Bartley Green Libraries These organisations have requested Community Asset Transfers or management agreements prior to and during the consultation period. These will also be progressed following Cabinet decision

4.18 Should issues arise which prevent a partner-led library from being implemented, that library will be decommissioned and mobile provision will be provided as an alternative. The nearest BCC-run library from all partner-led libraries is provided in the following table:

Proposed partner-led library	**Nearest BCC Library**	**Distance by car in miles**	**Distance walking in miles**
Bartley Green Library	Weoley Castle Library	1.6	1.4
Bloomsbury Library	Aston Library	1.9	1.4
Boldmere Library	Erdington Library	1.8	1.7
Frankley Library	Northfield Library	2.9	2.7
Glebe Farm Library	Shard End Library	1.9	1.2
Sutton Coldfield Library	Mere Green Library	1.8	1.8
Walmley Library	Erdington Library	2.2	2.2

Capital investment asset strategy

4.19 Birmingham City Council is tightly constrained in terms of capital availability. Nonetheless, investment will be required to maintain any open buildings at a safe and accessible standard, and to enable a shift in the model of provision towards early intervention and prevention activity. £7.650m is allocated for neighbourhood and community assets, including libraries, over the next 2 financial years in the Capital Programme, with year 1 of this programme included in the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan. This Cabinet paper sets out the service model and pattern of provision but does not make commitments to the continuation of specific buildings.

4.20 From a Corporate Landlord perspective, any new service delivery model resulting from the recommendations in this report will require a review of the existing library asset base and a service-specific asset strategy. This will ensure that the service is adequately accommodated and also ensure that the council maximises the value of the corporate property base.

4.21 Some elements of the current estate are in need of urgent maintenance and investments are also required to allow the service to optimise the new delivery model and achieve the intended outcomes for citizens. Initial work has identified the community hub locations plus those community library buildings most in need of urgent repair as the priority for investigation. Further work is needed to ensure immediate disrepair and building related costs and risks to service delivery are properly quantified. This exercise will also include consideration of the most appropriate accommodation available in each locality.

4.22 The council also requires a longer-term strategic review of these assets including the delivery of other customer facing services in each locality, to achieve a more suitable and sustainable public sector asset profile. This strategy will make recommendations for retention, investment and potentially, acquisition around identified land and buildings, providing indicative costings wherever possible. Moreover, this strategy will seek to identify solutions for services (including library services) currently delivered from those community-facing assets that are considered unsustainable for operational use in the medium-long term. Savings and capital receipt assumptions and projections will be referenced against any investment asks. A new cross directorate Corporate Accommodation Board chaired by the Executive Director for Children and Families has been established to support asset optimisation, co-location and rationalisation.

4.23 The strategy will also make reference to opportunities associated with the optimisation of the Library of Birmingham as a Corporate Property asset.

Corporate Landlord implications

4.24 To support any subsequent capital investment decisions associated with the service change set out in this paper, the Corporate Landlord team will:

- Work with the library service and corporate finance to quantify immediate works and the associated costs.
- Seek to deliver the programme of any immediate works identified with a view to ensuring value for money, enhancing the optimisation, efficiency, sustainability and ultimately the value of the corporate estate where this relates to providing accommodation for the delivery of community libraries and any other co-located services.

- Work collaboratively across the council to bring forward the strategic review of the community-facing asset base on a locality-by-locality basis with a focus in the first iteration on the provision of accommodation to support the change of the community library service.
- Instigate an immediate programme of work to address priorities around urgent building maintenance and any health and safety issues identified. The Corporate Landlord service will highlight any risks associated with ongoing service provision from in-scope buildings and make recommendations for closure if necessary to mitigate these risks and/or avoid expenditure on property assets that are uneconomic to maintain.

Background and context

4.25 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 mandates local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, highlighting the essential role of public libraries in promoting access to information, education and culture to support people living, working and studying in the city. This includes access to books, technology, community events, business startups, job seeking, study space and research materials.

- Local authorities must assess the diverse needs of their communities, considering factors such as demographics and socio-economic status.
- Regular consultations and evaluations are essential to ensure library services remain relevant and accessible to all.
- Funding for public libraries primarily comes from local authorities, which significantly influences the quality and scope of services. Authorities must balance budget constraints with the necessity of providing high-quality services, appropriate staffing, materials, facility maintenance, and programme development.
- Local authorities can innovate through various delivery models including partnerships with community organisations and volunteering programmes.

4.26 In summary, the Act requires local authorities to deliver library services while allowing them to adapt these services to meet community needs effectively. The proposed model meets these requirements.

4.27 The advice and information services within this delivery model are to be partially funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), which has legislatively set conditions for spend, those being that HRA funds from tenants' rent payments must be spent specifically on tenants, not the wider community (whose services are funded by Council Tax), and where services are provided by Birmingham City Council, the charge must be set at cost. As such, reductions in the cost of providing advice and information services leads to a reduction of £0.300m in the HRA funding available. Therefore, the actual reduction to the Community Libraries and NAIS expenditure budgets is £2.635m.

4.28 The council remains committed to reforming services with a strong focus on Early Intervention and Prevention and good citizen outcomes. Over a period, we also see further opportunities to review and develop the localised service offer in line with the council's priorities and financial position. This includes co-location of resources and, greater alignment of services with the needs and aspirations of our local populations.

4.29 A Needs Analysis (Appendix B) and a Draft Vision, Strategic Framework and Outcomes (Appendix A 1, A2 and A3) have been developed alongside an Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix C), to help shape proposals for public consultation. These documents were further

reviewed considering the consultation findings, and inform the recommendations contained within the report. The approach to the consultation and findings is set out within Appendix D of this report.

4.30 The recommendations in this report strike a balance in meeting local need, preserving the value that library and advice services hold within communities alongside our legal requirements, whilst ensuring that the council operates within its financial means.

4.31 The exceptional financial challenges facing the local authority, coupled with growing economic and social pressures within communities, mean that library buildings are one of the few remaining council public-facing spaces which act as a first point of contact for residents needing help. A good example of the versatility of the service over the last 12 months, has been our libraries becoming 'Warm Welcome' spaces for residents experiencing cost of living pressures. Library staff have stepped into this space offering navigation signposting and early help and support to residents where needed and we are grateful for their continued flexibility, innovation and professionalism.

4.32 Historically, a number of public, private and voluntary sector organisations continue to work in partnership across our library services to offer activities relating to health and wellbeing, helping people to get jobs, gaining new skills, digital inclusion, startup support to micro businesses and arts and cultural activities.

4.33 The approach set out within this report, seeks to build upon these examples. It changes the emphasis from 'libraries as buildings' towards library services delivered in multi-functional Community Library Hubs, increasing the value and efficiency of the total range of services delivered. This enables council services to reach out to citizens early and, wherever possible, preventing their further escalation of need into higher cost or statutory interventions.

An Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P) Approach

4.34 The key principles of an EI&P and direction of travel for the organisation was set out within the Cabinet Report (April 2023). Since then, Birmingham City Council has scaled up its ambition towards becoming an EI&P led organisation, the founding principles for which include:

- Data and insight-driven actions.
- Easier self-navigation support for citizens wherever possible.
- Strengths-based approaches to our interaction with citizens 'how do we help you to help yourself?'.
- Multi-disciplinary approaches to team working.
- Creating a connection to communities and community assets to enable citizens to live healthy happy lives within communities.

4.35 Our engagement with citizens during the development of the EI&P approach translated these principles further to reflect basic needs and aspirations:

- Having a roof over your head.
- Money in your pocket.
- Help to get a job and then a better job.
- Connection to communities '*things to do and places to be'.*

4.36 The NAIS, through their teams of highly skilled advisors, provides an important role in maximising the income of households, tackling debt issues and preventing severe financial hardship including associated vulnerabilities or risks that may arise as a result to their wellbeing,

safety and security. In April 2023 to March 2024 NAIS advised citizens to claim an additional £19.922m in benefits and grants (exceeding the 2023/24 target of £12 million.) Of this £8.523m was confirmed as in payment by the year-end. The service has an overall customer satisfaction rating of 80% good and 10% fair.

4.37 Given the size of the city, the current service offer from two main sites does not provide the level of physical coverage required, particularly for parts of the city where the cost of living crisis is having a greater impact. The proposals in this paper seek to address this gap in coverage whilst increasing overall efficiency of advice services. Use of the library's footprint through location within the 10 Community Library Hubs with the additional flexibility to respond to local need will improve local accessibility to our council tenants. This important proposition has been agreed with the City Housing Directorate and is underpinned by a Draft Service Level Agreement which will track the use of the HRA funds to ensure appropriate use.

4.38 Over the last 18 months, the council has also developed prototypes and testing of early intervention and prevention approaches against the key principles above. This incorporates learning from across the organisation including Adult and Children Social Care, Public Health and nationally, from Barking and Dagenham, Leeds and Wigan.

4.39 Over the past 12 months, there has been significant digital development which will support the new model of delivery, enable the council and its partner agencies to reach people earlier, before they fall into crisis - and with the ability to respond quickly to those that do. Through the support of the West Midlands Combined Authority we have also developed a digital pilot using data, insight and behavioural science to proactively reach out to households who may be at risk of financial hardship. The pilot maximised the income of 40 households totalling £0.094m, alongside reductions in risks of statutory services for social care and homelessness with an estimated cost avoidance of £1.320m. Work is under way to digitise and scale this offer across the council through the introduction of a OneView system which will provide greater visibility of households enabling the earlier targeting of households experiencing hardship.

4.40 The proposed delivery model takes this learning and will amalgamate the existing NAIS service and Community Libraries into one proactive service offer which is data and insight-driven to help target vulnerable households much earlier, thus preventing a fall into crisis. Further information on the need for digital transformation in the service is outlined in Appendix A.3 Outcomes Framework. An example of this is also included in Appendix M-Using behavioural science to access income support. Implementation of the new digital infrastructure will form part of the overall implementation of the new operating model.

The concept of Community Hubs

4.41 Most local authorities now have libraries that operate on some form of a Community Hub model, drawing together resources to offer wider services. In its simplest form, this concept enables the co-location of services and activities alongside the delivery of a core library offer as outlined in section 4.71 of this report. These services are driven by the needs, interests and aspirations of residents in the local area which means that there is not one defined delivery model. Hub services are not new to Birmingham. Over the years, these have gradually evolved with support from both statutory and voluntary partner agencies, examples include libraries in Handsworth, Ward End, Shard End, Stirchley and Glebe Farm.

Needs analysis

4.42 A library service needs analysis has been undertaken by BCC officers ahead of developing the draft proposals for the public consultations (Appendix B).

4.43 Over the last decade, especially since the pandemic, there have been changes in how people prefer to access library services including, self-serve, a growing preference for digital content, 24/7 online access, and the ability to access multiple services simultaneously and in one location.

4.44 At the same time overall physical usage (as defined by a combination of both footfall and PC usage in libraries) has declined by 45% from 2019-2023. Some of this decline can be attributed to library closures/reduction in hours. The pandemic and closures of amenities during 2020 was also a major contributor to this trend.

4.45 Pre-booking for PC usage in Community Libraries from 2015 to 2023 on average declined 60%. However, this reflects a shift to citizens bringing their own devices to use in libraries with access to free Wi-Fi.

4.46 The volume of issues and renewals processed manually by staff in community libraries from 2014-2023 on average declined by 69%, however, this is offset by an average of 332% increase in self-service kiosk usage in the same period.

4.47 37% of Community Library provision (13 out of 35) has increased active library memberships of more than 5% from the year 2014-2023

4.48 34% of Community Library provision (12 out of 35) has had notably stable active memberships between the years 2014-2023. This is no more or no less than a 5% difference between the earliest year of data available and the latest.

4.49 28% of Community Library provision (10 out of 35) has seen decreased library memberships of more than 5% from the year 2014-2023.

4.50 Current active membership of mobile library provision from 2014-2023 has increased 13.5% despite active membership declines in some physical libraries.

4.51 At the same time there are at least 13 libraries that have over 10,000 active members, which when cross-referenced with socioeconomic needs there is an opportunity to provide additional services above and beyond the statutory offer, for example, benefits, welfare and wellbeing services, jobs and skills support.

4.52 Citizens are willing to, and have been, using self-serve digital tools, where available.

Additional possible funding routes to support investment in accommodation

4.53 Any public-facing facility with high footfall requires ongoing capital investment. From 2020 decisions to invest in the capital costs relating to buildings accommodating library services were deferred until a more sustainable approach to Community Libraries was developed. Paras 4.19-4.24 above set out building's investment and Corporate Landlord implications from the proposed service model.

4.54 Applications will also be submitted to the Community Infrastructure Levy which is nationally used by other local authorities to remodel libraries, recognising their wider potential as core social infrastructure to a local area. Work is also under way to secure commitments through the council's contracted providers through their social value contributions.

4.55 Where there has been strong collaboration historically by community partners in individual libraries, the opportunities for Community Asset Transfers will continue to be explored. This will include the formulation of robust commercial agreements to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for all parties are clearly understood and the council's liabilities are strictly managed.

4.56 Legal advice and support will continue to be engaged with regards to buildings held in Trusts with a view to enabling the respective Trusts to consider enabling a transfer of accommodation to third parties. Independent representation is being put in place to enable said Trusts to make objective decisions.

4.57 Fundraising is a competitive environment. We will therefore explore options for generating greater income through co-location rental for community facing services, room space hire for specific events through to raising resources, both in terms of cash and in-kind contributions. Appendix F sets out examples of how this approach can be taken forward. The intention is that this will form part of the annual delivery planning alongside the strategic framework.

4.58 In addition, the service will investigate NPO status. A National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) is a museum, library or arts/culture/heritage organisation that receives regular funding from Arts Council England (ACE). ACE is currently reviewing the processes it will use to designate NPOs from 2027 onwards. Initial conversations have taken place with ACE about applying for NPO status and we will resume those conversations as soon as ACE have completed their review. Whilst the Arts Council are unlikely to fund statutory provision, they will work with library services to build and enhance cultural activity. This could include refurbishment of certain areas within a library, or funding activity such as exhibitions on local history.

