HILLINGDON'S LIBRARY STRATEGY & TIERD OPENING TIMES

Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Eddie Lavery
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Residents' Services
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Papers with report	Appendix 1 – Consultation questions Appendix 2 – Consultation responses summary Appendix 3 – Individual responses to the consultation Appendix 4 – Library Strategy

HEADLINES

sought views on a new raft of permanent opening hours, grouping libraries into tiers based on location, transport and busyness. he consultation ran continuously for the period 1 st March 2023 to 16 th April 2023 inclusive. This report to Cabinet presents the findings of the consultation. Cabinet is asked to note and consider the consultation responses and consider approval of the Strategy and tiered opening hours.
Putting our Residents FirstThis report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: Enjoy access to green spaces, leisure activities, culture and arts
Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026This report supports our commitments to residents of: Thriving, Healthy Households
Financial Cost Adoption of the tiered hours will ensure the library service ca
operate within existing budgets.
Relevant Select Residents' Services Committee
Relevant Ward(s) All



RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

- 1. Notes the findings and considers the responses from a comprehensive consultation exercise, which has informed the proposed final Library Service Strategy;
- 2. Notes the adaptations to the proposed Tiered library opening hours as set out in the report, following consultation.
- 3. Agrees the Library Service Strategy in Appendix 4 from June 2023, and agrees the Tiered opening hours to take effect later in this financial year as set out in the Annex to this report.

Reasons for recommendation

The library service strategy clearly sets out the five ambitions that will determine the priorities and projects over the next five years, and the tiered opening hours will enable the library service to manage its resources effectively and for the Council to meet its statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

Alternative options considered / risk management

No alternative options were considered. In order to retain a large network of public libraries in Hillingdon, the Council must ensure resources are deployed responsibly and efficiently. To retain a wide offer of events, activities and initiatives in staffed libraries, approval is sought from Cabinet to adopt both the strategy and the tiered opening hours.

Select Committee comments

The Residents' Services Select Committee were consulted on the draft Library Strategy and proposal for decommissioning Harlington Library and sought clarifications on both matters, to which Officers and the Cabinet Member responded. Further details are set out in the minutes of the meeting under the Background Papers in this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. The draft library service strategy was developed in line with the Council's approach to put residents first and to practice sound financial management. The strategy makes clear the continued commitment to an enhanced library service which goes beyond a core offer and provides those who live, work or study in the borough with access to cultural activity, opportunities for independent lifelong learning and support to live enriched, empowered and healthier lives. The Council is committed to its library service and as part of the wider Council Strategy as well as the Library Service Strategy, will see full refurbishments of a number of libraries as flexible community spaces.



- 2. While adoption of a tiered hours approach would see a reduction in total opening hours, it would increase access at the most popular branches with an increase in opening after 5pm. This enables Hillingdon to provide both more branches and longer opening hours than library services in its nearest neighbours (Ealing, Harrow, Hounslow) and more branches than any other authority in London except Enfield. Hillingdon also has more libraries than the most populous London borough (Barnet) and the largest London borough by area (Bromley).
- 3. Hillingdon Council recognises the value and importance of libraries operated by trained staff, and so did not consider community-run branches as some other authorities have done. Although in the future there may be opportunities to look at technological solutions that enable ways of working that rely less on staff presence throughout advertised opening hours, this is not currently practical in Hillingdon. It is important that staffing levels allow for both efficient service delivery to residents and the safety of all visitors and staff, hence the Council is not currently considering lone working in order to reduce running costs.
- 4. Following consultation responses and to help with future planning, it is proposed that if Harlington library is decommissioned (subject to a separate proposal), West Drayton moves from Tier 4 to Tier 3 as a mitigation measure for those affected by Harlington library closure. Northwood Hills library will remain a Tier 3 library and (in variation with the proposals presented at February Cabinet) will close at lunchtimes alongside other Tier 3 libraries based on current usage trends, and with nearby Northwood library (proposed as Tier 2) currently performing better. This will be reviewed in the event that demand and usage changes following Northwood Hills library reopening after rebuild.
- 5. The intention is to keep a 'rolling review' on the usage and transport options for each library, so that if indications are that opening hours should change, they can be. This would need to be managed within available resources and a modification to hours at one library could affect the opening times at another. The Council will be led by data and information relating to usage, population, transport and building capacity when proposing any amendments to the tiers.
- 6. The Council has considered its duties under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The Council continues to provide a large network of branch libraries open a minimum of 5 days per week, reachable by multiple transport options, and alternative methods of engaging with the service (including online and Mobile library).
- 7. Cabinet approved a public consultation on the library strategy, including opening hours, in Feb 2023 which ran from 1st March 16th April inclusive. The consultation sought the views of those who live, work or study in the borough and was interested to hear from library members and non-users alike. Questions related to the wording in the strategy, the Tiered hours proposal and more generally about how libraries are used by respondents. The consultation is summarised below. A graphic summary can be found in Appendix 2, with the detailed responses set out in Appendix 3 (redacted for data protection purposes).
- 8. The proposed tiers and library opening hours for Cabinet to consider approving and following consultation are set out in the Annex to this report. The proposed Library Strategy for Cabinet to consider approval following consultation, is set out in Appendix 4.



