

PROPOSED RELOCATION OF UXBRIDGE LIBRARY AND LIBRARY STRATEGY UPDATE

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Eddie Lavery
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Residents' Services
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Papers with report	Equalities Impact Assessment & Uxbridge library plans

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>Hillingdon Council is committed to putting its residents first and delivering sound financial management. Key to achieving these aims is the most effective use of Council assets and resources. This includes creating hubs/clusters of services, such that residents' needs can be more effectively met; through more joined up services.</p> <p>The current Uxbridge Library building is no longer fit for purpose in the view of Council officers with regards to disability access, and health and safety at work legislation as demonstrated in the Legal comments of this report. It would require significant capital investment to remedy this with further investment required to meet the Councils decarbonising responsibilities. The relocation would deliver wider benefits in service delivery, improved accessibility - particularly for disabled people – along with a reduced environmental impact on the Borough.</p> <p>The proposals, and benefits set out on the proposed move, are subject to planning consultation and consent.</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	There are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations included in this report, but should the relocation of Uxbridge Library be approved, it will reduce operating costs by £412k per year.
Select Committee	Residents' Services Select Committee
Relevant Ward(s)	Uxbridge

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

- 1) **Re-affirms the Council's commitment to joined-up public services designed around residents' needs and notes the progress made on the Library Service Strategy 2023-2027;**
- 2) **Insofar as the proposal for the relocation of Uxbridge Library, agrees that it would, amongst other things as set out in the report:**
 - **Deliver services equal to or better than at the existing site and provide other benefits through its co-location at the Civic Centre;**
 - **Improve the health and safety for those with disabilities;**
 - **Achieve a net saving in carbon emissions of 165 tonnes CO2e per annum;**
 - **Generate an annual saving of approximately £412k;**
- 3) **Having regard to the Equalities Impact Assessment and the benefits of a step free, one-floor library and taking into account the views expressed by library service users, agrees to the relocation of Uxbridge Library from UB8 1HD (High Street, Uxbridge) to UB8 1UW (Middlesex Suite & Civic Centre, Uxbridge) subject to satisfactory planning approval being granted and the closure of the existing site at a time to be determined by the Cabinet Member for Residents' Services.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Delivering joined-up services

The Council desires to be a strong leader of joined-up public services, practicing sound financial management and delivering value for money for all residents by ensuring it continues to use its assets in the most efficient way possible.

The Civic Centre in Uxbridge is the Council's largest property asset and whilst it is often identified as the Council's base of operations, the site has been underused and does not utilise its full public realm and service potential, an aspect reflected in the emerging Master Plan for the Town Centre. Since 2018, the Civic Centre site has also been Grade II listed with a duty for the Council to preserve and, therefore, make best use of the building within these parameters.

To address this, and to ensure services are provided as efficiently as possible the Council has embarked upon a major project to co-locate more services at the Civic Centre. This has included a new Adult Education facility and Family Hub, with arrangements in place for health and care partners to make best use of underused office space.

The proposed relocation of Uxbridge Library to the Civic Centre is consistent with this approach. The Council recognises that better use of the Civic Centre estate can bring about greater resilience and sustainability in services and, importantly, design them around residents' needs, particularly those of children, families, learners, and older people, whilst continuing to deliver on its' commitment to reach carbon neutrality.

Uxbridge Library proposal

This report seeks Cabinet's agreement to relocate Uxbridge library from its current location in High Street, Uxbridge to approx. 300 metres down the road to the Middlesex Suite on the Civic Centre site, subject to satisfactory planning approval being received.

It is the Council officer view that the current Uxbridge Library building is no longer fit for purpose, it is not compliant with equalities or health and safety at work legislation, and the legal comments in this report state that if there was no existing proposal to relocate Uxbridge Library such a proposal would have to be developed in order to protect the safety of all library users and to comply with the Council's legal obligations.

