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## CABINET

5 February 2025

**Subject Heading:**

Libraries Consultation

**Cabinet Member:**

Councillor Gillian Ford

**ELT Lead:**

Patrick Odling-Smee

**Report Author and contact details:**

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**Policy context:**

People – things that matter for residents

**Financial summary:**

The draft Library Strategy 2024-2029, upon which the library consultation was based, included a financial saving on the libraries budget of £300k. The recommendations in this report will achieve close to that saving, of £288k annually.

**Is this a Key Decision?**

Yes

(a) Expenditure or saving (including anticipated income) of £500,000 or more

(b) Significant effect on two or more Wards

**When should this matter be reviewed?**

March 2026

**Reviewing OSC:**

Place

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

People - Supporting our residents to stay safe and well X

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy X

Resources - Enabling a resident-focused and resilient Council

## **SUMMARY**

The Council's budget setting exercise for 2023-24 included proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the Council's library service by £300,000 over two years. This prompted the production of a Library Strategy that would set out how the library service would function in the next few years.

This report seeks approval of the Library Strategy.

Amongst other things, the Library Strategy provided for the potential closure of 4 out of 5 branch libraries.

The report considers the outcome of the consultation on the draft Library Strategy that sought views of stakeholders on the Strategy and on the option for the Council to close up to four branch libraries.

Following careful analysis of all the responses received during the consultation including the public survey, stakeholder feedback, petitions and correspondence received, the condition of the libraries, the Council's ability to invest capital, and the Council funding gap it is considered that Council funding for three branch libraries should cease. This will result in the consequential loss of service of three branch libraries that are recommended to close on 31 March 2025 and achieve an annual saving of £288k.

This report also considers a number of options to mitigate the impact of the decision.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet

1. Considers and notes the results of the Library Strategy consultation;
2. Approves and adopts the Library Strategy 2024-29 (as attached to this report);
3. Agrees the closure of three branch libraries from 1 April 2025 as set out in this report;
4. Agrees that the three branch libraries are mothballed from 1 April 2025 and delegates to the Strategic Director of Place the authority to use the branch library buildings for any appropriate meanwhile use, provided that any proposals for the disposal or long term use of the branch libraries be brought to a future Cabinet meeting;
5. Agree that the mitigating actions in section 5 are progressed;

6. Agree that the budget for book stock is continued as set out in this report.

<b>REPORT DETAIL</b>
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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility (a duty set out by law) to provide a local library service in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Act requires each local authority to provide a library service that is “comprehensive and efficient for those that live, work or study in the area”. It is for local decision how the library service best meets this requirement practically, including how many libraries there are, where they are, when they are open and what each one offers.
- 1.2 The guidance document ‘Libraries as a Statutory Service’, taken from the Judicial Review brought against the agreed changes by Lincolnshire Council to its library service contains the following: ‘A comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. Comprehensive has therefore been taken to mean delivering a service that is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on council resources. Decisions about the service must be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws upon evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the borough’.
- 1.3 The Council’s current statutory library provision consists of ten library sites, together with the Home Library service, the local studies library and a digital and online library.
- 1.4 Against a backdrop of continuing significant financial pressures for the Council, which included the need to request exceptional financial support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in order to set a balanced budget for the financial year 2024/25, the budget included proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the Council’s library service by £300,000 over two years. The library service accordingly developed a draft library strategy which included a set of proposals to close a number of libraries in order to deliver that saving.
- 1.5 The evidence of need to apply for a capitalisation direction from the Government includes a thorough scrutiny of budget making decisions. The Council must demonstrate to the Government it is doing everything in its control to reduce costs and to deliver savings. Without making these difficult decisions, a request for a capitalisation direction may not be successful which could put further services at risk.

1.6 The draft strategy attached at Appendix A comprised:

- The proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the service by means to closing up to four of the five “branch” libraries (Collier Row, Elm Park, Gidea Park, Harold Wood, South Hornchurch);
- Proposals to reduce the service’s book stock budget by 61% (£161,000) in 2024/25 and £30,000 (from the 2023/24 base) in both 2025/26 and 2026/27;
- A detailed needs and usage assessment which was used to develop the proposals;
- A refreshed vision and strategic priorities to underpin the statutory service in coming years;
- Proposals to develop an investment business case seeking capital funding to improve the quality of the library estate;
- Proposals seeking views on whether a purpose-designed children’s library – either at a fixed site or as a mobile provision – could better meet library need in the future.

1.7 An extensive twelve week consultation on the draft library strategy began on 10 May 2024 and ended on 2 August 2024. Details are set out in section 2 below.