Financial Implications

Following the recent public consultation on the future of Hillingdon's library service, this report recommends to Cabinet the adoption of the Library Strategy, and adoption of a tiered operating model for libraries reflecting differing opening hours aligned to the usage of the facilities.

Alongside the proposed closure of Harlington Library, which is subject to a separate report, adoption of the tiered opening hours model is anticipated to fully deliver the efficiency savings within the service agreed at budget setting in February. Detailed resourcing requirements will be developed following Cabinet approval of the recommendations set out in this report.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities?

The library strategy itself sets out ambitions and goals for the library service that will directly benefit those who live, work or study in the borough. Hillingdon Council commits its library service to the continued provision of an early-years offer, support for people with dementia, increased focus on STEM and STREAM-related initiatives and work experience placements that help young people with their employment skills, among other things. The promotion of literature, arts and culture to inform and enrich is also key, alongside removing barriers to access so that people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds consider the library a safe, welcoming space.

In retaining a large network of static libraries, a Mobile library and a Home Library Service, and a comprehensive range of digital resources, people in all parts of the borough can access and engage with libraries. Commitment to develop library service and invest in its buildings and facilities provides greater opportunities for residents to engage with arts, culture, learning, wellbeing and easy entry points into Council services.

The tiered hours enable Hillingdon to retain a large network of libraries (16, if the proposal to close Harlington library is confirmed) within available resources and ensuring the Council provides those who live, work or study in Hillingdon with comprehensive and efficient library service, as per the statutory obligations of a local authority. In the case of the three flagship libraries and five tier 2 libraries, an additional late evening will be provided compared with the current offer; Tier 3 libraries will offer a later opening once a week which they currently do not.

It is acknowledged that a weekday closure of branches in Tiers 3 and 4 could be inconvenient for people who prefer to use the library on that day; however, there will remain a large number of alternative libraries in the borough that can be used on the closed day of someone's nearest branch, and the location/transport options between libraries has been a major consideration in designing the tiers.

There is no strict definition in the Libraries and Museums Act 1964 as to what a reasonable distance to a library is for a resident, or how many opening hours they should offer either per branch or as an overall service; however, in providing a five year strategy and offering one of the largest networks in London with longer hours than many other London authorities (including



Hillingdon's 3 nearest neighbours: Ealing, Harrow and Hounslow), Hillingdon can demonstrate that it continues to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service as per its statutory duties.

Consultation carried out or required

A full public consultation on the draft strategy and proposed opening hours was conducted between 1st March – 16th April 2023. The consultation sought the views of those who live, work or study in the borough on each ambition in the strategy and on the tiered opening hours, as well as providing respondents with the opportunity to tell us anything general regarding the library service and whether respondents were familiar with and made use of the online library.

