

## Notice of Non-Key Executive Decision

<b>Subject Heading:</b>	Permission to apply to the Arts Council for funding for the refurbishment of Romford Library
<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Patrick Odling-Smee, Director of Living Well
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Gillian Ford
<b>ELT Lead:</b>	Barbara Nicholls, Strategic Director of People
<b>Report Author and contact details:</b>	Alexis Wainwright alexis.wainwright@havering .gov.uk Tel: 01708 433126
<b>Policy context:</b>	<p>If successful this application will transform Romford Library into a vibrant, welcoming space that reflects the diverse needs and evolving identities and needs of our community. Therefore:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Supporting our residents to stay safe and well,</li> <li>(2) A great place to live, work and enjoy and</li> <li>(3) Enabling a resident focused and resilient Council</li> </ol>
<b>Financial summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are seeking up to £499,000 in external funding through The Arts Council England to support the transformation of Romford Library.</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant Overview &amp; Scrutiny Sub Committee:</b>	People
<b>Is this decision exempt from being called-in?</b>	The decision will be exempt from call in as it is a Non key Decision

## Non-key Executive Decision

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

- X 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

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

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

For the reasons set out in this report the Director of Living Well is recommend to agree to officers applying for and accepting funding from Arts Council England of up to a value of £499,000 to refurbish Romford Library.

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

Part 3 of the Council's Constitution Scheme  
3.3.3 - Powers common to all Strategic Directors

##### **1. General**

1.1 To take any steps, and take any decisions, necessary for the proper management and administration of their allocated directorate, in accordance with applicable Council policies and procedures.

##### **5. Grants**

5.1 To apply for, accept and thereafter spend / allocate any grant funding connected with their directorate provided that any match funding or residual liabilities can be met from the existing budget of the directorate. For the avoidance of doubt this delegation shall allow the acceptance of any grant offered / allocated to the Council without any application.

Scheme 3.3.1  
General Provisions

##### **5. Sub-delegations**

5.1 The Chief Officers may delegate any of the powers listed in this part to another Officer, in so far as is legally permissible. Such delegation will specify whether the Officer is permitted to make further sub-delegations. Any such delegation or sub-delegation must be:

(a) recorded in writing; and

(b) lodged with the Monitoring Officer who will keep a public record of all such delegations.

Any such delegation / sub-delegation will become valid only when these conditions are complied with.

The Strategic Director of People has sub-delegated the above powers to Patrick Odling-Smee the Director of Living Well.

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

The Central Library in Romford was purpose built as a main district library and opened in 1965 as the main library of the new London Borough of Havering. The library's offer was over three main floors which included a mezzanine offering a Children's Theatre.

At that time the ground floor had an Adult Lending Library and separate room for the Children's Library. The first floor housed a Reference Library, study space, a large Exhibition Room. The Reference Library extended to a galleried area where the main Local History Collection was housed as well as ten small, lockable Study Booths. The second floor included Administrative Office, Bibliographic Services and the Children and Young People Library Service. A Housebound Library Service operated from one of the stacks.

In December 2008 the Central Library was closed for refurbishment reopening with the full lending Library being on to the ground floor, with the Local Studies Library in a room on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Following that, the rest of the library building was converted to Havering Council offices, a loss of approximately over half the public library space. In 2016 the large meeting room was rented to Havering C.A.B. and the space for talks and events lost.

It is now time to modernise Romford Library, as the current space, décor, and layout are outdated and no longer meet the evolving needs of our diverse and growing community. The building retains a municipal feel and lacks the warmth and inclusivity needed to welcome today's users, and the wider community uses. Its layout is ineffective—failing to balance activities such as lively baby bounce sessions with quiet study; lacking bookable spaces for independent businesses or community groups; and struggling with extreme seasonal temperatures due to poor infrastructure.

To address these challenges, we are seeking to secure external and internal funding to transform Romford Library into a vibrant, inclusive, and flexible space that truly reflects the needs of our residents. The overall library refurbishment will be subject to a separate Key Executive Decision. However, due to the application window to the Arts Council England for funding being short, this decision is required to enable the Council to secure vital funding towards the library refurbishment.

Expressions of interest for the Arts Council England Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF) Round 4 must be submitted by 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025, following which (if invited by Arts Council) applications open on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2025. We will know if we are successful in securing Arts Council England funding in March 2026. . If the funding is secured it will help support our vision and reduce the pressure on the Council's capital funding pot, allowing us to deliver a high-impact, long-lasting community asset in a cost-effective and sustainable way.

Our ambition is to move away from the cold, institutional atmosphere and instead create a timeless, welcoming environment full of character and purpose. We aim to invest in high-quality, durable design, fixtures, and fittings that not only enhance the space aesthetically but also serve practical community functions for years to come.