1.8 As part of any consultation on library closures, the Council is obliged to consider any implications arising from the Equality Act 2010. The Council has an equality duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to achieve objectives set in the Act to:

- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

1.9 Conclusions drawn from the consultation process are included below.

## **2 Havering Library Strategy 2024-2029 Consultation**

2.1 The consultation on the draft library strategy began on 10 May 2024 and ended on 2 August 2024. The consultation included:

- Online consultation on the draft strategy via the Council’s *CitizenSpace* portal;
- Hard copy paper version of the above, copies of which were made available at all libraries in the borough (hard copy consultations were subsequently manually entered on to the electronic portal);

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- A series of 15 public meetings that were well attended were held across the entire library estate;
  - “SHOUT about Libraries”, a version of the consultation designed for children and young people. The SHOUT consultation commenced in mid-July 2024 and closed in September 2024.
- 2.2 Petitions regarding library closures were submitted at full council. These include the below that are signed by Havering residents as well as people from further afield.
- Harold Wood Library – Councillor Darren Wise - 2036 signatures
  - Gidea Park Library – Councillor Darren Wise – 96 signatures
  - Libraries (Trades Union Council) – Councillor Mandy Anderson – 22 signatures
  - Gidea Park Library – Councillor David Taylor 570 signatures
  - Green Party – 2 signatures
- 2.3 The Havering Council Libraries Consultation gathered insights from 3,399 respondents, and the SHOUT survey aimed at primary and secondary pupils gathered insights from 1,214 residents regarding the usage, importance, and impact of potential closure of libraries within the borough.
- 2.4 There were fifteen public consultation events with at least one being held at each library in Havering.
- 2.5 Any consultation is only informed by those who choose to take part. Although the council considers that it did take active steps to promote the consultation and exhort residents to respond, and taking into account that the volume of response was one of the largest responses in recent council history, the large majority of residents, and in particular non-library users (but residents whose council tax still contributes to library services) chose not to respond. The Council did seek to engage with non-users of the library service through regular publicity regarding the consultation including articles in the Living publication delivered by email to over 60,000 residents in the borough. Just over 6% of respondents to the survey were not library members with a further 2% not sure if they were a library member.

### **Headlines**

- 2.6 The Havering Library Strategy 2024-2029 consultation report is attached as Appendix B. Whilst all of the report should be considered when taking a decision, certain responses are worthy of highlighting here.
- 2.7 The Library Strategy vision is;

‘A service where education, information and inspiration is available for free to all. We exist to cultivate a community of lifelong learners, serves as welcoming sanctuary for people of all ages and empowers our communities with the tools

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they need to thrive in an ever-evolving world. Together, we build bridges between the past and the future, residents new and old, fostering a shared journey of discovery, enlightenment, and community growth.'

- 2.8 The vision is supported by three strategic priorities;
- (a) Libraries to shape young lives
  - (b) Libraries to bring communities together
  - (c) Libraries to enjoy
- 2.9 The vast majority of consultation responses from the main survey – more than 90% of all responses received – came from residents who declared that they are current library members. Almost two thirds of responses (63%) came from residents whose declared “main local library” was one of the five libraries proposed for consideration of closure.
- 2.10 Two thirds of responses endorsed the service’s proposed refreshed vision, with 20% disagreeing. Library members provided valuable evidence on the activities they enjoy and pursue in libraries and on what other services libraries could provide. Despite the broad range of services that libraries provide, books are still the bedrock of the service and remain as the most frequently used service at a library.
- 2.11 More community programmes and events (59%) more digital and online resources (26%), job search assistance (24%) and enhanced language learning resources (21%) were cited by respondents as events or activities they wanted to see more of in libraries.
- 2.12 The vast majority of responses (more than 82%) declared that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to close four of the five branch libraries. Just under 10% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposals and 7% told us they neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposals.
- 2.13 The draft strategy identified that those whose means of access to the library is currently on foot (with a particular focus on the elderly, disabled people, parents and children) were likely to be negatively impacted by library closures as proposed. In the consultation we asked a number of questions to develop evidence on transport options.
- 2.14 A large majority of respondents, more than 76% of all responses received, told us that their usual mode of travel to the library was on foot. 29% told us they travel usually by car and 20% by bus or train.
- 2.15 More than 58% of respondents told us they were somewhat or very reliant on public transport if they had to access another library in the event of their local site closing. 59% told us they had some or significant concerns about the reliability or availability of local transport options for accessing alternative libraries.

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2.16 The qualitative data received during the consultation, either via free text boxes in the consultation or at public meetings, echoed these concerns. We heard very clearly from a large number of residents, particularly older residents, who travel on a limited basis in the borough and usually visit only familiar places – shopping districts, restaurants, supermarkets etc. Some residents told us that they would not be able to visit a different library if their nearest one was to close, while others told us that crossing major arterial routes (such as the A12 to reach Harold Hill library in the event of Harold Wood closing) would be a significant barrier.

### **SHOUT survey**

2.17 The SHOUT survey of primary and secondary aged children and young people, attached at Appendix C, received 1,214 responses. The majority of respondents, 76.6% were in primary schools years 1-6, whilst 22% were in secondary school years 7-13. A small percentage did not answer this question.

2.18 On frequency of visits to a library, 11.2% visited a library more than once a week, 21.7% visited once a week, 28.7% once a month and 38.4% less often than once a month.

2.19 When asked which is their local library, just over half of respondents at 52.7% cited one of the branches listed in the draft library strategy as one that might close. 7.5% of respondents stated they did not know which their local library was with the remainder citing one of the larger main libraries.