The consultation received 865 responses via the online form or paper copy, and 8 responses by email. Those with visual impairments could be provided with large print versions of the consultation or called and talked through the consultation in order to provide a response. The consultation was promoted with posters in each library and on community noticeboards throughout the borough, on social media, on the library website and in Hillingdon People.

Paper forms received after the close date of 16th April are not included in the data below but have been read for consideration of points raised.

Information about respondents is below and in Appendix 2.

- 836 (95.7%) respondents were local residents or responding on behalf of a local resident. 11 respondents work or study but do not live in Hillingdon. The remaining respondents were representing local businesses, community/volunteer groups or 'other'.
- The majority of respondents are members of Hillingdon library service. Only 32 said they were not members and never visited a library.
- Of the responses that provided a postcode, 75% were from wards in the North of the Borough and 25% were from wards in the South of the Borough.
- Most responses (26%) are from those aged 65+ (from those who told us their age bracket), which is an over representation against the borough's demographics of 13%. This is closely followed by responses from people aged 35-44 and 45-54.
- Of those who told us their ethnicity, the majority of respondents are White, followed by those of Asian/Asian British heritage. People from a white background are over represented on the consultation, with a response rate of 74% (48% of Hillingdon population is white).
- A Large majority of respondents are female 76%, compared to 50.6% of the borough total.
- The majority of respondents who completed the consultation form visit the library once a month (39%), followed by those who visit once a week (32.8%). Only 4.5% of respondents said they visit a library daily.
- The data suggests most library visitors use the library for multiple purposes. Among those responding via the consultation form, most visited to browse and borrow books (87%), and to pick up recycling bags etc (64%). Attending events and accessing information were also popular reasons to visit.
- 28% said they visited to access WiFi and public computers, despite this being one of the main facilities provided and used in libraries had the responses been more representative of the whole borough, this result may have been higher based on local knowledge.



• Almost a third of respondents to the consultation form use the digital library, including ebooks, digital newspapers and magazines, and online reference.

The Five Strategy Ambitions

The five key ambitions as set out in the strategy are:

- 1. Reading, Literacy and Culture
- 2. Health and Wellbeing
- 3. Improving digital services and inclusion
- 4. Information and learning
- 5. Sustainable service delivery

The ambitions in the strategy were received positively by those responding to the consultation form completing this section, with a large majority of respondents said they felt all five ambitions were clear to them and that nothing was missing from the detail of each ambition.

	Response*						
Ambitions	Was the	ambition	Anything that was missed?				
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No		
Reading, Literacy and Culture	750	19	90	106	712		
Health and Wellbeing	776	21	60	77	735		
Improving digital services and inclusion	736	23	93	72	733		
Information and learning	761	22	70	73	732		
Sustainable service delivery	761	22	70	73	732		

A mean average of 88% respondents felt all five ambitions were clear, and 85% felt nothing was missing from the detail of each ambition.

All 5 ambitions were judged by a large majority of respondents to be important or very important.

- 94% felt Ambition 1 was important or very important.
- 82.5% felt Ambition 2 was important or very important.
- 70% felt Ambition 3 was important or very important.
- 79.5 felt Ambition 4 was important or very important.
- 74% felt Ambition 5 was important or very important.

Free text comments received about the five ambitions were varied and cannot be easily grouped by theme. All comments related to the strategy can be found in Appendix 4, with redactions for data protection purposes.

Summary of comments about library opening hours tiers

There was a mixture of supportive and complimentary comments, and those that related to concern about how the tiers affected the branch in the respondent's postcode. Some speculated that it was a 'slippery slope' towards further reductions in hours or branches.



Hillingdon Council is committed to providing a large network of libraries and must do this within available budgets and resources, which have been affected by several factors, most especially the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many comments in response to the tiered hours expressed unhappiness at proposals to close branches one day per week, and it is acknowledged that reductions in library opening hours are unpopular. Reasons that these proposals were negatively received by some respondents include inconvenience to those who might want to use a branch on its closed day, increased travel time to an open branch, the potential for confusion and the perception that reducing library opening hours could lead in the future to more reductions and even closures.

