



## **Evaluation of libraries transformation**

**Barnet Council**

**Activist Group**

**February 2020**

This report was produced for Barnet Council by Activist Group.



## Report Details

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Version number vf

Date February 2020

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# Executive summary

## 1. Introduction

1. This report presents the result of an independent evaluation by Activist Group of the impact of the changes made to Barnet Council's library service over the last three years. The recommendations made in this report are designed to offer an impartial perspective that will help inform the Council's future decisions about the library service.
2. We have designed the report to be a readable, succinct analysis of the effect of the changes made and what can be done to improve the library service for the people who live, work and study in the borough. However, it is a very long document and so we have provided this shorter summary.
3. In 2016, the London Borough of Barnet began a series of changes to its library service to cut costs in response to reductions in overall local government funding. In summary, the changes included:
  - Introducing self-service opening, which allows people to use the library when no staff are present.
  - Increasing the overall opening hours, but reducing the hours when staff are on duty.
  - Reducing the floor space for libraries in order to release space to generate income.
  - Reducing the number of library staff.
  - Recruiting volunteers to support the service.
  - Transferring the management of four 'Partnership Libraries' to community organisations.
4. The findings and recommendations in this report have emerged from:
  - **Desktop research:** our starting point was to assemble information on the service before examining key data, such as visitor numbers, transaction volumes, computer and Wi-Fi use and how online resources are used. We have also compared the data on Barnet's libraries with those of other authorities.
  - **Inspecting libraries:** after our initial analysis of the data we then visited each library across the borough, meeting with staff, exploring the building and what is on offer. Our team has also completed an additional round of 'mystery shopper' visits.
  - **Talking to people:** armed with an initial understanding of how the libraries operate, we carried out interviews with people inside and outside the Council (including campaign groups); asked the public to complete a general questionnaire; held two public meetings; and held a number of targeted focus groups and interviews.
5. We are very grateful to the hundreds of people who have helped us and taken the time to share their thoughts. We have been struck by the passionate commitment shown by the people who use Barnet's libraries and by the staff who serve them.
6. The Council has asked us to provide them with the benefit of our independent opinion and has encouraged hard feedback, however uncomfortable that might be for members or officers. We have responded accordingly to this refreshing attitude.
7. While the Council or the public might not accept all of our findings and recommendations, we hope that they can find much that they can agree with and support.



## 2. About the library service

8. Here are some key facts about the service:

Heading	Key facts
Outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 library buildings (four run by voluntary organisations).</li> <li>• A home and mobile library service.</li> <li>• Local studies service.</li> <li>• School libraries resources service.</li> <li>• Digital resources, including eBooks and audio books.</li> </ul>
Opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 844.5 weekly hours across the network.</li> <li>• Of those 844.5 weekly hours, 576 are self-service, with staffing for 188 hours in council-run libraries and 80.5 hours in the partnership libraries.</li> </ul>
Self-service opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libraries can be accessed when libraries are unstaffed by swiping their library card and entering a PIN number at the door entry.</li> <li>• Self-service opening is not available at Partnership Libraries.</li> <li>• Young people in school year 11 and aged 15-17 need their parents' permission.</li> </ul>
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £3,536,150 for 2019/20.</li> </ul>

9. Library usage has declined steadily across the country over the last decade, a trend that can be attributed in part to digital materials, including eBooks, but also to the impact of spending cuts resulting from Government policies on public spending following the financial crash in 2008. The Council has faced the same financial pressures and had to make difficult decisions about cuts to service budgets.
10. On the 9th April 2019, DCMS confirmed the Secretary of State's decision not to order an inquiry following their investigation into a formal complaint regarding the changes made to the library service. In his letter, the Secretary of State stated that, in his view, the council 'is complying with its legal obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.'
11. The net effect of these budget reductions alongside other changes in usage patterns has been a reduction in library visits from 282m to 233m over the period from 2013-14 to 2017-18 and in book issues from 247m to 183m.
12. The library sector has made the case that the scale of budget reductions across the country is misguided and fails to recognise the wider role that libraries play in the social, health and economic fabric of the country. Leaders in the sector argue that libraries play a 'preventative' role, improving people's life chances and helping to reduce spending on health and welfare,
13. A number of library services across the country have adopted a clear purpose and identity for the service or an individual library, often by joining library services up with other services that appear a good 'fit'. Examples in London include Tower Hamlets' Idea Stores which have integrated adult education and libraries into a single building. Haringey's Marcus Garvey library includes a council 'one-stop-shop' and is next door to a leisure centre.

### 3. Evaluating the vision and strategy

14. The provision of public libraries is a statutory obligation requiring Barnet Council to provide a “comprehensive and efficient service”. The legislation deliberately left scope for local interpretation and prioritisation to reflect and meet local needs, although case law offers some constraints and guidance.
15. Authorities have considerable freedom to design their own local strategies. However, as we highlight in chapter 2, the financial pressures on local authorities have had a significant impact on local authorities’ plans for their library services.
16. These pressures have only increased since Barnet Council began to consider its strategy for the future of the library service in 2014, although it is yet to be seen whether the last government’s announcement that austerity is over will result in a sustained period of improvement in local government’s finances. The new government’s detailed financial plans for local government are likely to become more apparent early in 2020.
17. These changes made to modernise the service are, in many respects, similar to those made by other authorities, although the Council rejected closing any libraries. The changes planned in the transformation strategy were ambitious and many aspects have been successfully completed. Key changes have not yet been fully implemented (eg volunteering), which has exacerbated the overall impact of the changes.
18. The library service has a clear vision for its future role which compares well with national standards for library services. However, it is not clear that the Council’s strategic plans recognise the wider contribution that the library service can make to the people who live, work and study in the borough. The future vision for the service could be expanded to embrace integration, rather than just co-location, of other, complementary services.

#### Key recommendations

- To build on the new vision for the library service by ensuring that the Council embraces the wider contribution that libraries can make to the Council’s ambitions for the borough.
- To address weaknesses in the implementation of the current transformation strategy and revisit aspects of the strategy that were not sufficiently resourced.
- To review the extent of budget reductions and explore the scope for additional investment in the service given the relative decline in the take-up of the service.

### 4. Evaluating the infrastructure, including buildings and ICT

19. We have made scheduled visits to all the libraries during a mix of staffed, Self-Service Opening (SSO) and, in the case of the Partnership Libraries, volunteer-staffed opening, and members of our team have also 'mystery shopped' a number of the libraries.
20. The older library buildings have been refurbished, furnished and redecorated to an acceptable standard, although the interior design is dull and unimaginative. The new library buildings are, overall, attractive and well-designed, generally in more prominent positions within their localities, although little use is made of shopfronts. The signage and information on the outside of the buildings are poor overall, albeit with some better examples.
21. Staff generally offer a professional and friendly welcome to users of the library service although further training in customer service could be helpful. The general cleanliness of the library interiors and toilets is good overall (with some exceptions). The toilets tend to be closed during self-service opening, a source of complaint for users, though there has been some attempt to address this whenever any library or security staff are in the building.
22. The overall ICT infrastructure includes the key elements of modern library technology, although there have been problems with implementation. The failure to implement successfully new visitor count technology is a fundamental weakness and undermines the effective management of the service.
23. The footprint of most libraries has been reduced significantly. In some locations, particularly at busy times, this may leave insufficient space. It has also proved difficult to let out some of the space that has been designated for renting out.
24. Self-service opening technology generally works as planned and is popular with many users, although there are improvements they would like, eg access to toilets. Many users are fundamentally opposed to the principle of self-service opening, which also acts as a barrier to young people who are below the age limit to be allowed access. There is some support for a reduction in the age limits.

