

THE FUTURE OF HARLINGTON LIBRARY

Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Eddie Lavery
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Cabinet Member for Residents' Services
Officer Contact(s)	Perry Scott – Place Darren Deeks – Libraries and Cultural Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1: Proposed Harlington library closure post-consultation assessment (Equality Impact Assessment) Appendix 2: Library Service Statistics 2022-23 Appendix 3: Consultation questions Appendix 4: Consultation responses

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>At the Cabinet meeting in February 2023, it was agreed to commence a public consultation on the future of Harlington library, with the proposal it be decommissioned.</p> <p>The consultation ran continuously for the period 1st March 2023 to 16th April 2023 inclusive.</p> <p>This report to Cabinet presents the findings of the consultation. Cabinet is asked to note and consider the consultation responses and to confirm a decision on the future of Harlington library.</p>
Putting our Residents First Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: Enjoy access to green spaces, leisure activities, culture and arts</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Thriving, Healthy Households</p>
Financial Cost	The projected saving if proposal to close Harlington library is adopted is estimated to be in the region of £250k
Relevant Select Committee	Residents' Services
Relevant Ward(s)	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

- 1. Notes the findings and considers the responses from a comprehensive consultation exercise and;**
- 2. Having regard to the content of the Equalities Impact Assessment, and noting the actions that are proposed to mitigate the adverse effects of Harlington Library closing, Cabinet considers whether it is satisfied that service users will retain the ability to access a comprehensive and efficient library service within Hillingdon.**
- 3. If Cabinet are satisfied in relation to the above, that Cabinet:**
 - a. Approves the closure of Harlington library from Friday 21st July 2023 and instructs officers to inform all current service users of the closure and advise them about how they can still access the library service within Hillingdon, including the digital library, Mobile library and nearby alternative static libraries.**
 - b. Authorises the Corporate Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Residents Services, to negotiate appropriate compensation with Harlington School.**
 - c. Instructs officers to take all necessary steps to terminate the Council's lease relating to Harlington Library in accordance with the requirements of the Department for Education.**

Reasons for recommendation

As set out in the February Cabinet paper, Harlington library has low usage among the general population, particularly when compared to usage by school students. With the redevelopment of Harlington school site, the library would be moving some 200 metres further into the school grounds, which is likely to further impact its use as a public library.

The proposal to decommission Harlington library is based on its primary use being by the school, coupled with the associated lease costs meaning the Council is paying to provide a public library that is being underutilised.

Alternative options considered / risk management

No viable alternative options have been identified. A suitable alternative site in the area for a public library has not been identified. Promotion of the branch to increase usage is unlikely to improve usage considering that Harlington library has historically been promoted alongside all other Hillingdon libraries and provided engagement options for the general public. Running the library with volunteers is not feasible on this site due to the specific nature of providing a service to the secondary school aged children as well as the general public and would place an unreasonable burden on the School. In addition, with the library site due to move an additional

200 metres into the school grounds, usage of the library by the general public will only reduce further, weakening the case for retaining the library.

Furthermore, Hillingdon is committed to retaining one of the largest networks of libraries in London and residents in Pinkwell ward have the option of visiting other branches in the borough, including Botwell which is approx. 1.06 miles away. A Mobile Library service also operates and Hillingdon libraries have a digital library with 24 hour access.