The building does not allow for the safe evacuation of people with disabilities who cannot self-transfer from floors 2-6 in the event of a fire or other emergency. Changing the current lifts to evacuation lifts would cost circa £350,000-400,000 but would also require a generator/secondary power supply, which due to structural constraints make it unviable owing to the space required as well as the Health and Safety matters associated with storing a battery back-up in a location with combustible material.

This would be in addition to the cost of decarbonising the building to meet the Council's climate change action plan commitments, which are estimated at £1.6m, whilst also noting the fact that the building does not have the space to accommodate the size of air source heat pump required and the current boilers are too new to attract Government grants for decarbonisation. All these investment costs would place significant pressure on the Council's revenue fund.

In contrast, the Civic Centre has received Government funding to assist with decarbonisation across the site.

The relocation of Uxbridge library would provide a modern library facility in Uxbridge town centre, improving access and safety for disabled residents, reducing running costs while locating the service within easy reach of other Council services within the same building.

This proposal will continue to ensure the delivery of sound financial management, enhancing services while realising a reduction in operating costs. It is expected that being part of the Civic Centre campus will save £170,000 in gas and electricity, business rates of £139,000, £83,000 on staffing and £20,000 on cleaning costs, realising an annual revenue saving of over £412,000.

The plans for the new Uxbridge library (attached) include facilities not currently provided in the existing building, such as study booths, hireable meeting room space and dedicated laptop/device charging bars. Other popular features of the current Uxbridge library will be retained, such as exhibition and event space, learning centre, Tovertafel (interactive tabletop projections) and a dedicated children's library (enclosed for improved safety and noise reduction) as well as a large book stock collection.

The new location would also offer use of the wider Civic Centre space for events and activities, not limited to the proposed library footprint and late-night opening would be retained.

In summary, the relocation of Uxbridge Library is proposed in order for the Council to meet its legislative and environmental responsibilities, but will also offer an improved service, accessible to all, whilst delivering significant revenue savings and increased value for money for all Hillingdon taxpayers.

Planning permission

The relocation of the library to the Middlesex Suite on the Civic Centre Campus will require planning permission for the change of use of the existing space and this will be subject to independent assessment by the Local Planning Authority, which includes the standard planning consultation process.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The alternative option is to seek to remain at the current premises and address the legislative and environmental problems. However, site specific issues relating to emergency power supply and lifts would require such significant capital investment that it cannot be seen to offer value for money for Hillingdon residents.

Other options remain for the site including lease to partner organisations or sale for capital receipt.

Select Committee comments

The Residents' Services Select Committee were consulted on the draft Library Strategy in April 2023 as part of the proposal to adopt the Strategy, including the proposal to relocate libraries to new buildings in order to make the most of commercial opportunities and fully utilising assets.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Library Service Strategy: progress update

1. The Library Service Strategy was consulted on earlier this year, with over 850 responses from residents. Residents were supportive of the five Ambitions (reading, literacy and culture; health and wellbeing; digital services and inclusion; information and learning; and sustainable service delivery).
2. Residents did express concern about the tiered opening hours but were reassured all 16 libraries would remain responsive to need, with 8 libraries open a minimum of 6 days per week and transport options consulted in developing the tiers.
3. Since approval of the Strategy in May 2023, the service management team has been reorganising the teams to ensure the service can deliver on the strategy, and from April 2024 will adopt the tiered hours approved by Cabinet.
4. The service has already begun to deliver on the ambitions of the Strategy. Notable highlights include:

- a. Reading, Literacy and Culture – the introduction of monthly Coffee and Crime author talks at Manor Farm library; author events including bestsellers Louise Doughty, Alison Weir, Will Dean and Janice Hallett, and a celebration of romantic fiction; an online KS1 visit for 600 children by the author and illustrator of Yes You Can, Cow! - a free event for Hillingdon schools.
- b. Health and Wellbeing – Strength and Balance sessions in 7 libraries and falls prevention workshops as part of Falls Prevention Programme through NHS referrals; the expansion of Alive and Kicking ball library, so that footballs, basketballs and netballs can be borrowed by children at 4 libraries; a Summer Reading Challenge one-day event themed on sport and physical activity; combatting loneliness and social isolation with free activities including Gujarati Coffee Mornings at Northwood Hills library.
- c. Digital Services and Inclusion – the participation of 8 Hillingdon libraries in the National Databank Initiative, distributing data sims to those in digital poverty and working with partners to help people get online for services, banking and job applications; the development of Social Stories for children and adults with neurodiverse learning difficulties, to make visits to the library more comfortable; the pilot of sensory storytimes for pre-school children with autism or other sensory needs; expansion of groups for visually impaired people to engage with literature and library services.
- d. Information and Learning – the partnering with Project SEARCH to accommodate work experience placements for young adults with special educational needs; the introduction of LEGO Spike sessions for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) skills development.
- e. Sustainable Service Delivery – the pilot of WEEE recycling (small electrical items) in 9 libraries; working with Child & Family Development to share facilities and resources; the proposal to relocate Uxbridge library to reduce carbon footprint through being part of a wider campus with carbon neutral upgrades underway, provide income generating opportunities and improve resource sharing.

Disability considerations

5. Disabled access on a library across six floors presents significant challenges, not least in situations where the building needs to be evacuated as lifts cannot be used (Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005). Since Grenfell, the need to ensure everyone invited to use our service can be evacuated from a building, particularly those who cannot self-transfer to evacuation equipment, has been reinforced. Since 2022 there have been two incidents where, due to a power failure, library users who were unable to self-transfer had to remain in the library several hours after the building was evacuated, with no access to toilet facilities and with no working lights. This had serious implications for those unable to leave the library.
6. While guidance to avoid this scenario includes preventing those with physical disabilities from accessing the upper floors, the vast majority of adult book stock is on floors 2-5. Not only this, but it is impractical and undesirable to prevent access to the library due to

someone's disability, where preference is to provide a complete experience to all visitors; however, Health and Safety where life could be in danger takes priority over any Equalities considerations.

7. As noted above, that due to structural constraints, it does not appear economically viable to install a secondary power that would be required in addition to the estimated cost of at least £350,000 to upgrade the lifts.
8. Furthermore, a library set out across six floors is challenging for people with dementia and those with special educational needs. Staffing minimums are higher in Uxbridge due to the need to have sufficient staff to safely evacuate a building of this size, as well as for security considerations that would be mitigated in the proposed new location.
9. Step-free access is currently possible at the Civic Centre due to a ramp positioned to the right of the main staircase. The Principal Access Officer for the Council has assessed the ramp remains suitable for disabled access, with recommendations for new handrails to be fitted. Lighting and signposting will also be improved for ramp access if the proposal is agreed.

Environmental considerations

10. Uxbridge library has the third highest carbon footprint of any Council building in the borough and due to its size and layout, remedial adaptations are limited. Current emissions are 165.16 (tonnes CO₂e). The council's total estimated carbon emissions in 2021/22 was 11,241 (tonnes CO₂e) so the relocation of the library could result in a 1.4% reduction. The two council properties with higher carbon emissions per annum than the library are the Civic Centre (2,028 tonnes CO₂e) and Breakspear Crematorium (528 tonnes CO₂e). Upgrade works are taking place at the Civic Centre and efficiencies are found through housing several services together in one campus. As noted above, expenditure of around £1.6m would be required to make adaptations to the existing library.

Resident views

11. It is acknowledged that the current Uxbridge library building is highly cherished among residents and that its prominent high street location is convenient. Many residents have already made clear their preference to keep the library in its current location, though some of the responses suggest there is a misunderstanding that the library is closing permanently or that its proposed relocation will diminish its standing.
12. Three petitions have been received against the proposals to relocate the library, with a total of circa 1,031-1,131 valid signatures across the three. A petition hearing took place on 23rd November and each petitioner were given their democratic opportunity to state their views and grounds of their objections, which were chiefly reduction in space, book stock and the loss of a library in a key high street position. As set out later in the report, additionally, a public engagement exercise was undertaken by the Council to inform and seek feedback from residents about the proposed library move.
13. It is also acknowledged that residents are worried a change in location could reduce the branch's prominence and that its decrease in size would limit the scope of the branch.