Options considered

4.59 Four initial option proposals formed the first phase of consultation which took place from 4th April 2024 – 17th July 2024. These initial proposals, based on international best practice, are set out below and were chosen based on the deliverability of the savings and outcomes within the timeframes required. Views were also sought on viable alternative options that would deliver the savings required within the timeframes for the budget savings. The following table shares those options:

Option	Scale of change of provision	Description
1	No change	Do nothing and retain 35 Library buildings, Library of Birmingham, mobile offer, libraries at home offer and Prison library. **This option is not a favoured option** due to the high-cost number of disadvantages outlined in the consultation pack.
2	High	Keep Library of Birmingham and reduce Community Libraries to 6 but invest in co-located larger spaces and operations including expanding the digital offer and a mobile service whilst also retaining libraries at home and the prison library. **This option is not a favoured option** due to the limited number of community libraries.

3	Medium	Move from current 35 Community Libraries to a minimum of 11 Community Library Hubs (including Library of Birmingham) open 6 days per week with a BCC offer of Library Services and Early Intervention and Prevention. For the remaining libraries, work with the Voluntary and Community sector to enable groups to run libraries in their communities. This could be as a hub and spoke model of delivery to wrap around the core offer in the community. In addition, where appropriate co-locate library provision in suitable local buildings with suitable local organisations (e.g. colleges/wellbeing centre/GP surgeries). Based on current information on community interest and co-location opportunities, we estimate a combination of the council run and community led provision might secure a minimum of 16 building- based library services. This figure may change.
4	Low	**Recommended**: Move from current 35 Community Libraries to a mixed delivery model of: • BCC run Community Library Hubs open 5 days per week providing library and early intervention and prevention services. • BCC Community Library Hubs open part-time hours providing library and early intervention and prevention services. • BCC staff co-located with partners/community groups providing library services. • Community groups running library services via Community Asset Transfer. • Library of Birmingham. • Virtual (digital) Library. • Expansion of mobile provision. • Prison Library (Government grant received to deliver HMP Library) • Self Service. • Libraries at Home. Based on current information on community interest and co-location opportunities, we estimate a combination of the council run and community led provision might secure circa 25 building-based library services. This figure may change.

4.60 Following the first phase of consultation (4th April 2024 – 17th of July 2024), all feedback was collated and analysed. Option 1 could not be taken forward due to the savings required. Option 2 was also discounted due to greater challenges in meeting our statutory requirements.

4.61 Additionally, as part of the first phase of consultation, organisations and groups were invited to express an interest in running a Library building. This would mean the building and Library offer would remain open through partner-led service provision. In total, seven partner-led Libraries are proposed and are shared as part of option 3 and option 4.

4.62 Option 3 and option 4 formed the final part of the consultation which took place between 23rd August 2024 - Friday 27th September 2024. Within the first stage of consultation, the public requested more detail on what the options could look like for each library, the final stage of consultation provided this detail, including the proposed Community Library Hubs that were

selected and clarified what the proposed opening days could look like for each library.

4.63 The proposed provision for option 3 was selected using a priority list framework. Equal weighting was applied to both Community Need and Usage & Access. Community need was determined using the Multiple Deprivation Index. Usage was determined by items issued, membership, events and community activity. This ranked the libraries from 1-35 with 1 being the highest priority for inclusion in the model.

4.64 The proposed provision for option 4 did not use the priority list framework as all Libraries currently open, would remain open, either as a BCC Community Library Hub, BCC part-time Library or a partner-led Library. The only closure would be Spring Hill Library which has been temporarily closed since December 2022.

4.65 The proposals that went forward for the final stage of consultation are set out in the following table.

Option	Scale of change of provision	Description	Option progressed?
3	Medium	Move from the current 35 Community Libraries to a minimum of 10 Community Library Hubs (including Library of Birmingham) open 5 days per week with a BCC offer of Library services and Early Intervention and Prevention with co-locations and partner-led provision opportunities. Proposed 18 BCC funded building- based library services: • 10xBCC full time Community Library Hubs • 6x BCC part-time Library Offer • 2x Co-location • 7x partner-led opportunities • 1x additional mobile library vehicle • 1x Library closure Also expanding the digital offer and retaining Library Services at Home and the Prison Library.	Progressed to final phase of the consultation
4	Low	RECOMMENDED OPTION: Move from current 35 BCC Community Libraries to a mixed delivery model including BCC-run Community Library Hubs open 5 days per week providing Library and Early Intervention and Prevention services, part-time BCC libraries and co-locations and partner-led provision opportunities. Proposed 28 BCC funded buildings (including Library of Birmingham)- based library services: • 10xBCC full time Community Library Hubs • 13x BCC part time Library offer • 4xCo-location	Progressed to final phase of the consultation

		• 7x partner-led opportunities • 1x additional mobile library vehicle • 1x Library closure Also expanding the digital offer and retaining Library Services at Home and the Prison Library.	

4.66 Following the final phase of the consultation, option 3 was rejected as it did not provide the widespread cover that option 4 did. This shift would significantly increase reliance on the seven externally resourced libraries designated as "partner-led" in the model, introducing an added risk of further potential closures, if partner agreements are either not secured or fail in the future. This would make demonstrating a statutory compliant offer difficult.

4.67 Public consultation results further emphasise the community's preferences, clearly expressing the need for sufficient community spaces close to their neighbourhoods to serve various demographics providing safe spaces for children to do homework, combating loneliness among older vulnerable individuals and offering accessible venues for families.

4.68 In response to feedback and analysis from the final phase of consultation the recommended option 4 was revised. Significant feedback suggested more equitable split of hours between the Community Library Hubs and the part-time libraries. This input was considered carefully by officers. As a result, the hours allocated to individual libraries have been amended accordingly based on Library usage and access data.

4.69 Additionally, Small Heath library was included as the Community Library Hub for Ladywood, replacing the Library of Birmingham offering consistent opportunities for further development.

4.70 After the final consultation, an internal error was identified in the scoring mechanism for option 3. This error was rectified and the amended results communicated for consultation. This does not affect the final recommendation due to the reasons outlined below.

High-level proposed library services offer – recommended model

4.71 Under the proposed statutory service model Birmingham will retain 28 library service locations (including the Library of Birmingham), offering comprehensive coverage across the city. This will include 10 Community Library Hubs opening four days per week, one in each parliamentary constituency. The remaining locations will operate on a two or three-day basis determined by current usage. ***[Note that this is amended by Recommendation 3.4 of this Cabinet Report to increase opening hours to a minimum of three days for all part time locations.]*** There will also be an additional mobile library vehicle, totalling 2 mobile libraries for the service.

