LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

CABINET

DATE: 4 APRIL 2019

REPORT OF: Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture and Sport

TITLE OF DECISION Proposed closure of Heathfield Library Access Point (LAP)

WARDS: Heathfield

KEY DECISION: YES

IF YES, IN FORWARD PLAN: YES

For general release

1. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

1.1 This report recommends a new approach to the provision of library services in Heathfield ward, moving away from the single inefficient Heathfield Library Access Point towards a wider, more geographically diverse offering which delivers library services closer to the point of need and in collaboration with local service providers.

1.2 The report will be considered by the Adult Social Services and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 2 April 2019. Any recommendations raised at this meeting will be reported to Cabinet on 4 April 2019.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Establish a regular deposit collection of children’s library books in the Community Centre on the Hounslow Heath Estate.

2.2 Pursue a trial ‘click and collect’ library book service in partnership with a local shop on Hanworth Road / Powder Mill Lane, Heathfield.

2.3 Withdraw Heathfield Library Access Point from 31 May 2019 and redistribute the resources across the libraries service.

3. DETAIL

3.1 In April 2006, Cabinet agreed to re-locate Heathfield Library to enable the NHS to provide a new health facility for residents. It was proposed to provide a temporary library at Heathfield Junior School until a permanent library would be re-provided as a re-build either at the then Whitton School or Heathfield Juniors/Infants.
3.2 The proposed temporary library was cancelled in November 2010 after a change in Administration and when Heathfield Library closed in March 2011 the library services hired a multi-use room within Whitton Community Centre at an hourly rate to operate the Library Access Point [LAP]. It is open 12 hours per week, term time only, and offers a basic book loan facility.

3.3 In the period between July 2018 and January 2019, 25 people are recorded as using the LAP. This equates to a cost of £81 per visit, where they borrowed a total of 223 books at a cost of £50 per book. The operation of this service is unsustainable in the current economic climate.

3.4 It is proposed to replace this service with two schemes aimed at reaching areas of Heathfield furthest from current library provision. Hounslow Heath Estate is a predominantly social housing development managed mainly by Richmond Housing Partnership. It has a Community Centre where it is proposed to establish a regular deposit collection of children’s library books. This will be managed by volunteers from the local community. A trial ‘click and collect’ library book service will be offered in partnership with a local shop on Hanworth Road / Powder Mill Lane, Heathfield.

3.5 It is proposed to close the service point from 31 May 2019 and which will reduce operating costs by £22,700 per annum. Book resources will be redistributed to busier libraries.

3.6 Of the current 25 users, 24 (96%) have visited at least one other of the borough’s libraries in addition to the LAP. Only 1 child user (4%) is shown as not using any other library. Discussion will be initiated with this child’s guardian to encourage visits to nearby Whitton Library.

3.7 Whitton Library benefitted from a complete building refurbishment in April 2018 and, from April 2019, will benefit from further Council investment in the form of an additional community area for hire and quiet study space.

3.8 The Library Service is currently carrying a 0.5 FTE Library Assistant vacancy and so there will therefore be no requirement to implement redundancies as a result of the proposed closure.

3.9 The LAP is not a full public library facility and only offers a basic book issue, return and renewal service from a collection of 3,000 books (1,000 books for adults and 2,000 books for children) displayed in 10 folding bookcases, which can be closed when the room is hired by other community groups. It operates from a laptop connected to the community centre’s Wi Fi.

3.10 Richmond’s library service includes twelve libraries strategically located across the borough which promote reading, support learning and encourage local people to fully participate in the rich cultural and community life of the borough. Well-stocked library shelves and 24-hour online resources, along with specialised book collections are used to maintain and develop efficient, high-quality services, which keep pace with technological advances. A ‘click and collect’ reservation service, along with online resources, access to information and IT support, provide a gateway to the library and other council services.
Nearly 70% of adults have access to library services through the Council’s Richmond Card. During 2017/18, the Council’s libraries service received 1,403,005 visitors; issued 1,035,173 books and 83,445 audio, visual or electronic items to 33,435 library members; and, satisfied 74,450 reservation requests with 76% of them within seven days.

The community centre is not on the corporate network, so the LAP is not connected in real time to the library service network. This means that it is not possible to access the full range of resources, information and literary activities that are available to users in other borough libraries.

The LAP is operated by a part-time member of library staff working 18 hours per week. The use of volunteers to run the service point was trialled previously between 2012 and 2014, but this proved unsuccessful. Most library volunteers get involved in library work in order to give something back to their community or to learn a new skill to progress their personal development. Due to the small number of visitors to the LAP, and the restricted library duties carried out there, volunteers found the experience very limiting and soon left to try opportunities elsewhere in the library service.