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. As outlined in the Equalities Impact Assessment and February Cabinet Report, Harlington library sees low engagement from residents in the community. The vast majority of its usage is among students at the school while profiles including aged 60+, pre-school, residents aged 18-59, and primary aged children 4-7 profiles are significantly underrepresented as a percentage of total membership.
2. Figures for Financial Year 2022/23 show that Harlington library has the lowest rate of book borrowing in the borough, including the smallest and least visited branches in the borough (Charville, Harefield and Hayes End) and the Mobile library. In contrast, visitor numbers are among the highest in the borough, but this is clearly due to school students visiting rather than the general public – months with school holidays show much lower footfall than months within term time. For example, visits were below 3000 in August (when students were on holiday) but almost 7000 (when they returned) in September.
3. As further illustration of this imbalance, West Drayton library has a similar number of items as Harlington library and while it received just over half the number of visitors that Harlington did in 2023, the branch issued over 23,000 more books and joined 232 more new members.
4. Harlington library is ranked 12th of 17 libraries for new members registered in 2022/23, but joining was highest in September 2023, demonstrating this is due to Year 7s joining at the start of the school year. This is similar to visitor figures, in that usage is linked to school student use rather than use by the general public. More figures that show how use of Harlington library is predominantly by the school and not by general residents in the area can be found in the February Cabinet report and the Equalities Impact Assessment.
5. The Council pays annual costs associated with the lease of Harlington library on the school site of approximately £ 48,000 as well as paying for the staffing and book stock.
6. The Council will gift the school with any stock, shelving, furniture and PCs that will assist, should the decision be to close Harlington Library.

7. The Harlington School headteacher has no objections to the proposal and is supportive of it, while raising a concern about loss of revenue. Quote: *We continue to wish to work with and alongside Hillingdon Council to support this proposal, which we see as both logical and in the long term interests of both the School and the Local Authority. We look to the local authority for any subsidies or support to accommodate extra expenditure that the School will incur alongside the unplanned loss of revenue to our forecasts.*
8. It is acknowledged in the Equalities Impact Assessment provided with the February report that the closure of Harlington library would inconvenience residents, particularly those with disabilities. This has also been raised by respondents to the consultation so a new Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed following consultation and is attached in Appendix 1 to consider the mitigations.
9. It is proposed that if Harlington library is decommissioned, West Drayton moves from Tier 4 to Tier 3. This will mean West Drayton offers on 7pm closure per week and a later closure time on Saturday in keeping with other Tier 3 branches. This would help to further mitigate against the closure of Harlington library. West Drayton is one of the closest alternative branches (1.54 miles from Harlington library site) and is accessible by public transport and has step free access.
10. Other mitigations noted in the Assessment include the availability of nearby libraries on public transport routes, increased Mobile library coverage in Pinkwell ward and the 24/7 digital library.
11. The rebuild of Harlington School is part of the Department for Education's (DfE) Priority School Building Programme. The new school building is due to be completed and handed over on 21st August 2023, it was designed to provide 3 permanent classrooms for the Adult Education service and space for a public library. The school has also offered 2 additional classroom spaces in the main building for a year to allow the adult education service to continue providing service close to the current level.
12. As part of the building works, the existing building on the Harlington school site will be demolished including the library and the adult education facilities which are currently leased to the local authority.
13. At the start of the project, the local authority and the DfE agreed that all leases on the existing building will be surrendered at an appropriate time. The surrender includes leases of the library and adult education which was made between the Governing body of Harlington School and the London Borough of Hillingdon.
14. On 26th April 2023, the DfE issued a formal notice to the local authority requesting that the leases on the existing Harlington school building be released by 14th August 2023 to meet the DfE's programme for demolishing the building.
15. Lease agreement discussions for the new building will commence following cabinet's decision on the outcome of the consultation to decommission the public library.

16. On 23rd February, local authority officers informed the DFE of the proposal to close the library at Harlington school and the due process which had to be taken before formal decision is made
17. If Cabinet decides to decommission the library, the local authority will be liable to pay the DFE for the cost changing the agreed design of the new school building. The adult education service has also expressed interest in using spaces allocated to the public library. Cost associated with accommodating this request will be included in the DFE's design change submission. The DFE's design change cost is under review and has not been submitted to the local authority.
18. Harlington School are due to submit further information to the local authority about the changes to the library offer which the Council will follow up with the school to discuss further, when this is received.
19. Claims from both parties will be reviewed by officers and due process will be applied before seeking the agreement of the Cabinet Member for Residents' Services to the payments.

Financial Implications

Following the recent comprehensive consultation exercise and relevant responses this report recommends the decommissioning of Harlington Library mainly due to low usage.

