

Decision Maker: RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING POLICY
DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE.

Date: December 16th 2020

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: POST-COVID 19 LIBRARY SERVICE RECOVERY

Contact Officer: Paula Young, Principal Client, Libraries
Tel: 020 8461 7202 E-mail: paula.young@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Sara Bowrey, Director of Housing, Planning and Regeneration

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 Before Libraries closed in March due to the first lockdown, Bromley Libraries were performing well. Since the management of the service was transferred to GLL in 2017, there has been a steady increase in the number of items borrowed annually, resulting in Bromley Libraries moving to become the second highest issuing Outer London authority per 1,000 population an increase from third last year. The early phases of recovery after the first lockdown are positive, with in-branch issues having reached 72% of last year's levels before being halted by a second lockdown. As libraries prepare for the challenges of the next phase of recovery, GLL have produced a recovery strategy.
- 1.2 GLL have now responded to two Lockdown closures and has established contingency plans for future closures. This report sets out the direction for post-COVID recovery outlined in the GLL recovery strategy. This is underpinned by the continued commitment to the modernisation of the Library Service including the provision of increased e-resources and online services and renewed library buildings.
- 1.3 After two periods of mandated closure due to COVID-19, GLL now want to restore opening hours to the pre-COVID total of 528.5 hours per week. GLL have put forward a proposal for a temporary variation of opening hours to the total of 528.5 hours which are deemed to better fit local need as part of recovery.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That Members of the Committee agree the strategic approach as set out in this report, namely:

- To review and agree the recovery strategy which sets the direction for the provision of Library Services post COVID-19 including new library buildings.
- To review and agree the temporary opening hours proposal for all the 14 Libraries as set out in paragraphs 3.22 to 3.30.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: There will be no negative impacts from this proposal on vulnerable adults and children in Bromley. The recovery strategy has been designed to ensure that the previously existing levels of service are protected and developed as the Library service fully recovers from the effects of COVID-19. New Library buildings will benefit vulnerable adults and children which will include enhanced provision to meet their needs. The Library Without Walls gives 24/7 access to services.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: New Policy
2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council Supporting Independence Vibrant, Thriving Town Centres Healthy Bromley Regeneration

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
3. Budget head/performance centre: Libraries
4. Total current budget for this head: £4.782m
5. Source of funding: Existing 2020/21 controllable revenue budget

Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement: The Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964
2. Call-in: Not Applicable:

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not applicable

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): The library service has a statutory duty to be available and accessible to all those who live, work and study in the borough. A 2019 estimate identified that 332,336 people live in the London Borough of Bromley. 39,903 registered users used their library card to borrow an item in 2019, representing 12.0% of the population of Bromley. This excludes customers using the library solely for other purposes such as studying, activities, or using public PCs.

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3 COMMENTARY

- 3.1 Since the adoption of the last Library Strategy in 2014, there have been significant changes in the delivery of the Borough's library service, notably the commissioning of the Library Service. This approach has enabled the Council to avoid more extreme measures taken by other authorities. A ten-year contract for management of the Library Service was awarded to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) from 1st November 2017.

COVID-19 CLOSURE: 23RD MARCH - 6TH JULY

- 3.2 In line with Government advice, library buildings in Bromley closed to the public on Monday 23rd March 2020 due to the coronavirus. A full report of services provided by Bromley Libraries during the period of lockdown 23rd March to 6th July 2020 was provided as a response to the DCMS letter (Appendix 1a) and was included in the September 2020 Libraries contract performance report.
- 3.3 Following this unprecedented closure GLL reacted quickly by creating a new library service online. 'Library Without Walls (LWW)' offered a new timetable of online activities and videos creatively making use of modern technology. Over the 3-month period April the following statistics were recorded which are a measure of success
- 6,490 e books and eAudio books issued
 - 18,084 eNewspapers and eMagazines read
 - 277 videos uploaded with 123,399 views in total

- 3.4 Service recovery for Bromley Libraries began on 6th July 2020 the date set by the Government, only one fifth of UK Library services re-opened at this time. Six Bromley Libraries re-opened on 6th July offering Click and collect access and access to computers with no browsing. The remaining eight libraries had re-opened by 3rd August. From September all Bromley Libraries had extended opening hours to 10am-5pm reaching 82% of pre-COVID 19 hours. Services included bookable study space, longer computer sessions and browsing.