4.72 Under the proposed delivery model for option 4, opening hours for BCC led statutory library provision would total 714 hours per week. This represents a 31.94% reduction from the current 1049 hours per week. The proposed hours include the mobile library services and the Library of Birmingham. The specific opening days and times of individual libraries will be confirmed after the staff consultation concludes and will be regularly reviewed.

4.73 The overview below outlines the overall proposed library service provision in Birmingham, detailing the various library facilities and services that will be available to the community.

Statutory provision

- Library of Birmingham.
- 27 BCC Community Library service locations.
- Virtual (digital) library.
- Expansion of mobile provision.
- Self-service.
- Libraries at Home.
- Access to library catalogues and wide range of books and resources.
- A citywide book reservations service.
- A wide range of events and regular activities.
- Study space.
- Access to the internet on library computers, free Wi-Fi access.
- Access to skilled, trained and knowledgeable staff.
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- Study space.
- Access to the internet on library computers, free Wi-Fi access.
- Access to skilled, trained and knowledgeable staff.

Additional provision

- 7 partner-led libraries.
- BCC staff co-located with partners/community groups, providing library services.
- Prison Library *(Government grant received to deliver HMP Library).*

Definition of partner-led libraries

4.74 Partner-led Library arrangements would involve the building and Library offer remaining open through partner-led service provision with no BCC funding. Partner-led arrangements could be in the form of:

1. Manage and run the library provision via a Community Asset Transfer.
2. Fund the provision of library services via an agreement with BCC.
3. Partially run library provision alongside BCC staff.
4. Operate the library via a management lease agreement.

These agreements would be fully developed pending cabinet approval.

4.75 While partner libraries are not included in the statutory provision, BCC will continue to support these partner sites by providing physical books, e-books, and publications as well as still being integrated into the library management systems and reservations service. These libraries represent a valuable supplementary resource that is available for residents of Birmingham, as part of the council's broader library service offer.

Reasons for recommendation

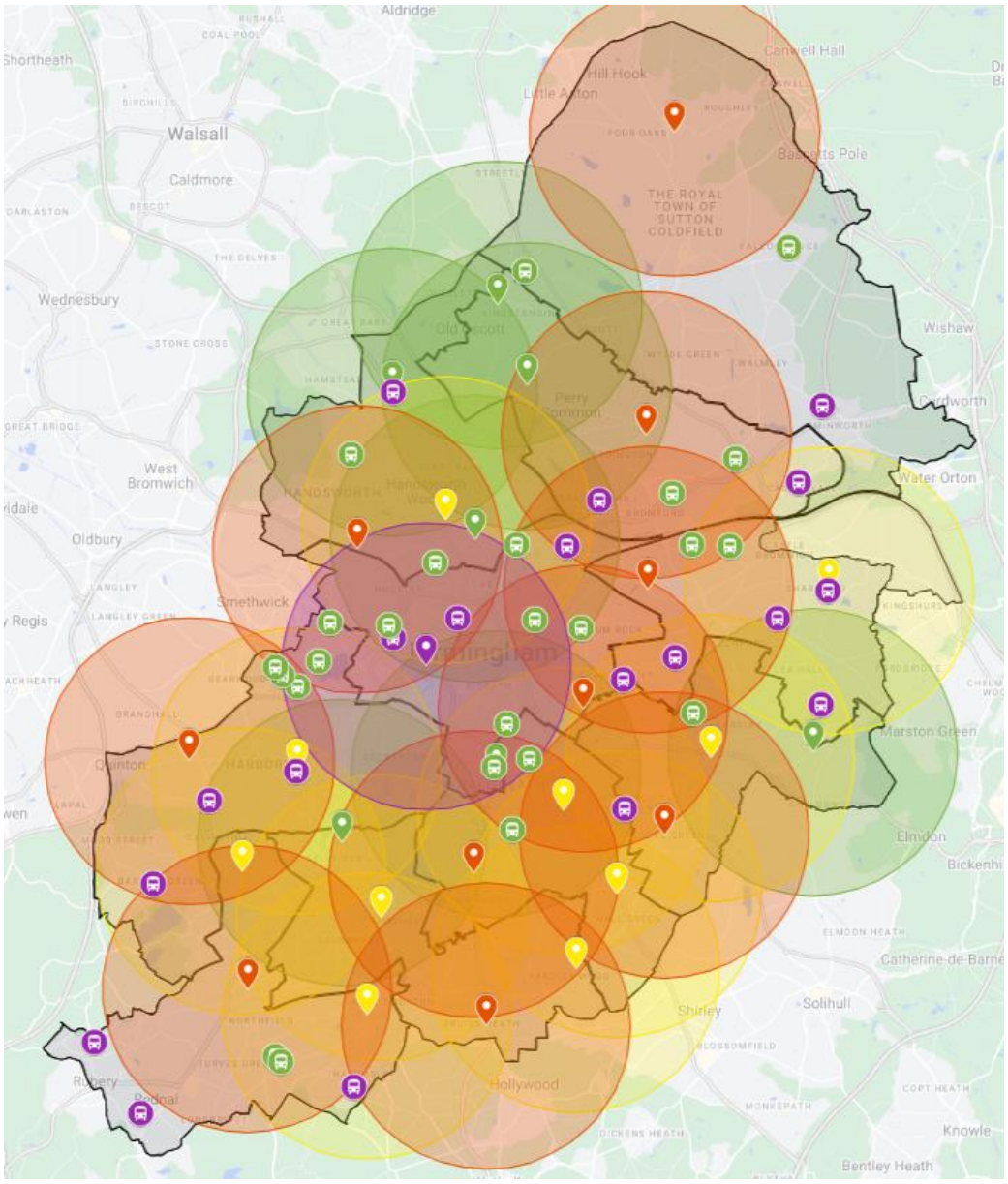
4.76 This service provision meets our legal responsibilities to our residents and addresses the diverse needs of our citizens throughout all stages of their lives, including children, young adults, families, the elderly, as well as vulnerable individuals. The approach also offers the flexibility to adapt and customise services according to local requirements and enables us to enhance our offer further in the future in co-production with partners and communities.

4.77 The proposed statutory library service provision in Birmingham is detailed in the following table. To ensure a balance between accessibility and coverage, the network of Community Library Hubs and part-time library provision will create a comprehensive library service across the city. A map below illustrates the library locations and includes a two-mile radius between libraries both demonstrate that citizens will have reasonable access to library facilities. Each library building has the opportunity to increase opening hours, based on co-location opportunities with partner agencies, increased use of volunteers, and other council services. The table below outlines the offer. Appendix K sets out the rational for the proposed Community Library Hubs. ***[Note that this is amended by Recommendation 3.4 of this Cabinet Report to increase opening hours to a minimum of three days for all part time libraries which were proposed to be reduced to two days.]***