By reducing the overall number of library opening hours and ensuring the busiest branches in each broad area have the most hours within the network, Hillingdon Council can continue to provide some of the best library services in London, with staffed libraries working with the ambitions of the strategy to focus its efforts to supporting residents. It is positive that this is recognised by many respondents to the consultation.

The retention of a large network of staffed branches with tiered hours, alongside a five-year strategy, continued investment in library buildings and their development as cultural and community hubs, should reassure residents that the Council remains fully committed to its libraries.

It's important to stress that except for Harlington library (subject to a separate consultation) there are no plans to close any other Hillingdon library and the Council is committing to provide at least 16 branches, higher than the London average. All libraries will be open a minimum of 5 days per week, with the two busiest branches open 7 days a week and 6 other branches open 6 days per week.

Some respondents requested more information as to how the Tiers worked or were developed.

During the consultation, there was an indication that some respondents misread the proposals which led them to believe libraries would be closed on more days than is proposed. Details of all the tiers, libraries and opening times were provided as part of the consultation and following consultation responses, proposed amendments are listed at the end of this report alongside current opening times.

The tiered approach allows for 8 of the busiest libraries in each broad area to be open a minimum of 6 days per week, 2 late nights and no lunchtime closures. Tier 3 libraries will be offering a 7pm opening once per week (currently all libraries that would be in Tier 3 close at 5pm or 5.30pm). Libraries placed in Tier 4 represent branches with the lowest use, but these and Tier 3 libraries will still offer opening 5 days per week.

For libraries in Tiers 3 and 4, it is proposed they close one day per week (either a Mon or Weds). Apart from Tier 4 libraries, all libraries will be open at least one evening per week which is an improvement on the current offer. 7pm was chosen as the late opening after officers consulted historic usage of libraries that, pre-pandemic, were open after 7pm and recorded low use.



Some respondents questioned closing for lunch, but lunchtime closures have been consistently observed in 8 branches since 2021. With lunchtimes being historically quieter compared to other times, closing 1-2pm allows responsible use of resources without affecting a library user's ability to visit before 12pm, or after school finishes, which are the most popular times to visit. Eight branches (excluding Harlington) will not close for lunch in order to provide access to those who have a need to visit a branch during this hour.

Some respondents felt that closing some libraries one day per week would be confusing for local residents. However, prior to circa 2012, it was common for many Hillingdon libraries to be closed at least one day per week, and currently there are 24 London boroughs (the majority) that have some libraries closing at least one day per week (not including Sunday), if not more. Considering this precedent, plus the fact the majority of respondents visit once a month or once per week (rather than daily or more than once a week), the impact and confusion of 8 libraries closing one weekday per week should be minimal.

A list of all library opening hours by tier can be found at the end of this report.

Some respondents wanted to know what 'demand' meant when it comes to setting and reviewing the tiers

In grouping libraries into tiers, officers consulted location and transport options to ensure that anyone affected by a one-day closure had at least one other library in easy reach, via bus, train, walking, cycling or road.

While it is not possible to work out the maximum distance from each residential property to their nearest open library, the distance between a closed library and a number of open alternatives has been considered, using Google Maps to check routes and journey times. Care was taken to ensure that each broad area of the borough had at least one library within reasonable reach that was open 6 days per week. All branches designated Tier 3 and 4 libraries have at least one Tier 1 or 2 library within 10-25 minutes' travel time by bus or train.

Examples include two bus routes from Harefield library to Northwood or Uxbridge libraries; three bus routes from West Drayton library to Yiewsley, Botwell Green or Uxbridge libraries; and two bus routes and two train journeys from Ickenham library to Oak Farm, Manor Farm, Ruislip Manor and Uxbridge libraries.

The size of buildings and provision of facilities were also factored in, to ensure there was a good spread of libraries across the borough that could accommodate any increase in visits caused by the one-day closure of Tier 3 and Tier 4 libraries. In addition, Tier 3 and 4 libraries near to each other will not be closed on the same day – for example, Charville would close on a Monday and Hayes End on a Wednesday.