Other benefits

14. The plans show that the relocated Uxbridge Library would retain a prominent position with the main entrance to the Civic Centre acting as the entrance to the proposed library, providing easy-to-navigate, step-free access to a modern library facility based on knowledge of the current library's usage and the opportunities afforded by the relocation.
15. Uxbridge library is designated as one of three premier libraries in the Strategy, and it would remain the largest library in the Borough. The plans allow for sufficient space for visitors, events, stock and study by making efficient use of the space available, introducing new features and facilities while retaining all other services.
16. The current library building has a lot of unused space due to the layout and several empty shelving units. Additionally, approx. 37% of loanable book stock in the building is classed as 'dead', having not been borrowed for over 2 years. The reduction in floor space (from 2050sqm to 1380sqm) and shelving (circa 39% less) can be accommodated through 'right-sizing', with efficient use of available space through design and a reduction in 'dead' stock that will not affect the experience of book borrowers.
17. Care will be taken to ensure stock collections remain highest in the most popular sections, and all subject areas will continue to be covered. Over a third of items loaned in 2022/23 were children's books, with adult fiction representing around 20% of borrowing. Residents can reserve items for free to come from any other library in the Borough. There are no plans to reduce the stock budget as a result of the proposals.
18. The proposed new library will allow for a continued offer of events, activities and diverse library usage for residents, with many aspects enhanced including large event space, space to study and relax, the Tovertafel for people with dementia and neurodiverse learning difficulties, a comprehensive book collection, public computers and learning centre, and café.
19. Additionally, the library will introduce dedicated study booths, bespoke laptop/device charging bars, an enclosed children's library to improve safeguarding and reduce noise, and hireable community spaces that can also be used for small-scale library events and activities.
20. With Adult Learning and the Family Hub already being based at the Civic Centre, residents will benefit from having three frontline services within easy reach in one complex and the service will be able to increase its partnership working with these and other services, to the benefit of residents and children in particular.
21. Managing the current library set out over six floors presents challenges around safety and security for both staff and residents, and situations involving antisocial behaviour can be difficult to deal with. It is anticipated that a one-floor library with security on hand to assist will reduce these issues.

History and background

22. From 1974-1987, a library in Uxbridge was situated at the Civic Centre. The current Uxbridge Library opened in 1987 as a purpose built four-floor public building. The two uppermost levels were designated for staff, and the basement houses the Home Library Service HQ.
23. The current library was refurbished in 2014, opening up an additional level for public use and moving Local Studies and Archives to Level 6 (previously on Level 3).
24. Despite all libraries registering an impact on usage as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, recovery continues, and Uxbridge remains Hillingdon's most visited branch. In the financial year 2022/23, Uxbridge recorded footfall of 166,404. While this is a 68% increase on the previous year, it is still less than half the footfall of pre-pandemic levels.
25. Books loans are around 18% lower than pre-pandemic levels. Uxbridge registered 130,532 loans in 2022/23, which is the highest book borrowing in the borough. There are 75,000 books that can be loaned from Uxbridge library (excludes Reference books).
26. 2,173 new members joined Uxbridge library in 2022/23 (April-March) from a service total of 13,677. Uxbridge library had 10,687 active members (those who used their membership at the library at least once in that period), from a service total of 60,662. Members can use any library in the Borough, and many people who are not registered with the library service still use facilities and attend activities as membership is not a requirement for visiting a public library.
27. Between January and December 2023, the library recorded footfall of 197,481, book loans of 137,733 and 3170 new members. While there is overlap with the last quarter of the 2022/23 figures above, these do suggest continued, albeit slow, recovery in use of the library and it is a certainty that the financial year 2023/24 (April-March) will show an increase on all these indicators compared with the previous year. It is predicted that footfall, for example, will top 220,000 by the end of the financial year. The last pre-Covid total was over 385,000 in 2019/20. A new facility would accommodate future growth not only in the library footprint but the ability to use other spaces in the Civic Centre, utilising committee rooms and the Adult Education Centre, for example, to provide space for events and activities. The cafe area and corridor leading to the main library space includes space for study and relaxation.
28. Since its opening, the library has been modified to recognise changing demands and trends – for example, the introduction of computers from the late 90s to the roll-out of the People's Network in 2004; the reduction of reference stock collections due to online access; the removal of a public information desk due to a drop in demand for this service; the introduction and discontinuation of stock types based on trends (e.g. records, CDs, videotapes, DVDs) and the introduction of online resources including downloadable ebooks, newspapers and magazines, and reference materials.
29. Uxbridge Library has successfully developed a comprehensive offer of activities. The large, open design of the building presents challenges and limitations in providing the events