2.20 Respondents were asked what are some of the things you would feel or experience if your local library closed. The largest response of 70.3% stated they would not be able to borrow books anymore. 47.7% said they would not have anywhere quiet to go and 39.3% would miss going to library events or activities. 31.8% said they would use their school library, 26.7% said they would not have somewhere to go after school and 14.7% would not have access to computers or technology.

2.21 When asked if they would be able to visit another branch library if their branch was to close, 41.8% said they could not go by themselves, 40.8% said the other library is too far away and 38.6% said travelling to another library would be difficult. 30.7% said they could visit another library.

2.22 A further question about the impact felt if their local library closed resulted with 30.9% saying it would make things difficult for them, 30.2% said it would make life worse. 22.3% said it would be ok, with 16.6% saying it would not affect them at all.

### **Equalities**

2.23 More than 70% of respondents answered one or more equalities question in the consultation. From this data, we can understand that there is no outlier in

the age range of respondents, which reflects a service used regularly by a broad cross-section of residents. The age range with the largest volume of responses – 19%, was from those who told us they are between 35 and 44 years of age. Respondents aged 65-74 (14%), 55-64 and 45-64 (both 13%) were next highest in volume. Residents aged 75 and over (7%) and 25-34 (6%) followed, with just 1.5% of responses coming from those who told us they were aged up to 24. 22% of responses either did not answer the question or selected that they preferred not to say.

- 2.24 Nearly 25% of respondents did not tell us their gender. 57% of responses came from people who told us they are female and 18% from people who told us they are male.
- 2.25 More than 2,500 responses were received from residents who told us whether or not they have a disability, impairment or health condition. Of that figure, 19% told us they do have a disability, impairment or health condition. Declaration of a long-term illness or health condition accounted for most responses (7%), followed by sensory disability or impairment (5%), mental health condition (4%) and physical impairment or disability (4%).
- 2.26 A significant majority of respondents (nearly 75% of responses received) told us they were concerned or significantly concerned about the availability of alternative accommodations or services for individuals with disabilities if the library were to close. More than 750 responses (23%) were received telling us that the closure of a nearest library impact would impact or significantly impact ability to access other libraries due to a disability.

### **3 Proposed Library Closures**

- 3.1 As set out above, a permanent £300k saving on the libraries revenue budget over a two year period was agreed by the Council in its 2023-24 budget. That can only be realistically achieved by reducing the number of libraries. Section 8 of this report provides consideration of options other than closure. The draft Havering Library Strategy 2024-29 included proposals to close up to four out of the five branch libraries. The branches put forward were:

- Collier Row
- Elm Park
- Gidea Park
- Harold Wood
- South Hornchurch

- 3.2 The branch libraries were initially earmarked for potential closure as these five branches account for less than a quarter of library visits across the existing ten libraries, with more than three quarters of all visits, book issues and the vast majority of IT and WiFi use occurring at the current five main libraries.



- 3.3 The condition of the library estate requires significant investment in order to maintain the current condition.
- 3.4 The consultation proposed the potential closure of up to four branch libraries, in order to meet the required budget saving. However, the Council is mindful of the importance of local libraries, as evidenced within the consultation, the petitions received by the Council and the equalities assessment. As such, after careful consideration, it is recommended that only three branch libraries should close instead of four as stated as a maximum in the draft Library Strategy 2024-2025 consultation.
- 3.5 There would then be seven libraries remaining in Havering mitigating some of the impact of losing three branches. The remaining seven libraries account for 80.1% of all visits to the existing ten libraries in 2023/24 and 84% of all book issues in 2023/24. The financial impact of closing three branches instead of four is covered in the financial implications and risks section of this report.
- 3.6 Whilst proposing which branches to close is not easy, the rationale is explained below along with the likely impacts of the decision to close the three branch libraries recommended. A full needs assessment that considers all the libraries in Havering is included within the draft Havering Library Strategy 2024-2029 at Appendix A. The decision making criteria adopted by the Council seeks an objective basis by reference to the available data, as informed by the needs assessment.
- 3.7 The three branches recommended to close are:
- Gidea Park
  - Harold Wood
  - South Hornchurch
- 3.8 The table below highlights the factors considered when recommending closures and risks for each branch recommended for closure that decision makers need to be aware of when considering the recommendations of this report. The data presented is drawn from the borough's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2023 and 2021 Census data;

<b>Gidea Park Library</b>	
<b>Factors Considered when Recommending Closure</b>	<b>Risks</b>
Closure would contribute £87k towards the budgeted library service saving of £300k.	Gidea Park library is deemed to serve the following areas: Squirrel's Heath, Marshalls and Rise Park, St Edwards, St Albans and Emerson Park. Other branches are also deemed to serve these areas, for example St Edwards is
Closure would prevent the need for capital investment required of £200k+ as identified in a non-intrusive, visual inspection only condition survey. This	