This decision would contribute an estimated saving of £250k in operating costs towards the Council's budget strategy, with this report being linked to the overall Library Strategy which is presented on the same Cabinet agenda.

The current Harlington Library staff will be offered an opportunity to relocate to other libraries within the Borough, where there are existing vacancies. No compulsory redundancies are anticipated.

There are likely to be compensation costs payable to the school for the loss of rental income they currently receive from the library. These are yet to be quantified and there is potential to fund these costs from the Council's Capital Receipts under the Flexible use of Capital Receipts Directive.

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.

The ambition of Sustainable Service Delivery within the strategy has identified the challenge of providing a public library within Harlington School footprint, which comes with associated costs and has had to prioritise the needs of school students over other operational considerations. For example, the school requires the library to be open during the lunch period, at a time when many Hillingdon libraries close for lunch. Public usage during lunchtimes is minimal. From September, any library on the school site would be a further 200 metres inside the school grounds, presenting a further barrier to use by the general public.

It is recognised that residents who do use Harlington library will be impacted by its closure, particularly if the branch is closer to them than the alternatives. 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, and good public transport links and a large remaining network of public libraries means Hillingdon would continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to its residents even if Harlington library closes. The nearest alternative from Harlington library, Botwell Green library, is reachable in 10 minutes by car or bicycle, and 20 minutes by an accessible bus on a frequent timetable, with a bus arriving approx. every 10 minutes.

The students at Harlington School will benefit from the library becoming a dedicated facility with stock, layout and facilities chosen and designed to meet their specific academic needs. This will be an improvement on current provision, which is based on the building's intended use as a public library rather than its unintended primary use as a school library.

Consultation carried out or required

A full public consultation on the future of Harlington library was conducted between 1st March – 16th April 2023. The consultation sought the views of those who live, work or study in Pinkwell ward primarily. The consultation questions can be found in Appendix 3.

The consultation received 84 responses from people who use the branch, and 3 who never use Harlington library. Respondents were able to reply via an online form or by hard copy. Those with visual impairments could be provided with a Large Print version or called and talked through the consultation in order to provide a response. The consultation was promoted with posters in Harlington library, on social media, on the Council website, in Hillingdon People and with direct mailing to active members.

Information about the respondents can be found below and in Appendix 4.

- 78 (92%) respondents were local residents or responding on behalf of a local resident. 3 (3.5%) respondents were students at the school and two (2.3%) work or study but do not live in Hillingdon.
- Only 3 of the respondents said they did not use Harlington library
- Of the 74 responses that provided a postcode, 97% were from wards in the UB3 postcode area.

- The majority of responses are from those aged 35-44, followed by those aged 45-54 and 65+. The majority of respondents of Asian/Asian British heritage, followed by people who are White/White British.
- 14% of respondents stated they had a disability.
- 82% of respondents said they only use Harlington library. Of those who use other branches, the most popular alternative is Botwell Green library, followed by Uxbridge.
- The majority of respondents who completed the consultation form visit the library once a month (36.9%), followed by those who visit once a week (32%). 13% said they visit Harlington library on a daily basis.
- Among those responding via the consultation form, most visited to browse and borrow books (82%), and to pick up recycling bags etc (52%). 35% said they visited to access WiFi and public computers, and almost as many said they visited to socialise and relax. The data suggests most library visitors use the library for multiple purposes.
- Almost half of respondents would, or would consider, using the Mobile library if Harlington library closed. Just over half said they would not – reasons for this include being able to use alternative static libraries, lack of computer facilities on the Mobile, limited availability to visit and a preference to use a static library due to its range of reading material.

Comments from respondents about using Botwell Green or West Drayton libraries

Respondents were asked “How would transferring the services from Harlington to Botwell and West Drayton libraries affect you? (Botwell library is 1 mile and West Drayton library is 1.6 miles from Harlington library) Please note, the school would provide a dedicated library for its students if the public library offer is transferred to Botwell Green and West Drayton libraries.”