programme now expected of a public library service, affecting the experience for other library users.

30. It is worth noting that the libraries refurbishment programme between 2007-2014 improved all Hillingdon libraries to ensure residents had access to events, activities and facilities locally, reducing the need for residents to travel to a 'central' library. This programme included several rebuilds including new larger libraries in Hayes (Botwell Green) and Ruislip (Ruislip Manor).

31. Public PC use has been steadily declining since Uxbridge library was refurbished in 2014. In the recent upgrade to Windows 10, Uxbridge library reduced public PC provision and increased space for laptop charging and book study where possible reusing old furniture, responding to customer demand and usage statistics.

Financial Implications

The proposed relocation of Uxbridge Library to the Civic Centre supports maximising the use of assets which is a core workstream of the wider transformation programme. Reduced expenditure associated with the removal of running costs at a second site would deliver revenue savings to the General Fund of £329k with a further saving of £83k from a review of staffing structures.

Any future expenditure associated with the development of plans and the carrying out of surveys will be funded from the Property and Estates budget and can be offset against the Capital project.

The Civic Centre Transformation Capital Budget is £13,403k in 2023/24, for the renovation, refurbishment and decarbonisation of the whole Civic Centre, which includes essential works bringing key public areas, e.g. main reception and the current Middlesex Suite up to standard.

Should it be decided to progress with the relocation of the library, then further funds of £2.2m are set aside within the overall capital budget for essential works to the Middlesex Suite, and this would include library specific kit-out capital costs of approximately £270k in total.

The Council has also secured £13,571k grant from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to undertake decarbonisation work at four Council sites. The total investment is £18,788k, of this £8,841k is for the Civic Centre site and therefore the proposed relocation of Uxbridge Library will ultimately be to a decarbonised and energy efficient building.

The current Uxbridge Library site could be repurposed, which would require further capital investment in the building and for decarbonisation works. Alternatively, the site could be disposed of to generate a capital receipt to finance the Capital Programme, or expenditure associated with transformation work across the Council where other savings can be realised.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

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

An Equalities Impact Assessment (attached) was completed that assessed those most likely to be affected by the relocation were those with physical and mental disabilities, and older people with disabilities including dementia. Women were also assessed as being impacted due to the high percentage of active library members who are female, rather than for any specific reason.

The Assessment also recognises that 1300 new homes have been built on the St Andrew's site, east of the Town Centre, and who reside closer to the proposed library location than to the current one.

Regular visitors to Uxbridge library may find the proposed relocation adds some additional time onto their journey to reach the library, but this will depend on the direction they approach the library from. For example, there are 5 buses that stop right outside the Civic Centre (the 427, U1, U3, U4 and U7) and therefore the relocation would benefit residents arriving via this method without disproportionately adversely affecting residents approaching from the station or car parks. Step free, one-floor access to the library will benefit those with disabilities and learning difficulties and make the library easier to use. There have been some issues related to antisocial behaviour in the current Uxbridge library that are in part attributable to the size and layout of the building; it is anticipated that a one-floor layout in the Middlesex Suite and Civic Centre reception will help to reduce these issues without reducing the types of services available. Subject to the relevant consents, signage on the Civic Centre campus would be improved, and signposting from the current location to the new location would be introduced to assist people to find the library.