Library	Constituency	Proposed opening days and hours per week (as shared in the consultation)	Additional Information
Acocks Green	Yardley	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Balsall Heath	Ladywood	2 days (14hrs)	Currently closed for refurbishment and planned to re-open in 2026
Birchfield	Perry Barr	3 days (21hrs)	
Druids Heath	Selly Oak	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Erdington	Erdington	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Hall Green	Hall Green & Moseley	3 days (21hrs)	
Handsworth	Perry Barr	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Kings Heath	Hall Green & Moseley	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Kings Norton	Northfield	3 days (21hrs)	
Kingstanding	Erdington	2 days (14hrs)	
Mere Green	Sutton Coldfield	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Northfield	Northfield	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Perry Common	Erdington	2 days (14hrs)	*

Quinton	Edgbaston	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Shard End	Hodge Hill & Solihull North	3 days (21hrs)	
Sheldon	Yardley	2 days (14hrs)	*
Small Heath	Ladywood	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
South Yardley	Yardley	3 days (21hrs)	*
Sparkhill	Hall Green & Moseley	3 days (21hrs)	
Stirchley	Selly Oak	3 days (21hrs)	
Ward End	Hodge Hill & Solihull North	4 days (28hrs)	Community Library Hub
Weoley Castle	Northfield	3 days (21hrs)	*
Yardley Wood	Selly Oak	3 days (21hrs)	
CO-LOCATION			
Selly Oak	Selly Oak	2 days (14hrs)	Remain in existing co-location
Tower Hill	Perry Barr	2 days (14hrs)	Exploring alternative co-location venues
Aston	Perry Barr	2 days (14hrs)	Remain in existing co-location
Harborne	Edgbaston	3 days (21hrs)	Exploring a joint BCC/ partnership provision to remain in the current building
CITY WIDE			
Library of Birmingham	Ladywood	6 days (66hrs)	Library Hub
Mobile Vehicle	City Wide	5 days(30hrs)	2 Mobile Vehicles

**During the consultation process, local organisations approached the consultation team with offers to work alongside BCC to explore future opportunities post cabinet report decision to expand the range of services on offer for local- residents from this building. This may provide opportunities to open the building for further days or co-location of additional services on the days open.*



Map illustrating all BCC run libraries including 2-mile radius

Refer to Appendix L for additional maps of provision.

4.78 This report acknowledges that the proposed model will result in reduced opening hours for some libraries. To address this, the proposal will aim to ensure that within each local area, libraries will work together to offer 6 days overall service a week coverage, providing consistent access to library services for residents.

4.79 In addition, two mobile library vehicles will offer up to a total of 50 stops a week at citywide locations. These stops will be determined based on a needs analysis, ensuring that parts of the city without a static offer and with the highest levels of deprivation have access to library services and additional information and resources.

4.80 All 28 sites and the mobile vehicles will offer access to a full range of library resources. In addition the book reservation service will be available from all sites including the mobile vehicles.

4.81 The Library Services at Home will provide a dedicated service for housebound residents and people in care settings ensuring they have access to library resources.

4.82 The online 24/7 library service will offer a range of downloadable resources, databases, online activities and a book reservation service.

4.83 Birmingham Library Services has an annual book fund. From this the service procures both products and services to meet its statutory obligations. These include physical books, magazines, newspapers, audio CDs and DVDs, electronic books in print and audio, e-magazines, e-newspapers and e-comics/graphic novels. Access to on-demand information (databases). All sites will provide access to public PCs and study space as well as a Library Catalogue and membership management system.

4.84 The council receives a grant from the Ministry of Justice to provide a prison library.

4.85 We will also continue to take a collaborative approach to working with and through stakeholders and local communities to ensure that the library service offer continues to respond to the needs of all our communities and is flexible in meeting the evolving needs of the city. The approach is set out within the Strategic Framework (Appendix A2).

4.86 Birmingham libraries will continue to promote the service through social media and the BCC website. In addition, we will collaborate with the community and partners across the city, including other council services, to connect with individuals who do not currently utilise library services.

4.87 This will include the creation of partnerships with community groups, businesses, corporate sponsors and educational establishments to build a service offer which remains relevant for current and future needs of our city.

4.88 The service offer will be subject to regular review and offer further development to ensure that it meets the needs of the city. The approach will identify patterns and trends in needs, usage and access which may require adjustment to the way in which services are delivered at local level.

Reasons for recommendation section- 3.4 of this report

4.89 High level feedback from the revised option 4 consultation indicated that the highest number of respondents felt Birmingham City Council should not reduce library hours, with many advocating for maintaining the current hours. In response to this feedback and through internal consultation discussions, a further recommendation (3.4 of this report) to the opening days of all part- time libraries be increased to a minimum of three days per week, detailed in Appendix H.

4.90 Under this recommendation opening hours would total 763 hours per week. This represents a 27.26% reduction from the current 1049 hours per week offered. The proposed hours include

the mobile van Library services and the Library of Birmingham.

Other options considered

4.91 As a result of their unique position within communities, each of the Birmingham libraries faces a range of expectations in relation to the needs and aspirations of the local residents they serve. Within the time constraints it was important to explore externalised delivery mechanisms in being able to meet these expectations. Therefore, the desirability, viability and feasibility of externalised delivery models alongside the insight from other local authorities have been considered as alternatives to the recommended option set out within this report (Appendix E).

4.92 Views and suggestions of alternative options to the recommended option were explored during the public consultation process, the face-to-face engagement provided the consultation team the opportunity to explore in further detail. The feedback is summarised at a high level below:

4.93 The face-to-face discussions with the public generated a limited response to alternative delivery models due to the strength of feeling against any proposed budget reductions to libraries.

4.94 Where the public were willing to engage in discussions relating to alternative delivery models, there was significant feedback for the continuation of library services delivered by the council and through paid staff, rather than any form of externalised delivery vehicles or volunteering models.

Externalisation delivery models

4.95 There have been objections from the three major Trade Unions on behalf of their members to any form of externalisation. The main reasons being a policy position on protecting in-house delivery, perceived risks to terms and conditions for their members which could not be guaranteed beyond 24 months, and no guarantee of any more protection from current or future savings targets.

4.96 Learning from other local authorities demonstrates that desirability of the service offer to residents is a key driving factor in the successful development, delivery and ongoing support for externalised delivery models. The recommendation in this report is therefore to focus on creating a mix of council run and partner-led libraries. We will continue to explore alternative models taking a localised, place-based pilot approach for individual libraries where a council/community partnership model might be developed. We will achieve this through engagement with local residents, community groups and businesses, working alongside Birmingham City Council.

4.97 From an operational point of view, learning at a national level confirms there are complexities, liabilities and risks that would continue to remain with the local authority and that cannot and should not be outsourced.

Volunteer delivery models

4.98 Throughout the consultation process there has been a strong resistance to a wholly volunteer led service delivery that would replace paid BCC staff. There was cautious recognition that if managed appropriately volunteers could add value to any council run offer. For example, helping to extend opening hours, volunteering which offers a pathway into paid employment or provides wider benefits to volunteers themselves, by overcoming isolation and engendering a feeling of “making a contribution” to their local neighbourhood.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

Key risks:

5.1 **Risk Description:** Failure to deliver a comprehensive offer. **Mitigation**: DCMS guidance sought throughout the project. New model prioritises service provision.