SECOND COVID-19 CLOSURE: 5TH NOVEMBER - 2ND DECEMBER 2020

- 3.5 During this second Lockdown a Click and Collect service was available at all libraries from 12pm - 4pm to give access to physical stock to residents. Library without Walls continued to provide free access to reading materials and events online.
- 3.6 At the point when Libraries were mandated to close their buildings to the public once more, in-branch issues had reached 72% of last year's levels. Trends for the number of e-items issued in October 2020 showed an increase of +127% (over double) of last year. Visits had recovered to just 34% of previous years visits due to there being no physical activities, limited browsing, controlled numbers of people entering libraries and the need to discourage customers from lingering in buildings.
- 3.7 From 3rd December when the second Lockdown ended, all libraries re-opened from 10.00-5.00pm offering browsing, ICT facilities and item sales e.g. food waste bags.

SERVICE RECOVERY: STATUTORY DUTY

- 3.8 Libraries are a statutory service which the DCMS has a statutory duty to superintend. To assist delivery of this duty DCMS and the LGA asked all local authorities in England to provide details of restoration of their library services - Appendix 1a. A response from Bromley Council response was provided - see Appendix 1b - which set out the direction for re-opening Library buildings while continuing to develop the digital and eBook offer.

STRATEGIC SERVICE PLANNING

- 3.9 Prior to the pandemic GLL have set out their ambition for the Library service at the milestones specified within the contract. This includes the Strategic Service Plans which are updated each year. In 2019 GLL produced a 5-year strategy which set out the vision for a modern library service for the Borough which puts customers first (Appendix 2)

GLL POST COVID STRATEGY

- 3.10 The GLL recovery strategy for Bromley Libraries (Appendix 2A) expands on their existing vision and incorporates the opportunities and development of new services that were offered during this period. Whilst this has been a challenging time, it has provided GLL with a unique and valuable opportunity to modernise Library services in Bromley and identify development opportunities which are a combination of physical and digital services including
- Library Buildings
 - Library Without Walls
 - Library Development
 - Opening hours

LIBRARY BUILDINGS: MORE THAN BOOKS

- 3.11 Modern Library buildings provide so much more than books. They are social spaces, where people come together to meet each other. This was demonstrated by their absence during COVID-19 as despite accessing books and activities online, customers were keen to get back into Library buildings to access study space, IT provision and access to work space for those working at home. New libraries can offer purpose-built enhanced provision to meet the post COVID needs of customers.
- 3.12 A key objective of the 2014 Library Strategy was to improve buildings when opportunities arise. The new Regeneration strategy 2020-2030 which set out the following ambition for libraries *enhancing the Library service including renewing Library buildings, ensuring it is fit for the 21st Century and responds to our changing lives and communities*. Several schemes are under consideration which would enhance Library Service provision in the Borough. GLL are committed to improving existing buildings e.g. the recent refurbishment of Central Library.
- 3.13 Investing in library buildings has a positive impact on services as statistics at the three newest libraries show. The borough's first "modern" library opened in 2010 at a co-located facility in Biggin Hill resulting in a 27% increase in issues in the first year. After relocating to the Walnuts Shopping Centre in May 2012 visits at Orpington Library increased by 71% in the first year of opening. The trend continued when Penge and Anerley Libraries merged, and the new Penge Library opened in 2014 in a visible high

street location. Visits in the first three months increased by 33.1% and were maintained at higher than pre-merger levels. Further trend analysis shows although initial high increases to issues and visits level out, the decline in issues and visits at the new modern libraries is less than the borough average.