In the financial year 2017/2018, there were 1,459 visits to the LAP at a cost of £15.35 per visit. 1,298 books were issued at a cost of £17.25 per book (see appendix 1). Comparative costs from Hampton Wick library, which is the next least used library, show a cost per visit at £2.66 and cost per issue at £2.30.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Closing Heathfield Library Access Point would generate a reduction in costs of £22,700. It is a cost saving within the Environment and Community Services budget saving schedule.

4.2 The estimated 2019/20 cost of service provision is made up of 0.5 FTE library assistant (£13,800 per annum) and hire of the Whitton community centre hall (£8,900 per annum).

4.3 Other unspecified costs of the Heathfield LAP service include regular replenishment of the book stock with new items (280 volumes per annum) and weekly book deliveries to the LAP by the Library Service’s courier driver.

4.4 The Library Service is currently carrying a 0.5 FTE Library Assistant vacancy. If approved, this post would be deleted and there would be no redundancy costs as a result of the closure.

4.5 Books from the Library Access Point will be redistributed to other borough libraries.

5 PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no procurement implications relating to this report.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (PLMA 1964) states that ‘it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.’
When fulfilling its duty under section 7, a local authority must have regard to the desirability:

- Of securing that facilities are available for the borrowing of or reference to books and other printed matter, pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials
- That these facilities are sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general and special requirements of adults and children
- Of encouraging children and adults to make full use of the library service

6.2 Taking into account the reasons set out in paragraphs 3.10 and 3.11 above the duty under Section 7 of the above Act will be discharged.

6.3 Under the section 149 Equality Act 2010, the council must, when exercising its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act and
- to advance equality of opportunity and
- foster good relations between those who share a ‘protected characteristic’ under the Act and those who do not share a protected characteristic.

A ‘protected characteristic’ is defined in the Act as age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership are also protected characteristics for the purposes of the duty to eliminate discrimination.

6.4 An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been undertaken to assist decision makers. The duty is, however, personal to the decision maker who must consciously direct his or her mind to the obligations. There must be a proper and conscious focus on the statutory criteria and proper appreciation of the potential impact of the decision on the equality objectives and the desirability of promoting them.

7. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

7.1 As per detail within Equality Impact Considerations (paragraphs 8.3)

8. WIDER CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 POLICY IMPLICATIONS / CONSIDERATIONS

Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (PLMA 1964) states that ‘it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.’

8.2 RISK CONSIDERATIONS

As per Legal and Finance Implications.

8.3 EQUALITY IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS

8.3.1 An EINA has been carried out (appendix 2) which indicates that there will be little negative impact on users, 24 (96%) of whom are shown as either currently using or having used other borough libraries in the preceding 6
8.3.2 Write to each of the current users to expand upon, explain the proposals and the reasons for such, with details of alternative provisions that have been put in place.

8.3.3 Current users will be directed to their nearest alternative borough library where they will be able to access the full range of library services, which are not offered from the LAP. These include free public access computers and training sessions, DVDs and audio resources for hire, newspapers or magazines, information assistance, Wi Fi and literary events.

8.3.4 The library home delivery service will be offered to any of the current users who may not be able to journey to an alternative borough library.

8.3.5 Usage data has shown that 1 child user has only ever used the LAP. Direct contact will be made with the guardian of this child to discuss the feasibility of visits to nearby Whitton Library.

8.3.6 If it is not possible for the child to be taken to another library, due to disability or care restrictions, arrangements will be made to place the child on the library home delivery service.

8.3.7 Whitton Community Centre Nursery visit the LAP on a frequent basis as they are located in the same building. As it is unlikely that the Nursery will be able to visit their nearest library (Whitton) on such a regular basis, arrangements will be made to provide them with a regular deposit collection of picture books.

8.3.8 A regular deposit collection of children’s library books will be provided in the community hall on the Hounslow Heath Estate for the benefit of local children who may not be able to travel to Whitton Library on a regular basis.

8.3.9 A trial click and collect service will be set up in partnership with a local shop on Hanworth Road / Powder Mill Lane. Local library members will be able to order books from the library service which will be delivered to the shop from where they can be collected and returned once read. The shop will have a dedicated internet enabled tablet to access the library catalogue and shop staff will be able to guide prospective users through the process.

8.4 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS
None

9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS
None
11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Statistical information on current user base
Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Needs Analysis

12. CONTACTS

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