5.4 **Risk Description:** Building condition – many buildings require capital investment. **Mitigation**: Corporate Landlord have an asset strategy for the library estate which prioritises new condition surveys, immediate works to rectify the buildings most in need of attention and will identify buildings which are no longer fit for purpose – in these areas, Corporate Landlord will work with the service to source alternative provision for the service. The statutory provision will be protected in all areas identified in the cabinet report; however, the location may change. Close working with Finance to ensure visibility over capital request for year 1 is built into overall budget proposals.

5.3 **Risk Description:** Delays in conclusion of staff consultation process resulting in delays to implementation of the new model and subsequent delivery of savings. **Mitigation**: Regular meetings with Trade Unions and affected teams. Delays to savings from extended staff consultation can be mitigated by vacancies in new team. Full HR engagement.

5.4 Risk Description: Partner-led proposals not being secured or secured in time. Mitigation: Negotiations and dialogue ongoing with all relevant partners. Paperwork/agreements are prepared to swiftly progress post cabinet approval. Partner-led provision is in addition to statutory compliance so implementation of BCC owned model will still achieve a compliant library offer. Mobile library van stops would be provided, and the needs of the community taken into to account for additional services e.g. 'Storytime' in alternative premises.

6. CONSULTATIONS

6.1 A public consultation exercise was carried out between 4th April 2024 -12th December 2024. The exercise was conducted in two main phases, the first consultation and the final consultation phase. Two further consultation phases were then conducted to share and seek feedback on the revised option 4 offer and to correct the error in the priority list rankings used for option 3.

6.2 The first consultation took place for 15 weeks, 4th April 2024 - 17th July 2024, consultation pack-Appendix N. It aimed to inform the public of the financial situation, the council's legal duties to provide a comprehensive and efficient service (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964) and present a balanced budget in 2026 by reducing the service annual budget by £2.288m. The consultation presented four high-level options and requested feedback on them, along with opinions on the draft Birmingham Libraries Strategic Framework, as well as gaining feedback on the library needs of those who live, work, or study in Birmingham.

6.3 The final consultation took place for five weeks, from 23rd August 2024 - 27th September 2024, consultation pack-Appendix O. It aimed to draw on the response to the first phase of consultation and provide details on the options shared in the first phase of consultation, including what the proposed offer could look like for each library. It also aimed to give people the opportunity to share how the proposed changes could be improved further.

6.4 Careful consideration of feedback from the final phase of consultation highlighted the need for more equitable opening hours across the city. In response, a revised option 4 was shared with the public between the 23rd October - 3rd November, consultation pack -Appendix P, and asked

for comments on option 4's revised distribution of hours.

6.5 An error was identified in the priority list rankings shared in the final consultation pack. The error was in a spreadsheet formula used to rank the libraries into priority order, which informed the option 3 proposal, option 4 did not use the priority list ranking. The error was corrected, and the libraries were all re-ranked. This did not change option 4, the recommended option. The corrected option 3 offer was shared with the public for 4 weeks, 14th November - 12th December, where people were asked to comment on the corrected option 3 proposal, consultation pack-Appendix Q.

6.6 The approach to the statutory consultation and its findings are set out in further detail in Appendix D**.** This involved four online questionnaires, 93 events conducted both online and in person and 32 targeted focus group sessions. The in-person events were held in community venues across each of the 10 constituencies, as well as in all currently open Community Libraries. For the two libraries that are currently closed, alternative local venues were used. A wide range of citizens and stakeholder groups participated and provided feedback during the consultation, including those groups less likely to use library services. Targeted engagement sessions took place with protected characteristics groups including, younger and older people, disabled people, neurodiverse people, religious groups, ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ and women's groups. A session also took place with carers. In total 7,136 Be Heard questionnaires were completed with a further 1,397 children and parents' forms, 93 online and in-person events with a total of 2,057 attending and 32 targeted engagement events with a total of 522 participating. In total 370 emails were received, all of which were used as part of the consultation analysis.

6.7 The revised option 4 consultation phase received a further 1,008 comments and the corrected option 3 proposal received 293 comments via Be Heard, paper comments and email inbox comments.

6.8 Valuable insight was gained during the two main consultation and additional consultation periods which has been considered carefully and reflected in the recommendation.

First consultation messages (4th April 2024 - 17th July 2024) high-level findings

6.9 The majority of respondents had serious concerns and strongly opposed any reductions to the Community Library budget and any potential closures or redundancies for staff.

6.10 Respondents value library buildings and the ability to access them regularly (weekly), locally (within walking distance), and value their role within the local community.

6.11 Would prefer a council-run full-time Community Hub (66.3%) and stated the importance of retaining trained staff.

6.12 Primarily use their library for books (literature and education), information and advice, social contact and community, and atmosphere and environment.

6.13 Emphasised the need for libraries to stay relevant and serve as multifunctional spaces for future community need.

6.14 Future suggestions highlight the need for greater collaboration and engagement with the community and broader groups.

6.15 Most people agreed with the draft vision and priorities for Birmingham Libraries.

6.16 Most respondents disagreed with co-locating services within the Community Library Hubs proposal. However, feedback through targeted engagement suggested these groups were largely in favour of the Community Hub model, especially if it would keep libraries open.

Final consultation (27th July – 23rd August 2024) high-level findings:

6.17 The highest proportion agreed with option 4 (38.7%).

6.18 A high proportion (34.3%) stated they were not clear on why the changes are required.

6.19 People don't agree that libraries should be pitted against each other.

6.20 Don't want their library to close and fear that decisions have already been made.

6.21 Majority of respondents did agree with a hub in each constituency and 24% would be 'very likely' to use them.

6.22 Library of Birmingham was not considered to be reflective of a community hub for Ladywood constituency.

6.23 Shared the importance of consistency of opening hours and don't want to have to travel far to access libraries.

6.24 Emphasised the crucial role libraries play for children, families, and vulnerable groups, and raised concerns about the significant impact on communities if they were to close.

6.25 Strong objection to any form of externalisation (outsourcing, trust, mutuals).

Consultation -first and final stage (4th April-27th September 2024) overall findings:

6.26 Most respondents were strongly opposed to any reductions to the Community Libraries budget and any potential closures or redundancies for staff.

6.27 People value library buildings and the ability to access them locally, within walking distance, therefore, value their role within the local community.

6.28 Would prefer the council to provide libraries through paid staff.

6.29 Whilst there was significant support for option 4 with some changes, this was often with reluctant acknowledgement that 'do nothing' was not a realistic option as this would not deliver the savings.

6.30 Overwhelming number of comments questioned the size of the council's overall budget deficit, some recognised option 4's potential to maintain as much as the possible and then rebuild the provision, should the deficit be smaller than first reported.

6.31 Partner-led libraries received mixed reviews, with significant support in some parts of the city which already have some form of partner-led input.

6.32 Alternative delivery models including outsourcing, mutuals and Trusts were met with scepticism. Examples of where such models nationally had been implemented and seen to have got into difficulties were being cited for the opposition, alongside a strong opinion that libraires should be run by the council through staff that it directly employs.