#### Key recommendations

- To invest urgently in high standards of exterior signage and in new design standards for shopfronts and interiors following an initial design feasibility study to develop costed options for the interior design of libraries.
- To keep the availability of space in library buildings under review in order to find opportunities to increase the footprint of the busiest libraries and to support the potential for greater service integration.
- To undertake an independent review of the failure to implement new visitor count technology effectively and fund an urgent recovery plan to correct the problems.
- To pilot keeping suitable toilets open during self-service opening hours, before considering whether to let users decide whether or not to use the toilets.
- To pilot a phased process of reductions in the lower age limit for self-service opening (subject to parents' permission).

### 5. Evaluating the service offer

25. The management of all aspects of library stock/media in all formats appears to function very efficiently in Barnet's library service and the libraries appear to have adequate stock in current and good condition. The media purchasing fund has been substantially reduced and is now at a level where any further reduction in real terms would be inadvisable.
26. The service provides a good range of digital and other online resources and has taken steps to enhance the offer, though the overall 'online library' offer would benefit from more focused 'packaging' and marketing to increase take-up.
27. Provision of public access computers in the libraries is adequate and these appear to be well used and appreciated, albeit the PCs need updating (due to take place soon). Wi-fi is available at all libraries and again is well used.
28. Barnet Library Service runs an extensive programme of events for children and adults using the meeting spaces in the libraries as well as in the libraries themselves, for example for children's activities. This is a key indicator of a good public library fulfilling its role at the heart of the local community.
29. In common with most public libraries, Barnet offers a home delivery library service to people who are for a variety of health reasons unable to visit a static library. Take-up of this service appears to be above average.
30. Overall, library users have reported to us that they feel that the changes have had a negative impact on them and that they use the libraries less often. They also indicated a range of priorities for improvement.
31. The reduction in staffed opening hours has gone too far, particularly given the low number of volunteers. We do not argue with the Secretary of State's finding that the Council continues to meet its statutory duty, but we have found that the reductions deter many library users and are a barrier to those young people who cannot access the library on their own during SSO hours and have impacted on people with disabilities.

### Key recommendations

- To maintain the Media Fund at its current level in real terms.
- To continue to review and enhance the digital offer and to consider greater promotion of this and the wider online library offer, by packaging it as 'the virtual branch library'.
- To increase staffed opening hours to ensure a more consistent and extended pattern of staffed opening (see our specific recommendations on funding, staffing and volunteering in chapter 6).
- To identify a small basket of key performance indicators (including the indicators at table 5.3), to be regularly reviewed by the Libraries management team and reported to Committee, without which it will continue to be difficult to accurately identify the ongoing impact of the transformation programme.

### 6. Evaluating the resourcing of the service

32. Staff numbers and costs have been severely reduced as a result of the transformation programme and the model that Barnet has adopted means that the deployment of staff is very tight. At the same time the model adopted has inevitably meant that staffed opening hours are quite thinly spread across ten sites. An effort has been made to balance opening patterns against the needs of particular groups and across all locations but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that there are too few staffed hours.
33. Community participation (with 70 volunteers) is demonstrably good at the four Partnership Libraries but this has not yet been extended to volunteering at the other ten libraries. The service has started to focus on recruiting volunteers and this needs to be a key initiative over the coming year. This will only be possible with additional resources to take this initiative forward, learning from other library services that have successful volunteer programmes. This would involve strengthening the small team of Community Engagement post to provide 'volunteer co-ordinators'.
34. The transformation programme did not resource the recruitment of volunteers sufficiently and the failure to recruit volunteers alongside the introduction of SSO has resulted in an adverse impact on users and exacerbated the negative perceptions of users about Self-Service Opening and the limited number of staffed hours.
35. Given the level of change the organisation has been through, levels of staff commitment, forward-thinking and enthusiasm are very good, reflecting well on the workforce themselves but also on the steps taken by the service management to engage staff in developing service priorities and initiatives such as the Year of Learning.
36. The replacement of East Barnet Library with New Barnet Library and Leisure Centre could not have been foreseen when the tiering of the libraries was put into place but now means that a new, very visible, library facility is closed while users of the leisure centre enjoy lengthy opening hours.

#### Key recommendations

- To develop and resource an ambitious volunteering plan that targets a dramatic increase in the use and deployment of volunteers.
- To invest, for the medium term, in the creation of dedicated volunteer co-ordinator post/s to accelerate the process of recruiting, developing and retaining volunteers across a range of volunteer roles.
- To increase staffed opening hours by increasing staffing resources in the short to medium term at least until adequate numbers of volunteers can be recruited and the use of volunteers stabilised.
- To undertake a capital investment to reflect the future vision for the service, with improved interior design and external signage and to address weaknesses in the deployment of technology.

# 1. Introduction

### Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This report presents the result of an independent evaluation by Activist Group of the impact of the changes made to Barnet Council's library service over the last three years.
- 1.2 The recommendations made in this report are designed to offer an impartial perspective that will help inform the Council's future decisions about the library service.
- 1.3 We have designed the report to be a readable, succinct analysis of the effect of the changes made and what can be done to improve the library service for the people who live, work and study in the borough.

### Background to the report

- 1.4 In 2016, the London Borough of Barnet began a series of changes to its library service to cut costs in response to reductions in overall local government funding. In summary, the changes included:
  - Introducing self-service opening, which allows people to use the library when no staff are present.
  - Increasing the overall opening hours, but reducing the hours when staff are on duty.
  - Reducing the floor space for libraries in order to release space to generate income.
  - Reducing the number of library staff.
  - Transferring the management of four 'Partnership Libraries' to community organisations.
- 1.5 Following the changes made to the service over the last three years, the Council has commissioned Activist Group to provide an independent review of the impact of these changes and to make recommendations for the future development of the service.
- 1.6 We have been asked by the Council to follow these principles:
  - That the review focuses on recommendations to enhance the future sustainability and effectiveness of the current library offer.
  - That the review considers the totality of the library offer including digital as well as branch-based services.
  - That the review is informed by stakeholder and service user engagement.

### Our approach and scope

- 1.7 This report investigates the effects of the changes to the library service made since 2016. We have examined the quality of the resulting service, users' satisfaction levels and the impact on particular sections of the population. We have also compared the service with other library services in London and elsewhere. We have talked to a range of organisations and asked people directly what they think of the service; how the changes have affected them; and about their ideas for change.