Uxbridge library, in its current location, is a very popular feature of Uxbridge High Street and it is acknowledged that many residents are concerned the proposed relocation will diminish the library's prominence. However, despite the proposed plans reducing the size of the library, this is in no way intended to downsize its importance to the town or community. On the contrary, the proposed relocation future-proofs a flagship library in Uxbridge by improving its cost-effectiveness and positioning it in such a way that it is close to other services (e.g. Adult Learning and the Family Hub), and as part of a wider transformation of Uxbridge. The library itself will preserve its main features and introduce new features based on improving the customer experience, including meeting rooms and study booths.

The Home Library Service will also move to the Civic Centre to ensure continued service delivery to housebound residents. Local Studies and Archives will remain in Uxbridge. The Local Studies and Archives search room will also retain its presence in a central position in Uxbridge, and display cabinets will be made more accessible with items on display at the Civic Centre and library locations across the Borough. This is an area of work already developed by Local Studies and Archives staff to ensure artefacts and travelling exhibition displays are available in different libraries. Display cases are now in place at Botwell Green, Ickenham, Northwood and West Drayton libraries.

If the proposal to relocate Uxbridge library to the Middlesex Suite is approved, the current building will be repurposed. While no final decision has been made, the sale and/or reuse of the building will benefit the local economy.

There will be minimal disruption during transition as the new site will be fully built before the relocation work takes place, with consideration given to when any disruption (if any) is least impactful to residents. During relocation, library services will continue to be provided from the current location while it is safe to do so. The service will adapt to circumstance, with the Mobile library able to provide access to book borrowing, pick up of reserved items and returns; the current library can offer 'click and collect' service and returns if it is not viable to provide resident access to the building. While some activities that run at Uxbridge may need to be suspended until the new facility is open, other libraries in the borough may be able to host in the interim as well as provide access to book stock, public computers and other library services.

Consultation carried out or required

On 10 November 2023 the Council publicised its proposals for the relocation of the library giving residents online and visiting Uxbridge library the opportunity to see the proposals. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were also provided to inform residents of the proposed changes, and an email address provided. It was decided in December to extend the period for making comments to January 19th 2024 following a petition hearing in November.

In this time, approx. 6,000 active users of Uxbridge library (those who have used the library in the past 12 months) were contacted by email where their address was on the system to make them aware of the plans. Posters were placed in all other Hillingdon libraries to make users of other libraries aware.

A full consultation was carried out on the library service strategy in the spring, with over 860 responses from residents. Ambition 5, Sustainable Service Delivery, stated the intention to:

- *review use of all buildings to fully utilise assets – make the most of commercial opportunities, co-locating services within an existing library building, **relocating a library to a new building**, or remodelling a library to maximise its potential*

70% of respondents to the consultation felt Ambition 5 was clear, and 74% felt there was nothing missing from the Ambition.

While relocation of a resource for its intended continuation does not require consultation, the above demonstrates engagement with residents on proposals. Advice was sought from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as to how the customer engagement exercise could be carried out.

Resident feedback to the proposals

Between November 10th 2023 and January 19th 2024 an email address was provided for residents to comment on and query aspects of the proposals. Some residents also emailed their MPs, local councillors, the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Residents Services and the Head of Libraries and Cultural Services.

266 emails were received from 258 people in relation to the draft plans, alongside lower correspondence received via other channels including Complaints and Members Enquiries. A rally protesting the plans was held outside Uxbridge library on Sunday 14th January, which appeared to increase awareness of the plans; a surge in emailed responses was noted following the rally.

The main themes of the resident feedback are as follows:

- *Relocation disadvantaging library users* – it is widely felt that relocating the library 300 metres from its current location to the Middlesex Suite makes the facility harder for people to access, due to the proposed new location not being in a prime high street location and set back from the main road, further away from the shopping centre and Uxbridge station. This is viewed as inconvenient as well as difficult for people with disabilities and felt that it

could lead to a drop in use of the library. It was viewed as beneficial that the current library is in a pedestrianised area.