<p>sum is expected to be higher if a full intrusive condition survey were carried out to include mechanical and electrical.</p>	<p>also served by Romford library. The data below is in comparison to other areas in Havering that are in the highest third indices. Considerations to inform decision makers when considering closure of Gidea Park library are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Households where no member has English as main language – England average is 5% - St Edwards 8.3%, St Albans 11.1%</li><li>• Unemployment (% of residents claiming JSA/UC) – England average 3.8% - St Edwards 4.8%,</li><li>• Access to car (% of residents who do not own a car or van) – England average 23.5% - St Edwards 35.9%, St Albans 31.9%</li><li>• Deprivation (% of households with 2 indices of deprivation) – England average 14.2% – St Albans 15.2%</li><li>• Community safety (crime rate) – England average 88.2 – St Edwards 232.9, St Albans 74.0</li><li>• Children (% of population made up of children aged 0-15) – England average 18.6% - St Edwards 19.4%, Squirrels Heath 19.1%, St Albans 21.3%,</li><li>• Older people (% of population aged 65+) – England average 18.4% - Marshalls and Rise Park 23%, Emerson Park 24.9%</li><li>• AHAH Index (higher score = poorer health related environment) – England average 23.2 – Marshalls and Rise Park 24.9, St</li></ul>
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	Edwards 31.2, St Albans 33.8
In terms of visits to libraries in 2023/24, Gidea Park with 37,000 visits is the third lowest number of visits across ten branches in Havering.	
The next nearest library, Hornchurch, is 1.4 miles away and Romford is 1.5 miles away. Travel time from Gidea Park library to Hornchurch library is approximately five minutes by car, eleven minutes by bus and a 27 minute walk. These times are only a guide as local conditions might affect the time taken.	

<b>Harold Wood Library</b>	
<b>Factors Considered when Recommending Closure</b>	<b>Risks</b>
Closure would contribute £101k towards the budgeted library service saving of £300k.	<p>Harold Wood library is deemed to serve the following areas: Gooshays, Heaton, Harold Wood and Cranham. Other branches are also deemed to serve these areas, for example Gooshays is also served by Harold Hill library. The data below is in comparison to other areas in Havering that are in the highest third indices. Considerations to inform decision makers when considering closure of Harold Wood library are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational attainment (% of residents 16+ with no qualifications – England average 18.1% - Gooshays 24%, Heaton 24.9%;</li> <li>• Households where no member has English as main language – England average</li> </ul>
Closure would prevent the need for capital investment required of £140k+ as identified in a non-intrusive, visual inspection only condition survey. This sum is expected to be higher if a full intrusive condition survey were carried out to include mechanical and electrical.	

	<p>is 5% - Gooshays 5.1%, Heaton 6.3%;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unemployment (% of residents claiming JSA/UC) – England average 3.8% - Gooshays 6.1%, Heaton 6.3%;</li><li>• Access to car (% of residents who do not own a car or van) – England average 23.5% - Gooshays 26.9%, Heaton 29.6%;</li><li>• Deprivation (% of households with 2 indices of deprivation) – England average 14.2% – Gooshays 20.1%, Heaton 20.3%;</li><li>• Disability (disabled under Equality Act) – England Average 17.3% - Gooshays 17%, Heaton 17.8%</li><li>• Community safety (crime rate) – England average 88.2 – Gooshays 66.7, Heaton 101.3;</li><li>• Children (% of population made up of children aged 0-15) – England average 18.6% - Gooshays 24%, Heaton 24.6%, Harold Wood 21.3%, Cranham 18.8%;</li><li>• Children – number of households with children living in relative poverty – England average 19.5% - Gooshays 20.5%, Heaton 21.4%;</li><li>• Older people (% of population aged 65+) – England average 18.4% - Cranham 22.9%</li><li>• AHAH Index (higher score = poorer health related environment) – England average 23.2 – Gooshays 24.9, Heaton 29.8;</li><li>• Community needs rank (data analysing the social and</li></ul>
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	cultural factors that can impact upon peoples outcomes) – England average 16,998 – Gooshays 2,021, Heaton 3,366.
In terms of visits to libraries in 2023/24, Harold Wood with 30,000 visits is the second lowest number of visits across ten branches in Havering.	The A12 was considered a barrier to accessing Harold Hill library from Harold Wood and was raised during the consultation as a key factor in some residents not using Harold Hill library as an alternative.
The next nearest library, Harold Hill, is 1.4 miles away. Travel time from Harold Wood library to Harold Hill library is approximately five minutes by car, sixteen minutes by bus and a 25 minute walk. These times are only a guide as local conditions might affect the time taken.	

<b>South Hornchurch Library</b>	
<b>Factors Considered when Recommending Closure</b>	<b>Risks</b>
Closure would contribute £100k towards the budgeted library service saving of £300k.	<p>South Hornchurch library is deemed to serve the following areas: South Hornchurch, Beam Park, Rainham and Wennington. Rainham branch is also deemed to serve these areas. The data below is in comparison to other areas in Havering that are in the highest third indices. Considerations to inform decision makers when considering closure of South Hornchurch library are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational attainment (% of residents 16+ with no qualifications – England average 18.1% - Beam Park 21.8%, Rainham and Wennington 23.4%;</li> <li>• Households where no member has English as main language – England average</li> </ul>
Closure would prevent the need for capital investment required of £75k+ as identified in a non-intrusive, visual inspection only condition survey. This sum is expected to be higher if a full intrusive condition survey were carried out to include mechanical and electrical.	