- 1.8 The scope of our work does not include a full strategic review of the service nor a formal public consultation. Also, the report does not review the Council's decision in 2016 to make the changes, nor the Secretary of State's conclusion in April 2019 that the Council continues to meet its statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service. It was also not part of our scope to review the commercial spaces within library buildings.
- 1.9 Instead, we have focused on the impact of the changes and on how the service could be improved. Our findings touch on less high-profile operational as well as more fundamental choices about the vision for the service and its resources. We have set out to provide a practical set of recommendations to the Council for how it can improve the service.
- 1.10 Our findings and recommendations have emerged from four stages of work:
- **Stage 1 - desktop research:** our starting point was to assemble information on the service before examining key data, such as visitor numbers, transaction volumes, computer and Wi-Fi use and how online resources are used. We have also compared the data on Barnet's libraries with those of other authorities.
  - **Stage 2 - inspecting libraries:** after our initial analysis of the data we then visited each library across the borough, meeting with staff, exploring the building and what is on offer. Our team has also completed an additional round of 'mystery shopper' visits.
  - **Stage 3 – talking to people:** armed with an initial understanding of how the libraries operate, we carried out interviews with people inside and outside the Council (including campaign groups); asked the public to complete a general questionnaire; held two public meetings; and held a number of targeted focus groups and interviews.
  - **Stage 4 – undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA):** following the first three stages, we have reviewed and updated the library service's Equality Impact Assessment as requested by the Council. The groups identified in the initial Assessment as most likely to be impacted included children and young people (particularly those in full time education and aged between 10 and 15 years of age), older adults and disabled people.
- 1.11 For our comparisons with other authorities, we have relied on the annual reports from a benchmarking exercise undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). The report we used compared data from 15 London Boroughs (all but one of them in Outer London).
- 1.12 There has been criticism of CIPFA's benchmarking of library services in the past over the differences in how authorities generate the data they provide (such as visitor numbers) and over the datasets they collect. However, we have found CIPFA's reports to be a reasonably reliable basis for comparison.
- 1.13 The CIPFA report we have relied upon compared authorities using actual performance and financial data from 2017-18 and estimates provided for 2018-19. As a result, the data is not current and so we have highlighted the trends shown in the report as the basis for our assumptions about how Barnet's library service is likely to compare now.
- 1.14 A particular trend that we assume will have continued is the reduction in expenditure on libraries by the authorities taking part in the benchmarking exercise, given the severe financial pressures faced by London authorities. Only with the publication of the CIPFA's next annual report will it be clear whether there have been any significant changes to that underlying trend and how Barnet now compares.



### How we gathered people's opinions

#### Introduction

- 1.15 We use four main methods for gathering people's views:
- Interviews with organisations in the borough.
  - An online survey (one version aimed at adults and one for young people).
  - Two public meetings.
  - Focus groups and focused interviews.
- 1.16 These different methods generated a wealth of views, experiences, ideas and suggestions. Within the resources available, it would not be realistic to try to gather opinions that were statistically representative of the borough's population. We are confident, however, that we have been able to assemble a range of opinions that, together, present a rounded picture of the experience of the impact of the changes to the library service on the people who live, work and study in the borough.
- 1.17 Those who feel strongest about the changes made to the service are likely to be over-represented among those that we have engaged with. Equally, we found that those with a passionate interest in libraries were a rich source of views and ideas that helped to illuminate the impact of those changes.
- 1.18 We have reported people's opinions whether they are based on evidence or perceptions without commenting directly on them. Where they illustrate well a commonly held view, we have reported individual comments. In a number of cases, we have attributed comments from people who confirmed to us that they were happy for us to quote them.
- 1.19 The quotes and opinions included in this report are ones that have been generated *during the course of our evaluation*. We are grateful for the evidence and quotes provided to us from previous publications and submissions, but we have not repeated those comments or quotes in this report so that we can ensure the currency of the evidence and opinions provided to us.
- 1.20 We have summarised our approach to each method below.

#### Interviews with organisations in the borough

- 1.21 We interviewed representatives of 14 voluntary and other organisations in the borough, including those with a co-ordinating role across the borough, those involved in operating Partnership libraries, a number of schools and Save Barnet Libraries. We also met with headteachers at one of their regular borough-wide meetings.
- 1.22 We also spoke to a number of library staff, managers and elected members with responsibilities for the library service. Their practical knowledge and experience was invaluable.
- 1.23 Save Barnet Libraries were kind enough to provide us with a considerable amount of background information and also supplied a commentary (attached at Appendix iii) on the initial findings we presented at the public meetings. We are grateful to Save Barnet Libraries' representatives for the time they were willing to commit to sharing with us their views and evidence and to helping to promote the survey. Their commentary at Appendix iii also includes links to a considerable weight of testimony and research.



### Public meetings

- 1.24 Two public meetings were scheduled to take place in November 2019. However, due to the general election being called for 12th December 2019, we rearranged them to take place in January 2020: Chipping Barnet Library on Thursday 16th January and Colindale Library on Saturday 18th January 2020.
- 1.25 The meetings were publicised via Barnet Council's communication channels and in each library and members of the public were able to register their interest in attending via the Activist website in order to be kept updated by email about the meetings and to help track likely attendee numbers.
- 1.26 12-15 members of the public attended each public meeting allowing an informal and lively set of reflective and insight-sharing discussions to take place, facilitated by Activist with no Council officers or library staff present. We were struck by the passion and knowledge shown by all of the public meeting attendees and we are very grateful for their time and input into the evaluation. We would also like to thank Mr Keith Martin for providing us with a copy of his book about Friern Barnet library<sup>1</sup>.

### Online survey

- 1.27 We ran two online surveys, hosted by SurveyMonkey – one aimed at adult users and one at young people. The public were invited to share their feedback on the library service and the changes made; ideas for what could change, and their priorities.
- 1.28 The survey was designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete and was available online or as a paper copy from every library branch. The survey was widely publicised via Barnet's communication channels and in each library, through a variety of online and printed media, along with coverage in the local press. The survey was launched on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October and was closed on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2020.
- 1.29 We received 1,127 full survey returns and 55 young people survey returns. We were grateful for the impressive number of returns to the main survey for what is an evaluation (as opposed to proposals for change). The library service's promotion of the main survey proved reasonably successful, although there was less success in promoting the survey aimed at young people, despite making specific attempts, including via school librarians and via the Schools' Circular (three times).
- 1.30 It should be borne in mind that the survey was openly publicised and available to anyone to complete. As a result, the participants were self-selecting, and their views may not be representative of the people who live, work and study in the borough. **Overall, we have treated the results of the survey as indicative and tested its results against our own observations and feedback from focus groups and interviews.**
- 1.31 There were a number of notable variations in the distribution of the survey participants from the Borough's population:
- The **best represented age groups** to respond to the survey were **35-44 year olds** (23%), closely followed by 45-54 year olds (19%) and 55-64 year olds (18%). This is broadly representative of the borough's demography based on the JSNA.
  - **Considerably more females** (68%) responded than males (24%).

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<sup>1</sup> Friern Barnet library is not within the scope of our evaluation.

- **East Finchley** (20%), Chipping Barnet (19%) and Finchley Central (11%) are the **libraries used most often** by survey respondents. In comparison, those libraries' usage for borrowing is East Finchley (6%), Chipping Barnet (16%) and Finchley Central (13%).
- **Under representation of black and minority ethnic people:** 67% of respondents described themselves as White British compared with 60.5% in the overall population (according to the JSNA).