Romford Library will become more than a facility—it will be a destination: a place where people of all ages and backgrounds come together to learn, connect, relax, and create. Through thoughtful redesign, we will deliver quiet study areas, dynamic zones for children, event space, and flexible meeting pods, ensuring the library grows alongside the community it serves.

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**OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

**Fund the Entire Project from the Council's Capital Corporate Fund**

*Rejected:* While this would allow the project to proceed, it would place significant pressure on the Council's limited capital resources. Relying solely on this funding route would reduce the availability of capital for other essential projects across the borough, making it an unsustainable approach.

**PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION**

None

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

Name: Alexis Wainwright

Designation: Libraries

Signature: *A. Wainwright*

Date: 20/5/2025.

## Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a general power of competence to do anything an individual can do, subject to any statutory constraints on the Council's powers. The recommendations in this report are in keeping with this power.

Officers will ensure they are cognisant of the funding conditions associated with the grant and agree the Council is able to accept and perform its obligations.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

#### **1. Unsuccessful Funding Application**

- Risk: The Council incurs the £4,200 consultancy cost
- Impact: Loss of preparatory investment and potential delays or cancellation of the project.
- Mitigation: Engage experienced consultants, involve Arts Council England early, and ensure application meets all required criteria.

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

- If successful in this application for funding, the refurbishment will likely require changes to how the library operates, including temporary relocation of staff and services during refurbishment. Therefore we will ensure early and ongoing staff engagement, regular updates and opportunities for input.
- The project will offer positive HR outcomes, including the opportunity for staff to contribute to service design and gain new experience in change management, public engagement, or the use of new facilities.

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### **EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

If successful in the funding application on the proposed refurbishment of Romford Library, the following outlines the Equalities and Social Inclusion Implications and Risks, as well as proposed mitigations, in line with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010.

Equalities and Social Inclusion Implications and Risks

#### **Positive Impacts**

The refurbishment of Romford Library presents significant opportunities to promote equality, inclusion, and community cohesion by:

##### **1. Age**

- Impact: The upgraded facility will better support all age groups through flexible, purpose-built spaces, such as quiet zones for older residents and students, and active learning/play areas for children and young people.
- Enhancement: Design will include age-appropriate facilities and intergenerational programming.

##### **2. Disability**

- Impact: The current building's design likely does not meet modern accessibility standards, potentially excluding people with physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments.
- Enhancement: Improvements will include full DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliance—step-free access, inclusive signage, sensory-friendly areas, and furniture/layouts designed for mobility needs.

##### **3. Pregnancy and Maternity**

- Impact: The current environment lacks comfort and facilities for pregnant people and parents/carers with young children.
- Enhancement: Inclusion of comfortable seating and pram-friendly layouts will support this group.

##### **4. Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Reassignment**

- Impact: A more inclusive, welcoming space helps reduce barriers and encourage participation by underrepresented or marginalised groups. A visible cultural offer through events and collections can foster representation and belonging.
- Enhancement: Programme content, collections, and displays will be reviewed to reflect the cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity of Havering's communities (e.g. showcasing Black, Asian and minority ethnic authors, LGBTQ+ voices, and faith-based resources).

##### **5. Socio-economic Status**

- Impact: Romford Library is a free-to-access public space that supports digital inclusion, learning, and community resilience—especially critical for low-income households.
- Enhancement: Offering quiet study zones, digital access, events, and warm spaces during winter supports residents facing economic hardship.

##### **6. Health and Wellbeing**

- Impact: The new design can directly support mental and physical wellbeing through access to learning, creative outlets, community engagement, and comfortable social spaces.
- Enhancement: Well-designed lighting, ventilation, seating, and layout can reduce stress, promote engagement, and support recovery and wellbeing.

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#### **Risks and Mitigations**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
<b>Temporary disruption to services during refurbishment</b>	May disproportionately affect vulnerable groups (e.g. elderly, disabled, isolated residents, low-income families reliant on library access)	Direct users via clear communications, to accessible alternatives during the closure.

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<b>Digital-only engagement on services</b>	May exclude older residents or those without digital access	Ensure in-person options are available and that staff assist users in navigating digital platforms in advance of closure.
<b>Lack of representation in library programming or collections</b>	Risk of cultural underrepresentation or perceived lack of inclusion	Regularly review and update programming and stock to reflect Havering's demographic profile and community feedback.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

The recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable environmental implications or risks.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

N/A

## **APPENDICES**

N/A

**Non-key Executive Decision**

**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

**Details of decision maker**

Signed



Name:

CMT Member title: Patrick Odling-Smee, Director of Living Well

Date:

20/5/2025

**Lodging this notice**

The signed decision notice must be delivered to Committee Services, in the Town Hall.

**For use by Committee Administration**

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

Signed \_\_\_\_\_