The majority of respondents noted that the alternative libraries were further away from them compared to the current Harlington library. Some respondents consider the alternatives too far and that having to use public transport to get there would be inconvenient or difficult. Some respondents cited mobility issues and said they would not visit an alternative library. (The comments received, redacted for data protection purposes, are in Appendix 4.)

It is acknowledged that closing Harlington library would be inconvenient for those who live close to it; however, as reflected above many residents already live at least a mile from their nearest library and the authority cannot provide a library within a few minutes' walk of each resident. The new Equalities Impact Assessment acknowledges impact on users with protected characteristics, most especially older people and those with disabilities, but also identifies mitigations.

Retaining a large network of accessible libraries in the borough provides residents with options to visit libraries throughout the week. The proposed opening hours mean the nearest alternative to Harlington (Botwell Green) would be open 7 days per week including evenings, and transport options from Harlington to other libraries close by such as West Drayton and Yiewsley libraries (journey time under 30 minutes), and routes to Uxbridge on single bus journeys.

The Mobile library currently makes 3 roadside stops in the Harlington area on a timetabled basis. These stops are within less than a mile of the current static library site, with a weekly stop in St Peters Way 0.6 miles from the library site. A further 3 stops are made in the UB3 postcode area within 1-2 miles of the current static library site. The Mobile library timetable will be reviewed if closure of the static library is confirmed and weekly stops will be increased to two per week, with the current Friday fortnightly stop reviewed in consultation with local residents to determine if a

better roadside location can be found. The Mobile library ensures residents have local access to book stock, particularly for people with limited mobility.

Some comments were made about the impact on the offer to students, but as confirmed in the consultation, Harlington School will provide a dedicated facility for its students on the school grounds and the remaining network of public libraries remains available for students of all ages to use in their leisure time.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting the recommendation to decommission Harlington Library, with the financial impact being part of the library strategy report presented on the same Cabinet agenda, with the decommissioning of this library contributing £250k to the efficiency saving for this service area.

Furthermore, it is noted that any compensation arrangements can be funded from Capital Receipts under Government direction for transformation related expenditure.

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 those living in, working or visiting Hillingdon. It is for the Council to determine the level of service provided within the Borough, taking account of local circumstances and the availability of resources. Case law provides that when changes are made to service provision, residents should retain a “reasonable ability to access the library service”.

In accordance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport the Council has undertaken two consultations in connection with the proposal to decommission Harlington Library.

The first consultation was with Harlington School. The response of the Head Teacher is contained in paragraph 7 of the report and supports the proposal to close the library, but seeks compensation from the Council for the unexpected loss of income. It is considered reasonable for the Council to negotiate appropriate compensation with the School.

The other consultation with service users and residents generated 84 responses, which are summarised in Appendix 4. In addition, the proposal has been considered by the Council’s Residents’ Services Select Committee. The possibility of alternative service provision has been considered, but no viable options have emerged.

It is confirmed that the consultation carried out by the Council has complied with the statutory guidance mentioned above. Cabinet must now take account of the consultation responses in reaching its decision.

An additional equalities impact assessment has also been commissioned which identifies a number of adverse impacts that will arise if the library is decommissioned. This is particularly the case with disabled and elderly residents who may be unable to travel to another library.

Before deciding whether to decommission Harlington Library, Cabinet must be satisfied that the proposed mitigation measures (increased opening hours at West Drayton Library and additional visits by the mobile library service) taken together with the availability of a 7 day library service nearby and a 24 hour online library facility, will enable service users affected by the proposed closure to retain a “reasonable ability to access the library service”.

Property

Property and Estates Services can confirm that the above proposals do not impede with any future strategies, plans or proposals from an asset management or estates viewpoint.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Cabinet report for consultation – 16 February 2023](#)
- [Residents’ Services Select Committee minutes – 12 April 2023](#)
- Libraries as a statutory service – statutory guidance published by DCMS 1 April 2022. [Libraries as a statutory service - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)