	<p>is 5% - Beam Park 5.8%, Rainham and Wennington 5.5%;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unemployment (% of residents claiming JSA/UC) – England average 3.8% - South Hornchurch 5.2%, Beam Park 7.5%, Rainham and Wennington 4.7%;</li><li>• Access to car (% of residents who do not own a car or van) – England average 23.5% - Beam Park 27.3%;</li><li>• Deprivation (% of households with 2 indices of deprivation) – England average 14.2% – South Hornchurch 15.4%, Beam Park 18.1%, Rainham and Wennington 16.4%;</li><li>• Disability (disabled under Equality Act) – England Average 17.3% - Beam Park 15.6%;</li><li>• Community safety (crime rate) – England average 88.2 – South Hornchurch 65.1;</li><li>• Children (% of population made up of children aged 0-15) – England average 18.6% - South Hornchurch 20.7%, Beam Park 24.1%, Rainham and Wennington 20.2%;</li><li>• Children – number of households with children living in relative poverty – England average 19.5% - Beam Park 22.5%;</li><li>• AHAH Index (higher score = poorer health related environment) – England average 23.2 – South Hornchurch 31.2, Beam Park 32.2, Rainham and Wennington 28.5;</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community needs rank (data analysing the social and cultural factors that can impact upon peoples outcomes) – England average 16,998 – Beam Park 10,409, Rainham and Wennington 13,934.</li> </ul>
<p>In terms of visits to libraries in 2023/24, South Hornchurch with 19,000 visits is the lowest number of visits across ten branches in Havering.</p>	
<p>The next nearest library, Rainham, is 1.1 miles away. Travel time from South Hornchurch library to Rainham library is approximately four minutes by car, six minutes by bus and a 22 minute walk. These times are only a guide as local conditions might affect the time taken.</p>	

3.9 It is considered relevant to highlight that some residents currently have as far, or further to travel with the existing ten branches than residents that will have to travel to an alternative branch if the recommendations of this report are agreed. Examples of this are included below:

<b>Area</b>	<b>Car</b>	<b>Bus</b>	<b>Walk</b>
Bridport Avenue to Romford Library – 1.7 miles	5 minutes	13 minutes	29 minutes
Clay Tye Road to Upminster Library – 2.9 miles	7 minutes	15 minutes	54 minutes
Laburnham Gardens to Upminster Library – 1.9 miles	6 minutes	24 minutes	37 minutes

3.10 Local Insight estimates that there are 285,744 people currently living within 1.5 miles of a Havering library. Proposed closures of Gidea Park, Harold Wood and South Hornchurch libraries would mean that there would be an estimated 272,165 people living within a 1.5mile radius of a Havering library. This is a reduction of 4.8%. Please note that the Havering population is 262,057 (populations from neighbouring local authorities are also within 1.5mile radius of LBH libraries).

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3.11 For the two branches not being recommended for closure, Collier Row and Elm Park, the following reasons are included for consideration:

- (a) Collier Row has slightly more visits in 2023/24 than the three branches recommended for closure;
- (b) Collier Row is also the most remote library from any other library in the borough with further distance and travel times to other branches if it were to close;
- (c) Elm Park has the highest number of visits, 44,000 in 2023/24 of all of the smaller five branch libraries.
- (d) The condition of Elm Park, being the newest of the five smaller branch libraries, is the best and requires significantly less investment than others.

3.12 The following table summarises against a number of considerations for the five branches considered for closure.

**Ranking scoring:**

**Saving** – Highest saving scores 5, lowest saving scores 1

**Investment required** – Highest investment required scores 5, lowest investment required scores 1

**Visitor Numbers** – Lowest visitor numbers scores 5, highest visitor numbers scores 1

**Distance to nearest branch** – Nearest distance scores 5, furthest distance scores 1

	Saving	Investment Required	Visitor no.	Distance to next nearest branch	Ranking Total
Gidea Park	£87k	£200k	37,000	1.4 miles	
Gidea Park Ranking	1	4	3	3.5	<b>11.5</b>
Harold Wood	£101k	£140k	30,000	1.4 miles	
Harold Wood Ranking	4	3	4	3.5	<b>14.5</b>
South Hornchurch	£100k	£75k	19,000	1.1 miles	
South Hornchurch Ranking	3	2	5	5	<b>15</b>
Collier Row	£90k	£300k	38,000	2.2 miles	
Collier Row Ranking	2	5	2	1	<b>10</b>
Elm Park	£110k	£15k	45,000	1.8 miles	



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Elm Park Ranking	5	1	1	2	9
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3.13 Using the ranking system above provides the rationale for recommending the three branches for closure – Gidea Park, Harold Wood and South Hornchurch.

3.14 Human resource implications arising from three branch library closures will result in 15 posts that will be affected and deleted. Of the 15 posts, 7 are filled by employees on permanent contracts, 8 are filled by employees on fixed term contracts, there are no agency workers and no vacancies. Subject to the recommendations in this report being agreed, the permanent employees will be relocated to vacant posts in other libraries and all those on fixed term contracts will have their contracts ended, then pooled together to apply for vacant permanent posts elsewhere in the library structure under the Council's Redeployment policy. Whilst technically there might be some 'redundancies' resulting from more fixed term contract employees than appropriate vacancies available in the structure, this is not expected to result in any redundancy payments being made.