- 1.32 For the sake of economy, we have not slavishly reported in the body of the report all the variations in the percentage responses to each question in the survey to avoid giving a false impression that the responses are statistically significant or representative. However, where there are interesting differences or similarities between particular groups or over contentious issues, we have provided more detailed charts and figures. Caution should be taken in attributing too much meaning to the differences as the subsets (eg of older people or people with disabilities) are smaller and, as with the whole survey, self-selected.
- 1.33 We have included the data from the main survey questionnaire in Appendix iv. We have also included in the body of the report verbatim comments from survey respondents. They were provided with open text boxes to allow them space to report the impact of the changes on them and to suggest ideas for improvement. We have included a sample of the many comments that were made. Those selected were chosen either because they reflected a common opinion; threw interesting light on a point of detail; or summed well a particular point of view. We have not sought to 'weight' these open text responses. We have corrected a few obvious typographical errors, but have not edited the few examples where the wording is slightly unclear.

### Focus groups and focused interviews with the public

- 1.34 To supplement the public meetings and survey, we spoke to 53 members of the public through a range of focus groups, small group discussions and individual structured interviews, tailored to reflect the time people could realistically be expected to spare us.
- 1.35 While speaking to a range of people across various demographic groups, we were particularly interested in youth fora and people in libraries who were parents, older or people with disabilities, given that these were groups the Council asked us to pay particular attention to.
- 1.36 We are particularly grateful to Unitas Youth Zone for organising and hosting for us a focus group with young people as well as the Council's staff supporting a focus group with Youth Board members.

### Our thanks to everyone who has contributed to this report

- 1.37 We are very grateful to the hundreds of people who have helped us and taken the time to share their thoughts. We have been struck by the passionate commitment shown by the people who use Barnet's libraries and by the staff who serve them. We have sought to bring the issues in the report to life by using the words of people who have contributed to it. We hope we have done justice to the force of the main points they and others have made.
- 1.38 We have been impressed by the hundreds of pages of documents, careful analysis and evidence that we have been provided with. We have not sought to repeat all that detail in this report as we have been determined to make the report readable, focused and a basis for action. We hope to have struck the right balance for the reader by drawing out the key points while backing them up with sufficient evidence.

- 1.39 The Council has asked us to provide them with the benefit of our independent opinion and has encouraged hard feedback, however uncomfortable that might be for members or officers. We have responded accordingly to this refreshing attitude.
- 1.40 While the Council or the public might not accept all of our findings and recommendations, we hope that they can find much that they can agree with and support.

### An overview of this report

- 1.41 The first two chapters of this report provide an introduction and some context. The next four chapters follow the structure of our four-part approach to evaluating library services:
- The vision and strategy for the service.
  - The infrastructure for the service, including the buildings and technology.
  - The service offered and how well it is used.
  - The resourcing of the service.
- 1.42 Each of those chapters follows a similar structure, setting out what we have examined, what we have found, what the data tells us, what people have told us and a summary of our findings and recommendations.
- 1.43 We include in the report as an appendix the Equalities Impact Assessment and a summary of all our findings and recommendations.

#### What's covered in the chapters in this report

1. **Introduction:** an introduction to the report, its purpose and background and an overview of our approach.
2. **About the library service:** a summary of the library service; the background to the changes made; and how library services are changing elsewhere.
3. **Evaluating the vision and strategy:** the vision and strategy and how they support the Council's corporate plans; compare with national strategies; and meet the needs of the borough.
4. **Evaluating the infrastructure, including buildings and ICT:** library buildings, the ambience and cleanliness and the use of technology.
5. **Evaluating the service offer:** the book stock, online materials, the range of services, take-up, impact on equalities, user satisfaction and operational efficiency.
6. **Evaluating the resourcing of the service:** staffing levels, community participation and volunteering, and funding levels.
7. **Conclusions:** a summary of our conclusions with a single list of our report's findings and recommendations.
8. **Appendices:** supporting information referred to in the body of our report, including the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA).

## 2. About the library service

### Introduction

- 2.1 This section provides an introductory overview of the library service, its management and how the service was changed from 2016 onwards in response to reductions in local government funding. Similar financial pressures affect other local authorities, so in the section we also summarise how libraries – and their roles – are changing across the country.
- 2.2 This section is designed to provide a brief summary of the library service, the changes made and the national background for readers who are not familiar with the service. We examine the detail from chapter 4 onwards.

### Some key facts about the service

#### What the libraries provide

- 2.3 The lending of books and materials remains the traditional heart of the service. The service is used extensively with over three quarters of a million books borrowed a year.

**Table 2.1: Barnet’s library service transaction volumes (2018-19)**

Transaction types	Volumes
Book loans	787,300
Audio visual loans	43,933
Registered borrowers <sup>2</sup>	123,777

- 2.4 The library service offers much more than books.

**Table 2.2: services provided by Barnet’s library service**

Summary of services provided by Barnet’s library service
Access to books, newspapers, journals, CDs and DVDs.
Local studies, archives and research collections.
Free computer and Wi-Fi access.
Digital materials, inc audio books, eBooks and free access to online subscriptions.
Classes, training courses and school holiday activities.
Events, such as the Year of Learning programme.
Information services, including advice on completing online official forms.
Free work and study space.
Hire of rooms, display cabinets and window space.
Printing and photocopying services.

<sup>2</sup> Registered borrowers are defined here as library members with a library card that may or may not have borrowed physical items in the last 5 years.

- 2.5 The service has this year embarked on an extensive series of events under the banner of the Year of Learning<sup>3</sup>. Over 2,750 activities and workshops have taken place in libraries across the borough since the beginning of the year, offering IT skills training, theatrical performances, author visits and talks, coding and robotics workshops and music lessons. This was made possible by collaborating with other council departments, public health services and providers such as Barnet and Southgate College, Middlesex University and Arts Depot.
- 2.6 The library service operates from facilities across the borough, as summarised below.

**Table 2.3: Barnet library network – key facts**

Heading	Key facts
Outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14 library buildings.</li> <li>• A home and mobile library service.</li> <li>• Local studies service.</li> <li>• School libraries resources service.</li> <li>• Digital resources, including eBooks and audio books.</li> </ul>
Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edgware Library</li> <li>• Colindale</li> <li>• Childs Hill Library (Partnership Library)</li> <li>• East Finchley Library</li> <li>• Finchley Church End Library</li> <li>• North Finchley Library</li> <li>• New Barnet Library (Partnership Library)</li> <li>• Osidge Library</li> <li>• Chipping Barnet Library</li> <li>• Golders Green Library</li> <li>• Burnt Oak Library</li> <li>• Hendon</li> <li>• Mill Hill (Partnership Library)</li> <li>• South Friern (Partnership Library)</li> </ul>
Opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 844.5 weekly hours across the network.</li> <li>• Of those 844.5 weekly hours, 576 are self-service, with staffing for 188 hours in council-run libraries and 80.5 hours in the partnership libraries.</li> </ul>
Self-service opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libraries can be accessed when libraries are unstaffed by swiping their library card and entering a PIN number at the door entry.</li> <li>• Self-service opening is not available at Partnership Libraries.</li> <li>• Young people in school year 11 and aged 15-17 need their parents' permission.</li> </ul>
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £3,536,150 for 2019/20.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> The Community Leadership & Libraries (CLL) Committee Quarter 1 (Q1) 2019/20 Delivery Plan Performance Report.