6.33 In some parts of the city, residents and partner organisations have acknowledged there may be ways they could become more involved to support their local libraries, examples include co-

location opportunities to help keep the building open for the local community for more days, through to volunteering support and the establishment of library forums or friends groups, in areas that currently do not have such mechanisms of support.

6.34 There was an acknowledgment that additional mobile provision in parts of the city that currently do not have a library provision was generally positive as a means of starting to address this.

6.35 Community Library Hubs were met with mixed reviews. In the main, positive feedback was received in areas that were proposed to become a Community Hub or already operated on a Community Hub principle, questions were asked if some of the Community Hub hours could be redirected into some of the part-time libraries in areas of greatest need. There was recognition of a timetable approach to buildings having a multi–use or for exclusive use of spaces at certain times of the week for example, sessions run for teenage young people and older people where sessions running concurrently could otherwise be problematic.

6.36 A small number of respondents did not see wider service offers being a key part of a traditional library function.

Consultation – targeted engagement (4th April-17th July 2024)

6.37 Through targeted engagements of citizens that are currently less likely to access Library services, often those with protected characteristics, reasons most cited include:

6.38 Limited perception of what libraries offer? A view that libraries are solely places for books and quiet study. Many individuals engaged in the targeted outreach had not visited a library since their youth, leading to outdated views on the current range of services and activities that libraries provide.

6.39 Accessibility issues? That libraries are not open at times which they could attend. Some people raised concerns that libraries may not always be fully accessible for example, to individuals with disabilities such as working lifts or accessible technology. Another issue raised was concerns from Neurodiverse people that there is too much noise and potential overstimulation at libraries, therefore, they would need suitable quiet space. Concerns were also raised about signage which can prove confusing or that there is not enough signage for them to feel they know where to go or what events are happening.

6.40 Possible discrimination or bias. Some people stated they would like libraries to feel more inclusive or to promote the inclusive work that is taking place. More work needs to be done to ensure people feel their needs are catered for which will increase engagement and representation.

6.41 The consultation feedback has also informed the equality impact assessment, helping to balance a proportionate response through mitigating factors, addressing financial challenges, and driving better outcomes for citizens. For example, some participants expressed concerns during the consultation about reduced access to books and resources for children and vulnerable people, as well as limited space and opportunities to study. To address these concerns, we aim to ensure alternative services are available. These include adjusting, where possible, library opening hours to align with public preferences, rescheduling popular programs to match the new opening hours, enhancing mobile library services, and partnering with community organisations and schools to raise awareness of available resources, especially those in the Community Library Hubs, and improving digital access.

Internal engagement

6.42 Briefings took place with Corporate Leadership Team and Extended Leadership Teams and discussions with representatives from Public Health, Adult Social Care, City Housing, City Operations, Children and Families and Children's Trust. The team has worked closely with Corporate Landlord Services in developing the recommendations.

6.43 There has also been ongoing engagement with Trade Union Representatives through the regular Departmental Trade Union meetings, with staff through regular management team meetings and teams' live events providing updates during the public consultation process.

Revised option 4 proposal: Further consultation (23rd October - 3rd November 2024)

6.44 The high-level findings, respondents stated:

- 32.34% strongly agreed/agreed with the revised option 4.
- 6.94% neither agreed nor disagreed with the revised option 4.
- 59.13% strongly disagreed/disagreed with the revised option 4.
- 1.39% didn't know if they agreed/disagreed with the revised option 4.
- 0.2% other comments (via the mailbox)

It is important to note that the 59.13% who either strongly disagreed or disagreed in the consultation were not necessarily responding directly to the revised option 4 proposal, but to the changes to library services in general, as reflected in the following point.

6.45 Through theming the respondent's comments in the 'Be Heard' online survey, paper survey and email inbox comments the main themes coming though from the comments was that people did not want to see any decrease in hours and that libraries should remain as they are with no cuts. The next highest themes were that people agreed with the increase of hours to their Library in the revised option 4 and were happy with the revised model.

Corrected option 3 proposal: Further consultation (14th November- 12th December 2024)

6.46 The high-level findings stated that nearly half of all respondents agreed with option 4, the recommended option. The breakdown of responses is shown below:

- Option 4 (revised)- 48.1%
- Option 3 (corrected)- 10.2%
- Parts of option 3 or 4 only- 2.1%
- I don't agree with either option and have an alternative suggestion-15.7%
- I don't agree with either option and have no alternative option- 8.5%
- Not answered- 1.4%
- Not answered but made a comment -14%

7. ELECTED MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ENGAGEMENT

7.0 Member engagement first commenced in November 2023 with Cabinet members to explore a changed approach to Community Libraries and Neighbourhood Advice and Inform taking an Early Intervention and Prevention approach.

7.1 Elected members were sent communications pre all phases of consultation and invited to attend briefings ahead of the final public consultation documents going live. They were also invited to promote and attend the public consultation events that took place online, face to face events

and supported officers by promoting the consultation events in their wards and on social media.

7.2 The general feedback from elected members mirrored that of the public consultation in stating the importance of Community Libraries within wards and concerns over the level of reductions imposed on the service and the timescale for delivery. During the first phase of the consultation elected members raised the importance of face-to-face consultations within each of the Community Libraries, rather than alternative community venues so that residents could explore in detail the proposal for their individual libraries. This had already been factored into the second phase of the consultation whereby consultations took place in each of the individual libraries.

7.3 Some elected members also asked if alternative externalised options had been explored. The first stage of consultation asked people through the Be Heard Survey 'Do you have any alternative options that we could consider, taking into account the financial savings, that are required'? During the online and in person consultations people were asked 'Do you have any alternative suggestions as to how BCC could reduce the budget whilst protecting a maximum amount of library services?' The final phase of the consultation through the online questionnaire sought opinions on options 3 and 4 and if they did not agree with either option do they have 'an alternative suggestion, stating the reason for this answer', they were also asked 'Is there anything else that you would like us to consider as part of the consultation?'. The face-to-face consultations continued to seek interest for partner-led delivery by organisations or groups and to seek views of the public on viable alternative delivery models that would deliver the savings within the timescales required to be put forward.

Overview and Scrutiny

7.4 During the consultation period, officers attended two Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. The first was a private meeting on 24th July 2024, which provided an update on the consultation approach and public engagement levels. Feedback highlighted the importance of local libraries, the core service offer, and promoting consultations within local wards. While the need for a robust consultation process was acknowledged, concerns were raised about the length of the consultation period and its impact on in-year savings. The second meeting was public, held on the 27th November 2024, with the minutes attached in Appendix J.

7.5 This Cabinet report is due to be considered by Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 5th February 2025.

Other engagement

7.7 The Birmingham City Council Vulnerable Adults' Citizens Panel also operated as a critical friend from a social justice perspective representing the views of citizens experiencing multiple disadvantages. The feedback was highly positive towards a delivery model which was inclusive of the needs of all citizens, particularly any that struggle to access the current delivery models for both Community Libraries and Neighbourhood Advice and Information Services. The provision of a wider offer particularly focused on supporting households to remain independent within their own homes and communities was also welcomed. Specific comments were made in relation to the cost-of-living crisis and how the information and advice provided through a Homes and Money offer could help to address a broader agenda for the city such as in-work poverty.

8. IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Finance and best value

8.1 Reductions in Community Libraries and NAIS budgets have been created due to three factors:

(a)An existing intention to redesign services around good outcomes for local communities and a hub-based model in line with best practice nationally.

(b)The need to review spending in all areas to ensure best value, efficient services, in line with the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan to rebuild a stable financial budget for the council.

(c)An ongoing value for money review in the HRA, aimed at ensuring that tenants' rents are directed to the most relevant support needed by them, delivered in a way that balances accessible services with cost effective delivery.

8.2 The total original budget for Birmingham's Community Library Services is £6.160m, including NAIS and Library staff of £6.421m, grants to external financial support charities of £0.428m, operating and building running costs of £2.149m and income from the HRA, sales, room hire and small grants to the council, of £2.838m.

8.3 The saving put forward relates to a reduction of 25% of the expenditure above, and 37% of the net budget, meaning that delivery of the services within the reduced envelope requires a change to the way services are provided, rather than cuts to the funding within the same operating model.

8.4 The proposed recommended in option 4 of this paper achieves this redesigned approach to both Community Libraries and Homes and Money service provision, is in line with the budget reductions in both the Improvement and Recovery Plan and the HRA Business Plan, and maintains a £6.849m annual spend in Community Library and Homes and Money provision, funded by £6.160m General Fund budget, £1.500m HRA rents and £1.477m grant and other external income.

8.5 The further recommendation outlined in section 3.5 of this report achieves the redesigned approach to both Community Libraries and Homes and Money service provision, is in line with the budget reductions in both the Improvement and Recovery Plan and the HRA Business Plan, and increases the expenditure figure in 8.4 by £0.125m, funded in the short term by the Household Support Fund, while options around generation of income from room hire and other rentable facilities are scoped, with a view to replacing the grant funding.

8.6 Potential capital requirements arise from the need for urgent repairs to some library buildings, alongside investment in those buildings which are to become Community Hubs. £7.650m is allocated for neighbourhood and community assets over the next 2 financial years in the Capital Programme, with year 1 of this programme included in the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan. The paper sets out a mechanism for investigating these potential costs with Corporate Landlord involvement and the council's capital spending processes would then be applied to make decisions.

Legal Implications

8.7 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places a duty on Birmingham City Council to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who "live, work or study and want to access the service" in the city.

8.8 In fulfilling its duty, the council shall in particular have regard to the desirability-

(a) of securing, by the 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.

Equalities

8.9 The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) outlines the potential risks and impacts of proposed library closures, with the greatest concern being the closure of partner-led libraries. Concerns were also raised during the consultation about reduced access to books resources and activities for children and vulnerable people, limited space and opportunities for younger people to study, as well as opportunities and activities for older people to connect with their community. Mitigation measures include mobile library services, alternative access options, community engagement, and digital solutions. If a partner-led library closes, the EIA mitigations will be reviewed and considered.

8.10 For reduced library hours, mitigations include informing users about other locations, enhancing digital services, expanding mobile library services, rescheduling activities, promoting Libraries Service at Home, and ongoing assessment.

8.11 The creation of Community Library Hubs is seen as beneficial, enhancing access to services, community wellbeing, digital inclusion, educational support, and economic benefits. The introduction of NAIS into these Hubs will increase accessibility and support.

8.12 Overall, the EIA outlines potential barriers and impacts, with a focus on mitigation and positive outcomes. The main challenge is if a partner-led libraries were to close, in which case the EIA would be considered. The current proposal is to proceed.

The full Equality Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix C.

The full Health Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix G.

Procurement

8.13 This report has no implications from a procurement position.

People Services

8.14 The proposal to amalgamate the Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service and Community Library Services into one service, taking an Early Intervention and Prevention approach, will result in removing all existing roles and job descriptions and implementing a redesigned structure with new job roles and descriptions. These redesigned roles facilitate the

efficient and effective delivery of the combined services. As such, staff working in these areas will be consulted on the proposed changes associated with delivering this revised service model.

8.15 In line with legal requirements, staff consultation will be meaningful and will be for a minimum of 45 days prior to any implementation of changes. We will undertake a formal approach to consultation in accordance with the council's standard procedure and due process. Any proposed alternatives submitted during the consultation period will be fully considered.

8.16 Whilst roles and job descriptions will change in order to deliver the redesigned service model; we will seek to minimise the impact on working locations and hours as much as possible. Acknowledging however, that the final model will be driven by the requirements of citizens as determined by the public consultation.

8.17 The staff consultation process will analyse the potential impact on equalities and the diversity of our workforce. It will ensure that the process by which appointments are made to the new structure are fair, transparent and considers the personal requirements of every employee. A full equality impact assessment under the Equality Act (2010) will be completed that considers the impact on all protected characteristics and will include all staff.

8.18 Following Consultation, the proposals may result in the displacement of a number of staff. We will seek to minimise Compulsory Redundancy through ringfencing opportunities in the proposed model to existing staff and offering Voluntary Redundancy through the consultation process. We will also seek to redeploy within the council through the Priority Movers process.

Climate change, nature and net zero

8.19 At this stage there should be minimal impact, however, given the condition of our current assets, any improvements made through future completed Repairs and Maintenance, or libraries re-modelling, will be more sustainable and in line with Net Zero strategies. The programme will need to produce an updated ESA when an implementation plan for those libraries to be re-modelled has been produced. This is expected Q2 2025.

The full Environmental Sustainability Assessment can be found in Appendix I.

Corporate Parenting

8.20 There are no direct corporate parenting implications from the recommendations in this report. The community and partner collaboration referred to in section 4.85 of this report will include working with Birmingham Children's Trust to explore opportunities for library services to better support our children in care and care experienced young people.

9. APPENDICES

Appendix A1, A2, A3 – Strategic Vision, Framework and Outcomes

Appendix B – Needs Analysis

Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix D – Approach to Consultation and Findings

Appendix E – Alternative Delivery Models

Appendix F – Attracting Additional Resources

Appendix G – Health Impact Assessment

Appendix H – Table of proposed provision including further recommendation 3.4 of this report.

Appendix I – Environmental Sustainability Assessment

Appendix J – Neighbourhoods Overview & Scrutiny Committee minutes (27th November 2024)

Appendix K – Community Library Hubs

Appendix L – Additional maps of provision

Appendix M – Using behavioural science to nudge residents to access income support

CONSULTATION PACKS

Appendix N – Consultation pack: First Consultation (4th April- 17th July)

Appendix O – Consultation pack: Final Consultation Stage (23rd Aug – 27th Sept)

Appendix P – Consultation pack: Outcome of Final consultation -Revised Option 4 Consultation (23rd Oct- 3rd Nov)

Appendix Q – Consultation pack: Corrected Option 3 Consultation and Option 4 (14th Nov- 12th Dec)

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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