3.15 Following the library consultation, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adults and Wellbeing wrote to the Government's Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism, despite receiving a response, they could not provide any commitment to providing funding that could prevent library closures.

**Needs Assessment Conclusions**

3.16 The needs assessment, assessing multiple factors, demonstrates a broad need for libraries across the borough. Every area has some level of need for a library and that with limited resources, difficult decisions need to be made about where the Council spends its resources. The following conclusions have been identified from the needs assessment:

- (a) The five main libraries (Harold Hill, Hornchurch, Romford, Upminster and Rainham) serve three quarters of all visits and issues, the vast majority of Wifi access and IT use and are easily accessible for the vast majority of the borough by public transport;
- (b) These main libraries serve catchment areas which include large and growing numbers of children aged 0-15 as well as growing populations of adults aged over 60. They are also in general the libraries in the best condition (although it should be noted that Hornchurch Library in particular will require significant investment within the next five years in order to maintain its operation);
- (c) There is therefore a strong evidence, based on the needs assessment and other factors, for the retention of these five main libraries as part of the future delivery model.

3.15 The impact of closing three branch libraries would be:

- (a) The total provision of statutory library services in the borough would reduce from 370 hours to 298 hours per week, a reduction of 19.5%;
- (b) More residents live further away from their nearest library and journeys that were able to be made on foot would now only be achievable mostly by using public transport, car or bicycle;
- (c) Some areas experiencing high levels of deprivation and/or serving large and growing populations of children or older adults would lose a nearby library. This could mean that children are unable to access libraries and the library offer at key points in the year. One potential impact could be uptake of the summer reading challenge and it is feasible that such a reduction in service could have a longer-term impact on educational attainment and adult literacy;
- (d) Concentrating the service on a provision of seven fixed sites is likely to make more effective use of capital funding when available to adequately maintain the library estate and make future improvements to condition and look and feel at each site.

3.16 The Council's proposed statutory library provision with the recommended changes consists of seven library sites together with the Home Library service, the local studies library and the digital online library. This revised provision is considered to mean that the Council will continue to meet its statutory duty.

#### **4 A Children's Library for Havering?**

- 4.1 The consultation provided for early engagement with library users in the larger survey on a proposal to explore whether a purpose-designed Children's Library – either at a fixed site in the borough or as a mobile service – could contribute to service development and respond to demographic change in future years. The draft strategy was clear that any development would require growth and was not proposed at the expense of the loss of any current library site.
- 4.2 In consultation, respondents gave mixed views on the proposal. 32% of responses told us they were likely or very likely to use such a facility and gave feedback on the range of facilities such a library could contain. There was a particularly strong response from those indicating that such a facility should contain opportunities to develop more activities and materials for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The proposal was however, as could be expected, overshadowed by the consultation on library closures. Many attendees of meetings told us they would prefer children's sections of libraries to be improved rather than a new library to be commissioned. There was no consensus on what form that library should take either – some residents accepted that a mobile library for children could mitigate anticipated reductions in classroom visits to local libraries in the event of closures, while others questioned whether a mobile provision could replace a building. The geography of the borough, one based on localities rather than an

acknowledged centre, was cited by those who did not feel a fixed site library to be workable.

- 4.3 The SHOUT survey also included questions on the provision of a children's library. When asked would you prefer a new library for young people or to improve your current library, 60% said they would improve their current library. Only just under a quarter of responses said they would prefer a children's library.
- 4.4 Given the consultation responses it is not proposed to consider further a children's library, however, in any future plans and investment, consideration is recommended to be given to improving the children and young people's sections of existing libraries. Further consultation will be required to seek the views of children and young people on what they would like to see as improvements.

## **5 Mitigating Actions**

- 5.1 Action to mitigate the closure of three branch libraries if the recommendations of this report are agreed include the following;
- (a) The library website will be updated with bus and train information, as well as information for nearby car parks and disabled car parking spaces. Available car parking at libraries will be assessed to ensure that parking is available for those who need it most;
  - (b) We will work with partners to support provision of information on active and alternative travel;
  - (c) Digital support will be targeted at those who most need it, including older people, users with a disability;
  - (d) Better marketing and promotion of the e-library service offer is needed;
  - (e) Familiarisation visits to other libraries will be offered to older people and families with young children;
  - (f) Further work will be carried out to expand the number of library volunteers able to meet increased housebound delivery demand. As part of this service, we will promote more the use of the Family and Carers Card, enabling cardholders to select and issue stock on behalf of housebound users;
  - (g) Provide an outreach offer targeting schools and community settings which serve communities affected by library closures;
  - (h) For the affected schools, encourage the adoption of the Teachers Card, which enables bulk stock issue with an extended borrowing period;
  - (i) The service will prioritise promoting activities and initiatives, such as the Summer Reading programme and online events like author sessions, to encourage participation. The service will collaborate with affected schools to provide book stock from the closed libraries that will not be relocated to alternative locations;

- (j) Seek locations for a book swap service for communities where branch libraries have closed;
- (k) Consider ways of providing more flexible space in libraries, such as using unbooked meeting room space as study space in busy periods such as examination season;
- (l) Explore capital-funding opportunities to invest in the remaining libraries.