### How the library service is overseen and managed

- 2.7 The direction for the Council’s services is set by its corporate plan. The Barnet 2024 Corporate Plan states that one of its key priorities is “Investing in community facilities to support a growing population, such as schools and leisure centres”, and it will deliver this by “maintaining our 21st century libraries”, amongst a number of other measures.
- 2.8 Barnet Council’s library service is overseen by the Council’s Community Leadership & Libraries (CLL) Committee which is made up of elected councillors. The chair of the committee is Cllr Reuben Thompstone. The committee sets the strategic and policy direction for the service and receives quarterly progress reports on its performance.
- 2.9 The library service is located with the Family Services directorate. It is managed by the Head of Libraries, Hannah Richens. She reports to Collette McCarthy, Assistant Director: Commissioning and Strategy who, in turn, reports to Chris Munday, Executive Director, Children’s Services.
- 2.10 The Head of Libraries is supported by an Operations and Customer Service Manager (Libraries) and two Service Development Team Leaders. They manage a team of frontline, specialist and support library staff numbering in total 64.4 full time equivalents (fte).
- 2.11 Four Partnership Libraries are managed by voluntary organisations in return for an annual grant of £25k per library.

**Table 2.4: management of Partnership Libraries**

Library	Managing organisation
Childs Hill	Kisharon
New Barnet	Inclusion Barnet
Mill Hill	NW7 Hub
South Friern	Inclusion Barnet

### The changes made to Barnet’s libraries since 2016

#### The financial background in Barnet

- 2.12 Local authorities have faced daunting financial pressures as a result of Government policies on public spending following the financial crash in 2008. Overall, local government spending power has risen from £44.9 billion in 2010 to £47.3 billion in 2019, translating to a decrease of 17.0% when adjusted for inflation.<sup>4</sup> Individual authorities have had to respond not just to lower central government funding, they have faced restrictions on their ability to raise council tax and have had to deal with costs rising as a result of increasing demand for children’s and adults’ social care.
- 2.13 Those same pressures were facing Barnet Council which decided in 2014 that it needed to make £98.4m of savings from its base budget by 2019/20. As its contribution, the Library Service was required to find savings of £2.85m. This led to a set of options and proposals that were then consulted on with the public.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) Local Authority Revenue Expenditure and Financing: 2019-20 Budget, England

### The changes made to the service

- 2.14 After two rounds of consultation, the Council decided in 2016 to retain the current 14 libraries, but make the following changes:
- Introduce three tiers of library: Core Plus, Core and Partnership Libraries.
  - Provide a different level of services for each tier, with Core Plus libraries providing more services.
  - Transfer the management of four 'Partnership Libraries' to community organisations, supported by a grant.
  - Introduce self-service opening in Core and Core Plus libraries to allow the public to use libraries when they are unstaffed, with live CCTV monitoring and a security guard presence at times.
  - Increase the overall opening hours, but reduce the hours when libraries are staffed.
  - Reduce staff numbers and introduce a new staff structure.
  - Increase the use of volunteers, particularly for libraries when staff are not on duty.
  - Increase the focus on the digital library offer.
  - Reduce the space in buildings given over to libraries and generate commercial income from the space released.
- 2.15 These changes required a series of construction and technology projects and have taken several years to complete. The programme is summarised below.

**Table 2.5: summary timetable of changes to the library service**

Year	Date	Event
2016	4th April	Approval by Council to proceed with changing the service.
2016	December	Start of building works in the libraries.
2017	April	Effective date of staff reorganisation.
2017	October	Building work in libraries completed.
2017	October	Introduction of self-service opening completed.
2019	January	Phased reduction security guards since July 2018.
2019	March	New library management software operational.
2019	August	Launch of online enquiry/help line.

- 2.16 Most of the changes planned have been completed. We will review their success in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, but it should be noted in particular that little progress has been made in recruiting volunteers, with the exception of the Partnership Libraries which are managed by voluntary organisations.



### Challenges to the decision

- 2.17 Against vocal local opposition, the Council approved the changes to the library service on 4 April 2016. Campaigners against the plans then made a formal complaint under section 10 (1) (a) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), asking the Secretary of State at the Department of Digital Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) to intervene.
- 2.18 In December 2017 the Council received the DCMS's provisional decision not to order an inquiry into the changes made to the library service. However, DCMS indicated that further representations would be sought before a final judgement could be made.
- 2.19 On the 9th April 2019, DCMS confirmed the Secretary of State's decision not to order an inquiry following their investigation into a formal complaint regarding the changes made to the library service. In his letter, the Secretary of State stated that, in his view, the council 'is complying with its legal obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.'
- 2.20 As stated in Section 1, our report does not revisit the original rationale for the changes to the service decided upon in 2016. Instead, we explore the *impact* of the changes that have already taken place and identify the *future possibilities* for the service.

### How libraries are changing

#### Are libraries in decline?

- 2.21 Local authorities have been funding and operating public libraries for decades. While most of the nation's libraries were built by councils, many were funded with the support of Victorian philanthropists, such as Andrew Carnegie and John Passmore Edwards.
- 2.22 These philanthropists would recognise much of what happens in today's public libraries. Books take pride of place as before and people continue to sit at tables to read, study and research - much as they did at the turn of the 20th century (even if they now use computers to access information and reference materials).
- 2.23 The slow death of libraries in the digital age has been predicted for many years, but they continue to be hugely popular, with over 204 million visits to libraries in England in 2018<sup>5</sup>. The advent of eBooks had been predicted to signal the end of printed books. In 2010 digital sales represented only 3.2% of the total UK value of publisher book sales, growing to a share of 18.1% by 2018/19. The boom in digital book sales has plateaued in recent years with the percentage share remaining at a similar level since reaching 18.4% in 2014.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.24 However, library usage has declined steadily over the last decade, a trend that can be attributed in part to digital materials, including eBooks, but also to the impact of spending cuts resulting from Government policies on public spending following the financial crash in 2008.

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<sup>5</sup> The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (2019)

<sup>6</sup> The Publishers Association (2019) The Publishers Association Yearbook 2018



### The impact of austerity on library funding

- 2.25 Local authorities have had to find ways to cut spending across all their services and this has had a significant impact on public libraries across the country. Since 2013-14, spending on libraries has decreased from £940m to £741m, a drop of £308m or nearly one third in real terms, and the number of libraries has fallen from 4,145 to 3,618.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.26 Local authorities have used a range of methods to try to reduce spending on libraries (with varying degrees of success), such as:
- Reviewing their library network and closing some branches.
  - Reducing the number of library staff.
  - Increasing the use of volunteers and transferring some libraries to community management.
  - Increasing the use of self-service technology.
  - Outsourcing the service to the private or charitable or mutual sector.
  - Reducing spending on books and other materials.
  - Increasing income, eg from printing and room hire.
- 2.27 The net effect of these budget reductions alongside other changes in usage patterns has been a reduction in library visits from 282m to 233m over the period from 2013-14 to 2017-18 and in book issues from 247m to 183m.