- *Diminution of Uxbridge library and effect on high street* – many residents expressed the view that the proposed relocation is to a less prominent position in the town, and that the decrease in size will mean the service will not be able to meet demand or provide full service due to lower book stock and lower numbers of facilities such as computers and study desks. It was expressed that the relocation of the library would have a negative effect on local businesses and the community.
- *Location of Local Studies and Archives* – many residents are concerned that there is currently no confirmed location for Local Studies and Archives if it relocates.
- *Questions about the current location including future use* – many residents responding to the plans referenced the fact the building was purpose-built as a library in 1987; questions were also raised about the intended future use of the building. A number of residents also raised queries about the facilities and services that would be available at the new site
- *Lack of transparency* – many residents felt a full public consultation should have been conducted and that there was a lack of promotion of the customer engagement exercise. There was a view from many residents that the Council has already decided to approve the plans, and a lack of transparency as to the potential savings and timescales.
- *Details of costs and savings* – some residents asked what the works would cost, including what costs would be for retaining the library in its current location, and what savings the Council is projecting as a result of the proposal to relocate.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting that that while there are no direct financial implications associated with the Library Service Strategy update, steps to rationalise the Council's estate provide a mechanism to secure efficiency savings while modernising facilities available to residents, which are in line with key objectives of the Council's Strategy and a critical element of the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast (MTFF).

This change has potential to release cashable savings of £412k from annual property running costs which is equivalent to a return on investment of 18% of the proposed £2,200k investment in readying new facilities on the Civic Centre site, which equates to a payback period of six years on the original investment. This is before any consideration of further benefits available through any realisation of capital value should the existing site be disposed, or value derived from an alternative use.

Alongside the direct financial efficiencies of this change the consolidation of operations onto a single site enables the delivery of carbon savings and contributes towards the Council's carbon reduction strategy. This change also leverages further benefits from the Council's Public Sector

Decarbonisation Fund grant of which £8,841k is already being applied to fund a range of decarbonisation measures at the Civic Centre. The new location also facilitates a range of qualitative benefits including the provision of additional facilities and accessibility that are not feasible at the existing site.

Legal

There are a number of legal issues which Cabinet needs to consider before deciding whether to approve the proposal to relocate Uxbridge Library from its current site to the Middlesex Suite, a distance of approximately 300 metres.

Section 7 of the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 requires the Council to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for those living, working or visiting Hillingdon. In this regard the Council recently consulted on its library strategy and committed to maintaining a flagship library in Uxbridge Town Centre with 7 day opening. The strategy recognises that libraries may be relocated in order to maximise the use of assets.

The report confirms that the relocation of Uxbridge Library will not result in any reduction of services available to residents and advises that additional services and facilities (such as study booths) can be more easily provided at the Middlesex Suite. It is considered that if the library is relocated to the Civic Centre a “comprehensive and efficient” library service will continue to be available in Uxbridge Town Centre.

As the Library Strategy had already been subject to consultation, there was no legal obligation on the Council to consult on the proposed relocation of Uxbridge Library. Nonetheless, in accordance with advice from the DCMS the Council has publicised its proposals for the site. This has led to many service users and residents making clear their opposition to the proposed move. Their views and those of the petitioners are to be considered alongside a number of legal issues.

As stated in the report, there have been two incidents since 2022 whereby disabled customers who are unable to self-evacuate have been forced to remain on the current site for lengthy periods of time during power cuts. During this time there were no working lights and the customers had no access to toilet facilities.

Section 4 of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 places a duty on the Council to “ensure so far as reasonably practicable” that the entire library site and all means of entry and exit are safe and do not pose a risk to health. The lack of a suitable emergency exit for customers who are unable to self-evacuate clearly poses a risk to the health and safety of those customers.

In addition, under section 20 of the Equality Act 2010, whenever a physical feature of a building places a disabled person at a “substantial disadvantage”, the Council is under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to the building in order to overcome the disadvantage. The layout of the current site clearly places those customers who are unable to self-evacuate at a “substantial disadvantage”. It is not acceptable to restrict the facilities or areas of the library available to disabled people who are unable to self-evacuate when these facilities are available to all other library users. Indeed, such a prohibition could well constitute disability discrimination.