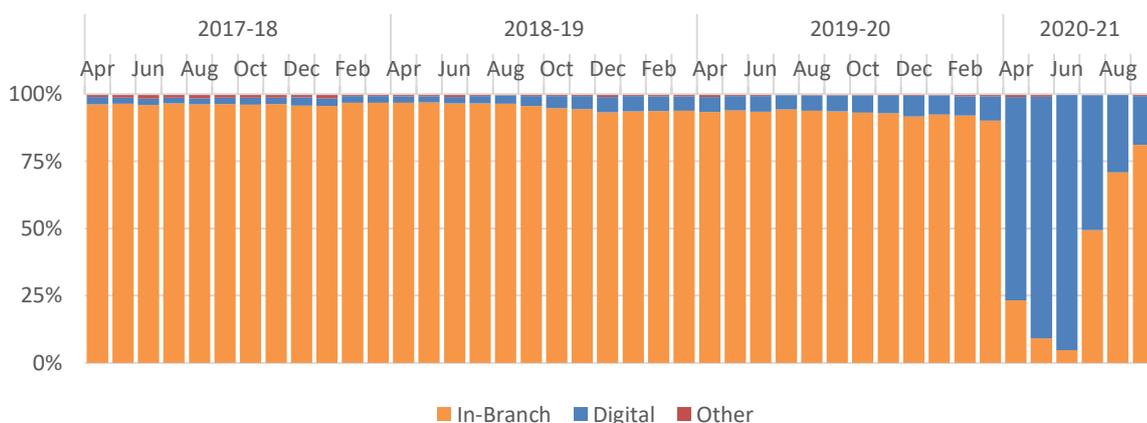
LIBRARY WITHOUT WALLS/15TH BROMLEY LIBRARY

- 3.14 GLL will continue to build on the success of their virtual library programme and ensure that all library users can access both a physical and online service. Whilst the digital service is a growing key element, there are still customers who are digitally excluded, and libraries are working to fill that gap. During lockdown GLL developed a new online service 'Library Without Walls' (LWW). At the request of the Council, this has been retained as the 15th Bromley Library offering 24/7 access to Library services. The online offer attracted new customers, some of whom prefer 'LWW' to physical buildings.
- 3.15 A timetable of online video activities and events was implemented from 18th March and hosted primarily on the Bromley Libraries Facebook page. The videos created activities usually run in-branch prior to lockdown including Bounce and Rhyme, Storytime, and Armchair Walks and were hosted by familiar library staff. Seasonal and periodic events, such as Libraries Week and Loneliness Awareness Week, were also observed with videos and posts. Between 18th March to 18th October 2020, 377 videos have been posted with a total of 170,078 views
- 3.16 Through LWW GLL have maximised modern technology to serve and interact with their users remotely. Additional services have been added to the digital reading and listening offer which improve the wellbeing of users through virtualising reading groups and school visits. This has been developed further as, although Libraries have re-opened, they have not been permitted to offer activities due to social distancing so these have continued online and now includes a group for new parents group and author events.

BOOKS AND E-BOOKS

- 3.17 The proportion of digital items issued in Quarter 1 (April-June) 2018 was just 2.3%. This increased to 87% at the same point this year when libraries were closed due to COVID. When libraries were open again from July the percentage of digital issues was 28% compared to 5.6% last year - see the graph below:

Figure 1 - Graph to demonstrate proportion of items issued digitally relative to in-branch



DIGITAL ISSUES SUMMARY

- 3.18 COVID has accelerated the uptake of the library service's digital offer, more than doubling quarterly issues on the previous year in 2020-21. Digital issues include eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines, eNewspapers, music streams and downloads. Digital issues have maintained year-on-year increases since 2015, while overall issues have fluctuated. eMagazines/Newspapers have become the most borrowed type of item in the online catalogue, followed closely by eBooks.

STOCK SPEND

- 3.19 Spending plans will be reviewed and adapted as required to ensure that both physical items and online resources meet customer needs to ensure that the book fund is being spent on the items that library users want

NEW AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- 3.20 Public libraries are uniquely placed to make a difference to their local communities. In the current crisis Bromley Libraries have demonstrated that libraries do not just provide books but offer services that can provide support during unemployment, mental health issues and a respite from loneliness and isolation. Post-pandemic, along with many UK authorities, GLL are taking the opportunity to identify new areas for development with positive outcomes, supporting economic recovery and positive wellbeing which is detailed in the recovery strategy.
- 3.21 A key area for development post COVID is the greater need for job seeking, business and career support. In preparation GLL are currently reviewing services and making contact with key internal and external agencies in order to support residents. Libraries in Bromley are highly accessible, evenly distributed across the Borough. For residents who are struggling to apply for jobs, our libraries can be a game-changer, providing free access to books and technology, supporting customers to engage with professional networks, or gain new skills during this time. Libraries in Bromley can also offer free access to a host of learning opportunities through virtual programmes. Other development opportunities are highlighted in the recovery strategy.