### The wider role of libraries

- 2.28 The library sector has made the case that the scale of budget reductions across the country is misguided and fails to recognise the wider role that libraries play in the social, health and economic fabric of the country. Leaders in the sector argue that libraries play a 'preventative' role, improving people's life chances and helping to reduce spending on health and welfare, for example:

*"It is time for a library renaissance, where much-loved public libraries are revitalised and transformed through investment to create scalable and inclusive services. We want to transform lives through modern libraries in communities across the country."*

Source: Nick Poole, CEO at CILIP (2019)

- 2.29 Various national reviews and policy reports sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have stressed the wider impact of libraries, as illustrated by the national Library Taskforce's description of the outcomes libraries contribute to.

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<sup>7</sup> The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (2014) CIPFA Public Library Actuals survey 2013-14 and The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (2018) CIPFA Public Library Actuals survey 2017-18

Figure 2.1: the outcomes to which library services contribute



Source: Libraries Taskforce (2016)<sup>8</sup>

- 2.30 While there is a widespread acceptance that libraries can make a positive overall contribution to people's lives, there is a shortage of evidence of their direct impact, not least because of the difficulty of identifying the specific contribution of libraries to these wider outcomes. As a result, it is harder to make the case to protect funding for libraries at the expense of other services.
- 2.31 The breadth of information and advice available in libraries can have the effect of making the role of libraries seem amorphous. This is perhaps reinforced by the phrase 'community hub' which is often used to describe the wider purpose of a library. However, it may not be obvious to those outside the sector exactly what that phrase means.
- 2.32 A number of library services across the country have adopted a clear purpose and identity for the service or an individual library, often by joining library services up with other services that appear a good 'fit'. Examples in London include Tower Hamlets' Idea Stores which have integrated adult education and libraries into a single building. Haringey's Marcus Garvey library includes a council 'one-stop-shop' and is next door to a leisure centre.
- 2.33 Central to these authorities' approach is a recognition of the wider contribution of libraries, tailored to the specific needs and political priorities for a borough or a locality. In the next chapter, we will examine how Barnet Council's library strategy addresses the borough's specific needs.

<sup>8</sup> Libraries Taskforce (2016) Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 [online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk> [Accessed 29 October 2019]

### 3. Evaluating the vision and strategy

#### What we have examined

- 3.1 In the last chapter, we summarised how Barnet’s library service operates and briefly outlined the changes that were embarked upon in 2016. We also reviewed the changing role of libraries.
- 3.2 In this chapter, we look more closely at Barnet Council’s own vision and strategy for its library service, drawing on developments in national policy and elsewhere. We examine in turn:
- National strategies and priorities for public library services.
  - The implications of the Council’s corporate strategy and financial plans.
  - The service’s vision and strategy.
  - What the data tells us about the needs in the borough and trends in the service.
  - What people have told us about the borough’s needs.
  - Lessons from elsewhere.

#### What we have found

##### The national context and Government policy on library services

- 3.3 The provision of public libraries is a statutory obligation<sup>9</sup> requiring Barnet Council to provide a “comprehensive and efficient service”. The legislation deliberately left scope for local interpretation and prioritisation to reflect and meet local needs, although case law offers some constraints and guidance.
- 3.4 Authorities have considerable freedom to design their own local strategies. However, as we highlighted in chapter 2, the financial pressures on local authorities have had a significant impact on local authorities’ plans for their library services.
- 3.5 These pressures have only increased since Barnet Council began to consider its strategy for the future of the library service in 2014, although it is yet to be seen whether the last government’s announcement that austerity is over will result in a sustained period of improvement in local government’s finances. The new government’s detailed financial plans for local government are likely to become more apparent early in 2020.
- 3.6 Technological innovations have provided both a challenge to, and an opportunity for, public libraries: changes in lifestyle, access to information online, changing reading habits, have all impacted on how, and the extent to which, libraries are now being used.
- 3.7 Nevertheless, public libraries remain much loved and at the heart of local communities everywhere, which is demonstrated not least when there are proposals for any type of changes to how the service is provided. But this is also reflected in the increasing involvement of communities, and individuals within those communities, in helping to provide public services generally but particularly libraries.

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<sup>9</sup> Under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act Barnet is a ‘Library Authority’ with duties

- 3.8 The national body representing heads of library services, Libraries Connected, had developed eight ‘universal offers’ which public libraries can provide. The offers demonstrate the breadth of libraries’ role (see below).

**Table 3.1: Libraries Connected’s universal offers (current)**

Offer	This involves <sup>10</sup>
<b>Culture</b>	Providing a clear, consistent, and accessible programme of cultural activities and events and collaborating more with arts and culture organisations.
<b>Digital</b>	Ensuring that all public libraries offer a basic level of digital service to the public, to include free wi-fi, computers and online information about library services, and developing staff’s digital capabilities, while identifying significant digital developments and highlighting how public libraries and their leaders should respond.
<b>Health</b>	Creating self-help reading lists and book collections covering key areas of health and wellbeing, signposting and referring the public to information and local services who can provide advice and support, and providing creative and social reading activities for a range of targeted groups such as dementia sufferers, teenagers and older people.
<b>Information</b>	Bringing together government and non-government sources of information, helping local people access and use online services and build their digital skills through assisted digital schemes.
<b>Learning</b>	Providing free resources for study and learning, study space for people of all ages, information about local learning opportunities, and a range of workshops, groups, and/or events to support creativity.
<b>Reading</b>	Developing, delivering and promoting reading activities in libraries through an increased number of partnerships and resources.
<b>Six Steps Promise</b>	Improving accessibility to libraries for people with sight loss and other print disabilities, using and promoting sites and activities that support reading services for blind and partially sighted people, and engaging them more thoroughly when planning digital and physical access strategies.
<b>The Children’s Promise</b>	Encouraging children to engage with libraries by offering projects and programmes to parents and children throughout childhood, creating partnerships with schools for class visits, and ensuring digital resources are supported for secondary school age children.

- 3.9 We will assess the extent to which the Council’s strategies embrace the broader contribution that the universal offers make to a locality. Libraries Connected carried out a review of the universal offers which was completed in July 2019. Libraries Connected accepted the review’s recommendations, including a streamlining and refocusing of the offers. The transition to a new framework is due to take place in April 2020. We have shown the previous versions in the table above.

### Corporate strategy and financial plans

<sup>10</sup> Our summary of the details of each universal offer.

- 3.10 As set out in chapter 2, the financial pressures on local authorities play a significant role in shaping the strategies for a library service. This is certainly the case in Barnet, where the Council began its review of the Library Service aiming to make savings of £98.4m from its overall base budget and savings in the Library Service of £2.85m by 2019/20.
- 3.11 The annual net budget for the Library Service in 2015/16 was £4,639,820. Included in this was the Media Fund, which covers the cost of physical and electronic books, CDs, and other audio and visual materials at £623k. However, the largest single element of expenditure was staff and staff-related pay (including training, allowances, travel, insurance, etc) which represented 70% of the total in 2015/16. The net budget for the service in 2019/20 is now £3,536,150.
- 3.12 As well as of course sharing the other challenges faced nationally by libraries from new technology and changing social patterns, the other challenge particularly facing Barnet Library Service was the condition of the library estate, which we will cover in the next chapter.
- 3.13 'Barnet 2024' is the Council's corporate plan for 2019-24. It sets out the outcomes and priorities the Council wants to achieve.