5.2 Of the three proposed closures, detailed work and active discussions continue to take place around the re-provision of a library service in Harold Wood and the possibility of an enhanced community offer in South Hornchurch subject to the schemes being financially viable. Work is also taking place looking at alternative locations for non-library support activities and groups that would be displaced as part of any closures.

## **6. Pre and Post Decision Position**

6.1 Should the recommendations of this report be agreed, attached at Appendix D is the position of a statutory library service as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 both before and after the decision. The position after the decision is still considered to provide a statutory library service with the evidence provided through the needs assessment, the public consultation and then reflected within the content of this report.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 It should be noted that the Council does not wish to reduce library provision at all. However, the financial difficulties facing the Council make it imperative to make difficult choices.
- 7.2 The initial proposal was to close up to 4 of the 5 branch libraries. However, after reviewing the consultation responses, equalities information and the other information provided in this report, it is recommended that only 3 branch libraries close, rather than 4. This seeks to balance the Council's legal obligation to set a balanced budget and its responsibilities to the Borough.
- 7.3 When considering the decision as to whether to close three branch libraries, Gidea Park, Harold Wood and South Hornchurch, as well as the consultation response and needs assessment, the following are recommended to be taken into account.
- 7.4 Budget – there is a £300k saving budgeted within the libraries budget that cannot be met by other means than closing three branches. Even with closing three branches, the revenue saving is £288k so just falls short of the budgeted saving.
- 7.5 Capital – the capital required to invest in ten branch libraries is not available due to the ongoing financial situation for the Council. Whilst it will still be

incredibly challenging to provide capital even for seven libraries, it will absolutely not be possible for ten branches.

- 7.6 Usage – the three branch libraries recommended for closure have the lowest visitor number in 2023/24 of all ten libraries.

## REASONS AND OPTIONS

### **8. Reasons for the decision:**

- 8.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy includes a £300k budgeted saving for the library services budget - £150k for 2024/25 and a further £150k for 2025/2026. The overall financial position of the Council also influences the need to find these savings as all the decisions now required to do so are difficult and likely unpopular.
- 8.2 In order to achieve this saving, the only option considered viable and realistic, whilst still providing a statutory library service as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, is to close libraries. Whilst the saving with closing three branch libraries just falls short of the £300k required at £288k, the needs assessment and consultation responses have influenced the decision not to over achieve on the budget saving required by closing a fourth branch.

### **Other options considered:**

- 8.3 Do nothing – this is not an option as the budget saving is required to meet the Council's legal responsibility to set a balanced budget.
- 8.4 Achieve the required budget saving without closing three branches as recommended – the library service over the recent years has seen the budget reduced quite substantially. It is now at a position that to achieve the savings required, and to limit the capital investments required for the library branches, branch closures are the only realistic option. This option has been rejected.
- 8.5 Close fewer branch libraries i.e. close one or two libraries instead of three. This has been rejected as there would still be a sizable shortfall in the budgeted saving for libraries. However, it should be noted that the Council is proposing to close only 3 branch libraries, rather than 4.
- 8.6 The draft Havering Library Strategy 2024-2025 at Appendix A considers other library models, all of which have been rejected. These are:

(a) Community managed libraries – these run in one of two ways:

- Libraries are operated entirely by community groups or organisations in space not funded by the Council (although

- council owned space to lease may be available). These libraries would not form part of the statutory library service.
- Libraries run on a day to day basis by community groups or organisations. In order to remain part of the statutory service, the library would need to benefit from funding, support for infrastructure (buildings, IT connections) and professional librarian support.

The Council consulted in 2019 on proposals that would see some of the branch libraries transferred to become community managed if local appetite to do so could be evidenced. At that point, and at no point since then – has that local appetite been evidenced.

The draft Havering Library Strategy 2024-2025 included community groups or associations to express a desire and capacity during the consultation to take over the running of a branch library proposed for closure for consideration. No such expressions of interest were received.

(b) Contracted out library service

Some library services nationally are delivered on behalf of rather than directly by the Council. These services take a number of different forms, including contracted directly by private sector organisations, mutualised services (a service which was in the public sector, continues to deliver public services, and has a significant degree of employee control) or services run on behalf of Councils by charity partners on a contracted-out basis.

Desktop analysis has not identified that such a delivery model could guarantee statutory service delivery or delivery of library and broader council outcomes within the Council's current funding envelope.

(c) Replacement of branch libraries with a mobile library

This was rejected due to the set up and ongoing operational costs of a mobile library meaning the service was unlikely to deliver the required savings. In addition a mobile library is considered unlikely to adequately serve the geography and demographics of the borough, particularly that funding such a service may well impact on either opening hours elsewhere in the estate or other services such as the housebound service.

(d) Closure of no libraries but achieve required saving through reducing by half the opening hours in each library.

This option was not considered to be viable because it would result in a reduction of cumulative opening hours from 370 hours to 180 hours a

week. Also, such a reduction in opening hours would be unlikely to meet the Council's statutory obligations.