TEMPORARY VARIATION OF OPENING HOURS

- 3.22 The pre-COVID opening hours were previously set by Bromley Council and deemed to meet both local needs and statutory requirements. The last review of opening hours took place in 2014 when a 13% reduction from 605 to 528.5 hours per week was agreed as part of the budget setting process for 2014/15. Until the March 2020 closure of public libraries in England, GLL had delivered the specified pattern of opening hours.
- 3.23 Under the contract terms, changes to the opening hours can be requested to the Council through the change control procedure ***should a change in circumstances occur***. The service specification states *Any changes in Opening hours will require a full Equalities Impact Assessment Needs Assessment and Consultation as appropriate. These documents will be drafted by the Service Provider and agreed by the Client Unit and where appropriate in accordance with the Council's relevant democratic processes.*
- 3.24 GLL is seeking approval for a temporary variation of opening hours for a six-month period due to COVID-19 recovery from January 2021 with an option for a further six-month extension to aid recovery. The Council's requirements for authorising a variation

are covered in CPR 23.7 and 13.1, this is detailed in section 6-procurement implications and section 9- Legal implications. Should any permanent variation of hours be proposed this will be fully compliant with the process set out in paragraph 3.23.

3.25 The temporary opening hours proposal is set out below. See Appendix 3 for current opening hours. The changed hours are highlighted in yellow. Some hours remain unchanged. For clarity there is no proposal to reduce opening hours overall only to temporarily amend hours to support the service recovery.

Figure 3-Temporary Opening Hours Proposal

Branch	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Beckenham	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:00	-
Central	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:00	-
Biggin Hill	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:00	10:00 - 13:00
Burnt Ash	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-
Chislehurst	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:00	-
Hayes	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-
Mottingham	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 19:00	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-
Orpington	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:00	-
Penge	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:00	-
Petts Wood	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:00	-
Shortlands	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-
Southborough	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-
St Paul's Cray	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 17:00	-
West Wickham	9:30 - 19:00	9:30 - 17:30	-	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:30	9:30 - 17:00	-

ANALYSIS AND BENEFIT

3.26 The proposal reallocates opening hours from times when libraries are used the least during 7.00pm - 8.00pm and uses these hours to increase opening hours at Penge and Central Libraries .

INCREASED WEDNESDAY OPENING.

3.27 Wednesday opening increases to include Penge which will benefit the high number of residents using the Council Tax kiosk to make cash payments. The closed day at Southborough changes so it opens on Wednesday when nearby Petts Wood is closed.

INCREASED LATE NIGHT OPENING UNTIL 7PM

3.28 Late night opening has been suspended since the outbreak of COVID-19. This proposal offers a total of 18 late nights until 7pm across 8 libraries, improving access to more study space and IT facilities which will benefit residents. This includes re-instating late nights until 7pm at Biggin Hill and positions the Central Library as the Borough's flagship Library offering for the first time, 7pm opening 5 days each week.

3.29 Figure 3 shows the change of total of opening hours at branches plus additional changes made to the timetable.

Weekly Opening Hours Total				
Branch	Current	Proposal	Difference	Additional changes
Beckenham	43.5	41.0	-2.5	Late night changed to Monday. Reduction due to standardisation
Biggin Hill	58.0	58.0	0.0	No change
Burnt Ash	21.5	20.5	-1.0	Reduction due to standardisation
Central	52.0	55.0	+3.0	Increased late nights Monday-Friday
Chislehurst	42.0	41.0	-1.0	Late night now on Thursday instead of Monday
Hayes	21.5	20.5	-1.0	Reduction due to standardisation
Mottingham	28.5	28.5	0.0	Late night retained and changed to Monday instead of Friday
Orpington	51.5	50.5	-1.0	Reduction due to standardisation
Penge	43.5	49.0	+5.5	Now open all day on Wednesday instead of only a half-day
Petts Wood	42.0	41.0	-1.0	Reduction due to standardisation
Shortlands	27.5	27.5	0.0	No change
Southborough	27.5	27.5	0.0	Now open on Wednesday instead of Monday
St Paul's Cray	27.5	27.5	0.0	No change
West Wickham	42.0	41.0	-1.0	Reduction due to standardisation
Total	528.5	528.5	0.0	No reduction

SUMMARY

3.30 The number of days each branch is open has not reduced. There are some changes to the days that Libraries are open and to some late nights. Central and Penge will be open for longer whilst Beckenham reduces by 2.5 hours to standardise with other similar sized libraries. Opening and closing times have been standardised as follows