**Figure 3.1: Barnet 2024 outcomes**



- 3.14 For each of these outcomes there are a set of priorities. Below we have extracted those priorities to which the library service can contribute, taking into account the universal offers in table 3.1.



**Table 3.2: priorities in Barnet 2024 to which the library service can contribute**

Outcome	Priorities
A pleasant, well maintained borough that we protect and invest in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investing in community facilities to support a growing population, such as schools and leisure centres</li> <li>• Responsible delivery of our major regeneration schemes to create better places to live and work, whilst protecting and enhancing the borough</li> </ul>
Our residents live happy, healthy, independent lives with the most vulnerable protected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do</li> <li>• Integrating health and social care and providing support for those with mental health problems and complex needs</li> <li>• Supporting our residents who are older, vulnerable or who have disabilities, to remain independent and have a good quality of life</li> <li>• Helping people into work and better paid employment</li> <li>• Encouraging residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles and maintain their mental wellbeing</li> </ul>
Safe and strong communities where people get along well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring we are a family friendly borough</li> <li>• Focusing on the strengths of the community and what they can do to help themselves and each other</li> <li>• Supporting local businesses to thrive</li> </ul>

- 3.15 Barnet 2024 is a high-level document which does not provide many details on its services. On the library service, it commits itself to '*maintaining* our 21st century libraries' (emphasis added). The wording of this commitment is not ambitious enough if the Council wants to harness the ability of the library service to contribute to its wider priorities in the corporate plan.
- 3.16 We would also question the use of the phrase '21<sup>st</sup> century' to describe the borough's libraries as this implies a level of modernisation that is not reflected in the 2016 strategy. The introduction of self-service opening, on its own, does not make libraries fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other library services have invested more in their digital service offer; the quality of PCs and software; and in creativity, culture and community collaboration.
- 3.17 Barnet 2024 was published in February 2019 before the Secretary of State confirmed that he would not be initiating a 'local enquiry' into whether the library service was meeting its statutory duty. It could be argued that, before that decision was announced, it was difficult to plan for the future of the service or to be more ambitious than just 'maintaining' the service.
- 3.18 Since the Secretary of State's decision, the Council can now plan confidently for the future of the service and this report is designed to support that process.
- 3.19 While, as we shall see below, the library service itself has articulated how it can support the Council's wider ambitions for the borough, it is less clear that the Council, at a corporate level, has embraced that vision and made the library service an integral part of its overall strategy for service delivery. The Council is now in a position to change that.

### Service strategy and plans and their alignment with national and corporate priorities

- 3.20 It was imperative that, taking into account its duties but at the same time the available resources, Barnet should have developed a new vision and a strategy for delivering the borough's library service.
- 3.21 Barnet Council began the current process in 2014 when it received a report<sup>11</sup> setting out a proposed vision, outcomes and objectives for the library service. The stated outcomes for the library service at the time were:
- A library service that provides children and adults with reading, literacy and learning opportunities.
  - A library service that engages with communities.
  - A library service that makes knowledge and information easily accessible.
  - A library service that can withstand current and future financial challenges and safeguard services for vulnerable people.
- 3.22 The objectives supporting each of the four outcomes are shown at Appendix i.
- 3.23 Following consultation on the proposed changes, the Council agreed a new vision for the library service in 2016.

### Table 3.3: 2016 vision for the future of the library service<sup>12</sup>

Barnet is a great place to live. We want a 21st Century library service that is in tune with the changing lifestyles of our residents. Libraries are a universal and unique service, offering learning opportunities from the early years and through retirement.

Our ambition is for libraries to:

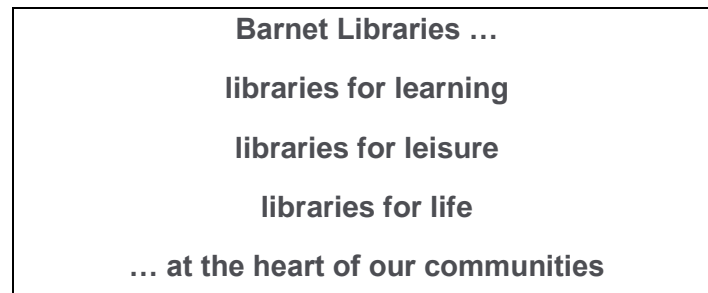
- Help all children in Barnet to have the best start in life, developing essential language, literacy and learning skills and developing a love of reading from an early age.
- Provide residents with the skills to live independently; to improve their health and wellbeing; and to get a job and progress whilst in work.
- Bring people together, acting as a focal point for communities and assisting resident groups to support their local area.

- 3.24 More recently, the management and staff of the library service have worked to develop a simpler series of straplines that summarise the vision.

<sup>11</sup> Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee (CELS) 28 October 2014

<sup>12</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from CELS Committee Appendix A pages 12, 13

**Figure 3.2: summary of service vision used for marketing purposes**



3.25 This has also been translated into a new logo which is in use on the website and all information and all publicity.

**Figure 3.3: logos used for library service**



3.26 The outcomes, objectives and vision demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the wider role that the library service can play in the borough and incorporate the key features of national library policies and the 'universal offers' summarised in table 3.1.

3.27 In the following chapters, we will explore whether the changes made to the service so far have allowed the service to fully realise those ambitions.

### **The 2016 library transformation strategy**

3.28 Within the national and local context outlined above, and the Council's ambition for the library service, any strategy for the future was inevitably going to entail making difficult choices, some of which could not please all residents and library users.

3.29 Barnet in their report<sup>13</sup> listed the main factors that influenced the decision-making process:

"... the main factors which informed the decision-making process, grouped around nine key issues. Balanced against each other to develop a deliverable service model which continues to offer a quality service whilst delivering the savings required:

<sup>13</sup> Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee (CELS) 28 October 2014 Appendix A Library Review and Proposed Model



1. Vision and objectives
2. Needs of residents
3. Financing
4. Views of residents
5. Comprehensive and Efficient Service
6. Buildings
7. Sources of funding
8. Technology
9. Community capacity”

3.30 The Council did consider alternative options including:

- Increasing council tax.
- Protecting the library budget and taking savings from elsewhere.
- Using council reserves.

3.31 It concluded that all of these carried with them even more undesirable issues or consequences either more widely or directly affecting the Library Service.

3.32 The strategy to transform the Library Service comprised two strands:

- The Library Service.
- The Library Estate.

### Transformation Strategy: the Library Service

3.33 A fundamental decision, reflecting the majority view emerging from the public consultation, was to keep all library sites. This inevitably meant that, in order to meet the financial target, substantial change to the delivery model for the Library Service would be necessary.