8.7 Within London alone there are six boroughs, including Havering, either proposing changes to library provision or having already closed branches. These are difficult decisions to take, but other boroughs, like Havering, are having to consider such decisions. Other areas outside of London are also considering and proposing changes to library provision, some 18 county or borough authorities.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

### **Financial implications and risks:**

The recommendation within this cabinet report to close three libraries across the borough would result in annual revenue savings of £288k per annum. The savings per library are broken down below, most of the saving is from staff costs and the remainder is the running costs of the premises.

<b>Branch</b>	<b>£'s</b>
South Hornchurch	100,000
Harold Wood	101,000
Gidea Park	87,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>288,000</b>

Against a backdrop of continuing significant financial pressures for the Council, which included the need to request exceptional financial support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in order to set a balanced budget for the financial year 2024/25. The budget included proposals to reduce the revenue budget of the Council's library service by £300,000 over two years. £288k is the full year saving that is achievable from the closure of the three libraries, alternative options will need to be considered for the shortfall of £12k to be achieved.

The savings figure proposed include some assumptions. A full year of business rates savings have been assumed within the savings figure of £288k. Empty properties receive three months relief from business rates but if the libraries remain dormant then business rates will continue to be payable after the 3-month relief period which would mean the saving would be under achieved whilst the libraries are left dormant. The business rate element of the saving amounts to £23k for the full year and £17k including the 3-month relief.

The second assumption included within the savings figure is that the income from the nursery based at South Hornchurch will continue. South Hornchurch is one of the libraries that is in scope for closing and this site also leases space to a nursery

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setting. The saving of £288k assumes that the nursery will continue to lease this space, and that the income is still forthcoming. The nursery setting currently holds a lease for the space they are renting but there is a risk at the end of the lease period that this income may not continue.

There is also a risk that if the sites remain empty, other costs could materialise such as security costs, hoarding, removals and service cap offs, this would also impact on the savings delivery. The estimated annual costs of retaining the dormant library sites are detailed below.

<b>Branch</b>	<b>£'s</b>
South Hornchurch	43,000
Harold Wood	43,000
Gidea Park	41,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>127,000</b>

The recommendation is that the three libraries will close on 31st March 2025 and therefore the full £288k saving will be able to be achieved in 2025/26, there is a risk that if the closing is delayed this will impact on the savings achievable in 2025/26, however dependent on how long the sites remain dormant determines how much of the above costs will be incurred. If the full amount of mothballing costs are incurred in 2025/26, the total amount of saving that could be achieved in 2025/26 is £161k. The costs below are estimates and could vary.

The saving can only be achieved in full when there are no longer any mothballing costs on the empty premises for a full financial year. Careful consideration needs to be given to the timing of the closing of the libraries in order for savings to be fully realised.

The libraries have had a visual condition survey which has identified that significant capital investment would be required in the buildings and therefore keeping the libraries would add additional pressure to the Council in the mid to long term. Closing the three libraries, would result in the avoidance of this capital investment and the reduction of revenue expenditure of £300k to Havering once the buildings are disposed of. For the three branches recommended for closure, the capital required to address the visual condition surveys is at least £415k. This does not take into consideration more extensive repairs and investment an intrusive condition survey might identify, including mechanical and electrical not included in the visual survey.

### **Legal implications and risks:**

The Council has a statutory responsibility (a duty set out by law) to provide a local library service in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Act requires each local authority to provide a library service that is “comprehensive and efficient for those that live, work or study in the area”. It is for local decision



how the library service best meets this requirement practically, including how many libraries there are, where they are, when they are open and what each one offers.

There is no specific legislative process applicable to potential library closures. However, the Council needs to make an assessment as to whether it can provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service” where changes to the service (including closures) are planned. The Council is obliged to consult on the proposals before the Cabinet makes its final decision. Further, the Council will need to have regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty, potentially by way of an equality impact assessment. It appears that each of these considerations have been met.

**Human Resources implications and risks:**

The recommendations contained within this report will be managed in accordance with the Council’s HR policies and procedures.

**Equalities implications and risks:**

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: ‘Protected characteristics’ are: age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

An equalities impact assessment has been carried out and it is attached to this report at Appendix E.

**Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks**

The closure of three library branches will negatively impact the mental well-being and access to information of the users of those libraries who source information from those libraries and who spend a substantial amount of their time reading books and periodicals or accessing the internet with the support of staff. Although there are no statistics about the regular users of the three specific libraries, People with disability are more prevalent among the consultation responders (19%) than in the Havering population (15%). Nonetheless, the nearest remaining libraries are less than 1.5 miles away, and the three libraries proposed to be closed have lower

footfalls, so the implication will be lower than closing other libraries. Therefore, although the closure of those three libraries will negatively impact the well-being of the users, this option will have the least negative impact on health and well-being.

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

The proposed closure of three libraries will see a reduction in energy use and greenhouse gas emissions across the library estate.

However, the closure might impact sustainable transport options if the libraries were accessible by public transport or walking. This could lead to increased car usage across the borough if people need to travel further to access library services

To support the circular economy, we should consider reusing equipment and furniture from the closed library buildings rather than sending them to landfill.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None