

## Notice of KEY Executive Decision

<b>Subject Heading:</b>	<b>Covid-19 Library service options: 5 Nov 2020 – 2 Dec 2020</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Viddy Persaud
<b>SLT Lead:</b>	Jane West
<b>Report Author and contact details:</b>	Gareth Nicholson, AD Customer, Culture, Communications <a href="mailto:Gareth.nicholson@havering.gov.uk">Gareth.nicholson@havering.gov.uk</a>
<b>Financial summary:</b>	
<b>Reason decision is Key</b>	<i>(c) Significant effect on two or more Wards</i>
<b>Date notice given of intended decision:</b>	<u><b>Urgent</b></u>
<b>Relevant OSC:</b>	
<b>Is it an urgent decision?</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Is this decision exempt from being called-in?</b>	<b>Yes. In view of the proposed national lockdown from 5 November 2020.</b>

### The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering  
Places making Havering  
Opportunities making Havering  
Connections making Havering

[X]  
[]  
[]  
[]

## **Part A – Report seeking decision**

### **DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION**

1.1 This executive decision sets out options for and advice on continuation of library services during the latest period of stricter Covid-19 measures. The options and advice below are commensurate with the borough's Gold strategy: *To work together to co-ordinate an effective response to Coronavirus, to preserve life, to minimise the impact on Havering's communities and business, and facilitate recovery and the return to normality.*

1.2 The options presented for decision are:

- a) Close libraries for the period 5 November to 2 December, redeploy staff to urgent Covid response and enhance digital library offer and activities (recommended option)
- b) Subject to the lockdown regulations to be approved by Parliament and any associated guidance permitting this option, close public access at the libraries but retain a 'click and collect' service based on pre-booked appointments available on current library opening hours at all ten libraries. Provide access to computers for essential use only (e.g. job application or starting a benefit claim) pre-booked

### **Regulations and Government guidance and Covid-19 in Havering**

2.1 At time of writing whilst the draft Regulations have been published, they have yet to be implemented and there is no published guidance yet on the operation of statutory library services during the period of national measures due to come in to force on 5 November.

2.2 Current general guidance and messaging is focus on the messages that were used in March during the national lockdown – stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives. Guidance for November onwards is based around a "stay at home message". People should stay at home except for a limited number of specific purposes (including for childcare, education, work if you cannot work from home, food/medicine shopping, exercise, medical treatment).

2.3 The guidance also, however, includes enabling non-essential retail to operate as a 'click and collect' service. There is speculation (but no official word as yet) that libraries will be encouraged to remain open on this basis.

2.5 The library service is seeking guidance and referring to Libraries Connected, CILIP and London Libraries for further advice and support.

2.6 The transmission rate in the borough is increasing and at time of writing Havering has the highest rate of infection per 100,000 of any London borough. Infections are increasing among vulnerable groups and hospital admissions, intensive care bed occupancy with covid-19 and deaths at BHRUT hospitals are also increasing.

### **Current library operations and other library services across the country**

3.1 The library service maintained a digital libraries offer throughout the March-June lockdown. Library staff who supported the Shielding calls throughout this period.

3.2 The offline library offer resumed in August 2020 with all ten libraries re-opening with Covid-secure measures in place, including PPE for staff, cleaning regimes in place, measures to quarantine books on return and time limits on use of study areas and computers. Libraries operate in pairs or 'bubbles' to manage staffing effectively while minimising travel across the borough Library opening hours were reduced to:

- Five larger libraries open Mon 1400-1900; Tue, Fri & Sat 1000-1500
- Five smaller libraries open Tue 1000-1500; Wed 1400-1900

3.3 The number of visits to libraries is much lower in 2020 than in 2019. Visits in 2020 are between 9% (Romford) and 33% (Harold Hill) versus previous year. Issues of books difference varies between 12% of 2019 totals for same period (Gidea Park) to 44% (South Hornchurch).

3.4 The reduction in visits and issues is likely down to two factors: the reduction in opening hours and residents making decisions not to spend time in public places like libraries.

3.5 The service saw a significant increase in digital library services during the March-June lockdown. Digital downloads of e-books increased by 23% and online activities and events continued, including facebook 'baby bounce' sessions and 'live storytime' sessions.

3.6 In terms of library operations in other local authorities, this is a mixed bag and is reflective of the fact that there is not a single archetype of what a library is and does. Some (e.g. Tower Hamlets) have maintained a closure of 'front doors' since lockdown ended in the summer. Some (Redbridge) have opened only the largest libraries (9 of 14 have remained closed). Some have only re-opened on a 'click and collect' basis. Those which have remained open are more likely to operate as multiple services including community hubs, local area coordination provision and some "essential" services such as support groups.