- Opening now at 9:30 across all open days, except Sunday
- Regular closing times are now at 17:30 (Except Mottingham on Wednesday which closes at 17:00)
- Late closing times now at 19:00 across Monday-Friday at all libraries
- Closing times standardised to 17:00 on Saturdays

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

- 4.1 The impact of the proposed service changes will have no negative impact on vulnerable adults, children and young people. Improved modern library services and more accessible opening hours will improve their outcomes e.g. Mottingham Library will be Bromley's first designated autism-friendly library. The availability of 24/7 activities and services will improve access.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This proposed library strategy is entirely consistent with the Council's objectives around Vibrant and Thriving Town Centres and their recovery and wellbeing in line with the Council's broader financial strategy.

6 PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The report seeks a temporary variation to the Council's Library Services contract with GLL.
- 6.2 The Council's requirements for authorising a variation are covered in CPR 23.7 and 13.1. For a temporary variation where there are no changes to the value of the contract, the Approval of the Chief Officer must be obtained. In accordance with CPR 2.1.2, Officers must take all necessary professional advice.
- 6.3 Following Approval, the temporary variation must be agreed via a suitable Change Control notice or similar agreed with the Provider.
- 6.4. The actions identified in this report are provided for within the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the proposed actions can be completed in compliance with their content.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The actions set out in this report have not impacted on the contract price which has continued to be paid in full. The closure of libraries during COVID-19 restrictions was mandated as an alternative library service continued to be provided by GLL, and the temporary variation to library hours does not affect the overall number of opening hours.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 GLL has been commissioned to manage the libraries on behalf of the Bromley Council. The staff working in the libraries are employed directly by GLL and therefore there are no staffing implications for Bromley Council employees arising from the recommendations outlined in this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The report seeks a temporary variation/modification for six months of the current contract with Bromley Library Services which transferred to GLL in 2017 (to review and agree the temporary opening hours proposal for all 14 libraries). GLL now wish to restore the opening hours to 528.5 hours per week which is deemed to be better as part

of the recovery process and indeed the last review of the opening hours was held in 2014 whereby there was a 13% reduction from 605 to 528.5 hours per week anyway.

- 9.2 Under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPR), the Council's requirement for authorisation of a variation/modification to a Contract, as per Regulation 72 (1) (a) (b) (c) and (e) of the Public Procurement Regulations 2015, is in accordance to CPR 23.7 and 13.1. Indeed, the recommended approach is to make use of Regulation 72 (1) which allows Contracts to be modified without a new procurement procedure where the requirement for modification has been brought about by circumstances which a Council could not have foreseen, that the modification does not alter the overall nature of the Contract and that any increase in price does not exceed 50% of the value of the original Contract. Where Regulation 72 (1) c is being relied upon, the modification should be published by way of an OJEU notice. Furthermore, the decision to commence a variation/modification of Contracts with a cumulative value of up to £100k (where there is a temporary variation resulting in no changes to the Contract value) in most cases authorisation for such procurement actions are at Chief Officer level based on CPR 3.2 which allows Chief Officers to waive the normal requirements of the CPR because of an unforeseeable emergency involving serious disruption to Council services subject to Agreement with the Director of Corporate Services and the Director of Finance. Please also note that the delegated authority to Chief Officers to take appropriate procurement action is in place for a period of six months from 1 December 2020 following which it may be extended for a further period at the discretion of Executive or through the Leader. For Contracts which are over £100k in value, it is a Portfolio Holder decision, with a report to Audit Sub-Committee in due course. In accordance with CPR 2.1.2, Officers must take all necessary professional advice.
- 9.3 Following Approval, the modification/variation of the Contract must be applied via the appropriate Change of Control Notice, or similar method signed by both parties, as specified in the contract.
- 9.4 All Council contracts (i.e. over 50k in value), or critical to service delivery must be included on the Council's Contract Database. Officers must keep copies on the Contracts Database of evidence of Agreement and Approval as required for all Procurement actions related to the Contract. This should include both the Report and the evidence of Agreement and Approval and other associated documentation such as minutes of meetings and correspondence.
- 9.5 The Contract can be awarded in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Procurement Regulations 2015.

Non-Applicable Sections:	None
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Bromley Library Service Strategy 2014 - 1st April 2014 DRR14/024 Provision of Library Services- Contract Performance Review 2nd Sep 2020 HPR/2020/022