Alongside the factors mentioned above, usage data (specifically footfall, book borrowing, new members and PC bookings) were considered when proposing the tiers. Future assessment of demand will also look at these performance indicators and if a branch's use increases or decreases to such a point that they could be considered to belong in another tier, this will be reviewed while bearing in mind remaining transport options and the requirement to operate within existing resources.



CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting the recommendation to adopt the revised Library Service Strategy following public consultation, with the implementation of the strategy maximising the efficient use of Council assets and is expected to achieve efficiencies that support the delivery of the Council's budget strategy approved by Council in February 2023.

Legal

As stated in the report section 7 of the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 requires the Council to "provide a comprehensive and efficient library service" for all persons who live, work or study in the area". In providing this service the Council must encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service and lend books and other material free of charge.

In accordance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, the Council has consulted on its Library Service Strategy for the next 5 years.

As also stated in the report, there is no statutory definition of what constitutes a "comprehensive and efficient library service". This is a matter for the Council to determine having regard to the local circumstances in Hillingdon and its available resources.

The proposed Library Service Strategy has been subject to consultation in accordance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport. The consultation responses are detailed in the appendices and must be taken into account in deciding whether to approve the Strategy.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<u>Cabinet report for consultation – 16 February 2023</u> <u>Residents' Services Select Committee minutes – 12 April 2023</u>



Annex

Proposed Tiers and opening hours for following consultation (changes noted with asterisks) and existing or current hours in grey italics

Tier 1:

Branch	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Botwell Green	9-7	9-7	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-5	10-1
Current	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-5	10-1
Ruislip Manor	9-7	9-7	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-5	CLOSED
Current	9-7	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-5	9-5	CLOSED
Uxbridge	9-7	9-7	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-5	10-1
Current	9-7	9-5	9-5	9-7	9-5	9-5	10-1

Tier 2:

Branch	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Manor Farm	10-7	10-5	10-5	10-7	10-5	10-4	CLOSED
Current	9.30-5	9.30-7	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-4	CLOSED
Northwood	10-7	10-5	10-5	10-7	10-5	10-4	CLOSED
Current	9.30-5	9.30-7	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5`	9.30-4	CLOSED
Oak Farm	10-7	10-5	10-5	10-7	10-5	10-4	CLOSED
Current	9.30-7	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-4	CLOSED
Yeading	10-7	10-5	10-5	10-7	10-5	10-4	CLOSED
Current	10-1 & 2-5.30	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				
Yiewsley	10-7	10-5	10-5	10-7	10-5	10-4	CLOSED
Current	9.30-7	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-4	CLOSED



Tier 3:

Branch	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Eastcote	CLOSED	10-1 & 2- 7	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
Current	10-1 & 2-5.30	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				
Harlington*	10-5	10-5	10-5	10-5	10-5	10-2	CLOSED
Current	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-5	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
lckenham	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2- 7	CLOSED	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
Current	10-1 & 2-5.30	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				
Northwood Hills**	CLOSED	10-1 & 2- 7	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
Current	10-1 & 2-5.30	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				
South Ruislip	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2- 7	CLOSED	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	CLOSED
Current	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				
West Drayton*	CLOSED	10-1 & 2- 7	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
Current	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				

*Harlington library is subject to a separate consultation about its future; if the decision is to close Harlington, West Drayton library will become a Tier 3 branch as mitigation. If the decision is that Harlington will remain operational, West Drayton library will remain Tier 4.

** In February report, it was proposed that Northwood Hills opened through lunchtimes but it is now proposed it will close at lunchtimes with other Tier 3 libraries, for review once the library reopens following its rebuild.



Tier 4:

Branch	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Charville	CLOSED	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-2	CLOSED
Current	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
Harefield	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	CLOSED	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-2	CLOSED
Current	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-5	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED
Hayes End	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	CLOSED	10-1 & 2-5	10-1 & 2-5	10-2	CLOSED
Current	10-1 & 2-5.30	9.30-1 & 2-4	CLOSED				