The report shows that it is not possible to install a secondary power source at the current library site and that, in any event, there are significant costs to installing a lift. It seems highly unlikely that the current site can be made safe for disabled customers who are unable to self-evacuate.

One benefit of relocating the library to the Middlesex Suite is that all facilities will be provided on a single level so that they are accessible to all library users as detailed in the Equalities Impact Assessment. Relocation of the library will therefore significantly reduce the risk of harm to disabled people in the event of a power cut or emergency.

Given the Council's legal duties set out above, if there was no existing proposal to relocate Uxbridge Library such a proposal would have to be developed in order to comply with the Council's legal obligations and ensure the safety of all library users.

Decisions about the use of Council owned buildings must be made in the public interest, taking account of the financial resources available to the Council and its other legal obligations such as best value and climate change.

The Council has committed to reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 in accordance with its obligations under the Climate Change Act 2008. The report explains that the current site produces emissions of 165.16 tonnes per year. The report also explains that the Civic Centre is undergoing transformation works to make it carbon neutral. Works to the Civic Centre are fully funded, whereas there is no current budget to fund necessary work to make the existing library site carbon neutral (estimated at £ 1.5 Million, without the opportunity to apply for funding as noted above). Furthermore, as also noted above, transformation work at the current library location is unfeasible for practical reasons and relocation of the library will generate a significant saving.

In addition, section 11 of the Children Act 2004 requires the Council to ensure that its functions "are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children". As explained in the report, the relocation of the library will make it easier for residents to access Council and other public services available at or near the Civic Centre, including the Uxbridge Family Hub. The provision of a dedicated children's library, in particular, can only benefit children and their families.

All the above matters need to be considered by Cabinet in deciding whether to approve the proposed relocation of Uxbridge library.

Property

Property and Estates have read the above proposals and confirm their agreement with the contents. While the current Uxbridge Library site has positive aesthetics, the layout and shape of the building is particularly constraining in its design, and a one-level premises will have more practical use. The main benefit being for those who may have disabilities and would be unable to self-transfer in the case of a fire or other emergency.

From an Estate Management point of view, there are often many benefits in combining different services from one location, such as the library being run from part of the Civic Centre site.

Planning

The proposed relocation of the public library into the Middlesex Suite would be a change of use for which planning permission is required. The principle of the provision of new or relocated community facilities would be assessed under policies CI2 Community Infrastructure Provision and DMCI 2 New Community Infrastructure of the Local Plan. Policy DMCI 2 requires that the provision of new facilities is located within the community or catchment they are intended to serve, provide buildings that are inclusive, accessible, and flexible and which meet the needs of the intended occupations, are sited to maximise shared use of the facility and make provision for community access. Policy S1 Development London's social infrastructure of the London Plan would also be relevant. This policy encourages the best use of land including the public-estate through the co-location of different forms of social infrastructure and the rationalisation or sharing of facilities. It also requires re-provision of social infrastructure in a way that continues to serve the needs of the neighbourhood or wider community and where they are part of wider public service transformation plan which requires investment in modern, fit for purpose infrastructure to meet future needs.

The planning approval for the current library building includes a condition requiring the local planning authority's permission for any use other than a library. It should also be noted that the current library building would also be classed as a community facility under Policy DMCI 1 Retention of Existing Community Facilities of the Local Plan. Any proposed change of use of the existing library building to a non-community use would be assessed against policies CI2 and DMCI 1 Retention of Existing Community Facilities of the Local Plan. These require that alternative community uses for the building are explored, before non-community uses are considered. Policy S1 Development London's social infrastructure of the London Plan would also be relevant.

The Uxbridge master plan is also under preparation. The baseline report has identified positive feelings about the current library building and identified issues with the perception of the Civic Centre and how welcoming that part of the High Street feels to the public. The master plan and planning application process provides an opportunity to consider any wider improvements that may be required to support a potential relocation.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Approval of Library Strategy – 25 May 2023](#)
- [Petition Hearing – 23 November 2023](#)