3.7 The varied models mean that comparison with other places' offers should be made with caution.

### **Options**

#### **Option 1 (recommended option): Close all ten libraries between 5 November and 2 December**

4.1 This option would provide the simplest direction for residents not to make essential journeys during the period of increased restrictions. It would enable the service to:

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- redeploy approx. 33.73 FTE (inclusive of 12FTE enabled with smart working kit)
- expand digital and online offers.
- Focus on work with voluntary sector partners to provide books to the most vulnerable residents in the borough via the housebound service

4.2 Closing the library service could negatively impact vulnerable residents in terms of depriving them of some social contact or the joy/comfort they take from obtaining and reading books. It would prevent access to computer terminals which could adversely impact library members who need them in order to access essential services or, for example, apply for jobs or benefits.

4.3 However, those risks are not considered as acute given the one month time period as the risk of encouraging residents to make journeys, including by public transport, that are not essential.

### **Option 2: operate the library service on a 'click and collect' basis**

5.1 This option is dependent on proposed lockdown regulations and/or associated guidance encouraging local authorities to operate this service. This option would prevent public access to libraries for browsing, study space or access to library computer terminals for the period of the increased national measures.

5.2 Library members would need to select a title online or telephone library staff to discuss a title before pre-booking a time slot to come and collect the title. Computer access would be pre-booked in the same manner and time limits on computer use would be in place.

5.3 Library staff would be on hand at all ten libraries at current opening times to meet residents and provide books/audiobooks and receive returned titles. This would involve a staffing cohort of 24.87 FTE across the week, which would enable 7.11 FTE to be redeployed on priority Covid-19 activities.

5.4 This option recognises the importance of libraries in the borough, retains access to libraries for those who find them essential and takes a proportionate stance to limit the risk to which residents are exposed if they do choose to leave home for a book.

5.5 While recognising the importance the library service plays in promoting the mental well-being of many residents, this option does risk encouraging residents to make journeys, including by public transport, where this will not be essential. The option also reduces the number of staff who would be able to be redeployed on other activity.

5.6 In order to make the logistical changes necessary to operating as a click and collect service, and to communicate the changes to the public, the libraries would need to close on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> and Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November. Libraries would reopen from Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November on the new service pattern but with current opening hours.

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### **AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE**

#### **2.4 Quality of life functions of Cabinet**

Leisure and cultural services

(f) To exercise the Council's functions in relation to leisure services, including the formulation and co-ordination of policies and their co-ordination and implementation. Such functions include (but are not limited to) the following: (i) library and information services

### **STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

This decision is taken to contribute to the delivery of the Council's Gold strategy for the management of the coronavirus pandemic.

### **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

Do nothing and operate a library service as present

On the current draft of the lockdown regulations, this option does not seem to be permitted.

### **PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION**

### **NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER**

Name: Gareth Nicholson, AD Customer, Culture, Communications

Designation:

Signature: GDN

Date: 3 November 2020

## Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

*In view of the lockdown regulations to be debated and voted for in Parliament, the temporary restriction of access to/closure of libraries will be mandatory.*

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

### HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

*Under the Council's emergency flu pandemic plan, the council can ask staff to accept redeployment into other areas of work where the work is similar or within the skill set of the employee. Staff who are no longer required to work in the Libraries, will be considered for allocation to urgent new work resulting from the Coronavirus emergency. Staff who are extremely clinically vulnerable should not be attending the workplace but can be asked to undertake work from home where appropriate.*

### EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

*In this emergency situation it will not be possible to complete an equalities impact assessment. Nevertheless, it is recognised that implementing either of the options presented in this report will have an impact on residents including those with protected characteristics. Accordingly for the most restrictive option, mitigation measures are included.*

**HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

*The purpose of this decision is to protect the public and staff from the impact of Coronavirus.*

*Option 1 best meets this aim as it entirely removes any incentive for residents to engage in non-essential travel (for reasons other than food shopping, education or work where working from home isn't possible).*

*As such it is consistent with and reinforces the key message underlying the lockdown – stay at home, to protect the NHS and save lives.*

*It also ensures that staff do not need to travel to work during the lockdown period reducing the risk to them and footfall on public transport thereby reducing the risk to other residents who must travel.*

*Option 1 also maximising the availability of staff to be redeployed to other duties arising from the lockdown most obviously checking on the wellbeing of the circa 10K extremely clinically vulnerable residents in the borough.*

*Mark Ansell, Director of Public Health*

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

*None*

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**Part C – Record of decision**

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

**Decision**

Proposal agreed

*Delete as applicable*

Proposal NOT agreed because

**Details of decision maker**

Signed

Name:

Cabinet Portfolio held:

CMT Member title:

Head of Service title

Other manager title:

Date:

**Lodging this notice**

The signed decision notice must be delivered to the proper officer, Debra Marlow, Principal Committee Officer in Democratic Services, in the Town Hall.

**For use by Committee Administration**

This notice was lodged with me on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_