3.34 The key elements in the Council’s Transformation Strategy were therefore:

- To change the service offer to a Locality model with three tiers of library: Core Plus, Core and Partnership, with the last of these involving transferring management to community organisations.
- To reduce building footprints and generate commercial income from the space released.
- A Product Catalogue to define and set out clearly what the service offer at each tier of library would include.
- Substantially reduce staffing costs and in order to do so to ...
- Use self-service technology<sup>14</sup> to cut substantially the staffed opening hours, whilst overall extending hours of access.

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<sup>14</sup> Often referred to as Open Plus, reflecting the commercial name for the product of the most frequently used supplier, Bibliotheca

- Increase the use of volunteers, including using them to provide periods of Self-Service Opening (SSO) with volunteers available to offer a level of service.
  - Increase focus on the Digital Library offer.
  - Review sources of income and fees and charges.
- 3.35 This strategy was supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to identify and mitigate the impact of these very substantial changes on particular groups including children and older people.
- 3.36 We have reviewed and commented on each aspect of the strategy under other sections of this report. However, it is important to note that some elements of the strategy have not yet been fully implemented.
- 3.37 In particular, volunteering has not yet been successfully pursued. We will examine the implications of this weakness and provide recommendations for addressing it later in this report. It appears that, while other aspects of the transformation strategy benefited from additional programme and project management support, this was not applied to the challenge of recruiting volunteers.

### Transformation Strategy: the library building estate

- 3.38 The review of the library service considered a range of issues related to the buildings from which the library service is offered. As is the case in most library authorities, the libraries are located in buildings constructed at various times over the past century, each reflecting the requirements for a library service at that time. Barnet therefore followed an approach used by a number of local authorities and looked at a range of key factors:
- The condition of the current buildings, including the backlog of maintenance and repairs that was estimated to be £2.47m.
  - The suitability of the buildings to provide a modern library service, including building access and the ability to use the internal space flexibly.
  - The location of the buildings, given that most have been in the same location for many decades and inevitably the character and infrastructure of the surrounding community has changed. And leading on from this:
    - The potential to redevelop existing sites for mixed use including a new library.
    - Whether a library would be better co-located with other public or community services.
- 3.39 More unusually, though not uniquely, Barnet also looked at every library to see whether better use could be made of some of the space by reconfiguring the layout and releasing space to be let commercially. This was designed to generate income that would help address the financial challenges facing the service and the council as a whole.
- 3.40 We have reviewed and commented on this approach to the building estate, and the steps Barnet has taken to implement it in chapter 4, as well as making some further recommendations.

### What the data tells us

#### The implications for the library strategy of the borough's needs

- 3.41 This section provides a brief overview of the borough's current needs, future needs and the most pressing needs that the service can help to address. Those needs - and the Council's political priorities - should inform the strategy for Barnet's libraries and their role in the lives of the people who live, work and study in the borough. A more detailed analysis is shown in Appendix ii, but is summarised here.
- 3.42 We begin by examining the wider economic, social and demographic needs that the library strategy needs to take into account, before examining the data that informs the 'targeted' services that libraries can provide.

#### Wider demographic, economic and social trends

##### A growing and ageing borough

- 3.43 The population of Barnet is large and growing. It has a large proportion of young working people who have been attracted to the area for its relatively affordable housing, good transport links and pleasant parks and open spaces. The implications for the library strategy are:
- Barnet's growing population is likely to increase the demands on the Council's services, including the library service.
  - There will be a dramatic increase in the numbers over 65, resulting in increased demand for high-cost services for older people. Libraries can play a preventative role for older people.
  - This increase in the proportion of older people could increase the potential pool of volunteers to help with the library service.

#### Prosperity, child poverty and attainment

- 3.44 The borough is relatively prosperous and has high levels of educational attainment. However, Barnet contains pockets of deprivation which are concentrated, but not exclusively, in the West of the borough. This is reflected in turn by the third of children who live in poverty. These inequalities are reflected in educational attainment. The implications for the library strategy are:
- The relative prosperity of the borough means that a substantial proportion of the borough may choose not to borrow books or use free computer terminals.
  - While generally prosperous, there are areas with high levels of deprivation which need adequate resources.
  - Study spaces for young people are particularly important for those living in the most deprived areas.
  - Self-service opening currently excludes, and possibly disadvantages, young people below the age of 15 from accessing quiet study areas.

### Housing costs and homelessness

3.45 Barnet has not been immune to changes in the housing market and the impacts of housing and welfare reforms over recent decades. The rising cost of home ownership has led to more people living in private rented accommodation which in turn puts pressure on the council to accommodate families made homeless due to eviction and puts pressure on services associated with supporting children living in poverty. The implications for the library strategy are:

- Increasing number of households in temporary and short-term tenancies is likely to result in overcrowding leading to more demand for study space for children and young people.

### A relatively safe borough, but crime is a concern

3.46 Barnet is a relatively safe place, with lower rates of violent crime and gang activity. Nevertheless, it is the top concern for Barnet residents who worry about lower-level anti-social behaviour as well as about the prevalence of drugs. Again, there are pockets in the borough of higher levels of offending, with a worrying trend in anti-Semitic hate crime. The implications for the library strategy are:

- Work could be done to understand the extent to which fear of crime could be preventing people from accessing libraries during self-service opening.
- Libraries could play a part in countering hate crimes by taking a lead in promoting and celebrating cultural diversity.

The borough’s needs – implications for targeted services

3.47 Our review of the Borough’s needs is informed by the borough’s approach to the Universal Offers (see table 3.1) and the Libraries Task Force’s description of the targeted and preventative services that libraries can provide.

Figure 3.4: targeted services which libraries can help to deliver



Source: Libraries Taskforce (2016)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Libraries Taskforce (2016) Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 [on line] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk> [Accessed 29 October 2019]

### Targeted services: skills

3.48 People here work hard and there is a low unemployment rate. However, there is a large proportion of people in low paid work and employment and Barnet has a higher than average gap between the highest and lowest paid. The implications for the library strategy are:

- Low paid workers and the unemployed are more likely to need computer and Wi-Fi resources to access job applications and benefit claims.
- Poorer and older people may not have internet access at home or the computer skills needed.

### Targeted services: health and disability support

3.49 Older people in the borough are relatively long lived and continue to enjoy a high proportion of home ownership. However, as this population ages, there will be an increase in the long-term medical conditions associated with the elderly as well as the associated social isolation. The implications for the library strategy are:

- Increasing levels of social isolation among older adults are likely to result in greater demands on the library service.
- As the population living with long term illness or disability increases, the role of the library as an accessible community space becomes more important. Access to accessible toilets is particularly important for this group.

### Targeted services: community support and cohesion

3.50 The borough has a very diverse population and continues to be an attractive destination for migrants, the largest proportion coming from the EU. The implications for the library strategy are:

- The borough is becoming increasingly diverse, with increases in the number of people for whom English is not a first language and who may benefit from support to improve their literacy in English.
- While generally prosperous, there are areas with high levels of deprivation which need adequate resources.

### Trends in Barnet

3.51 There has been a downward trend in the reported performance of the library service. This is due in part to the library transformation programme, but also due to problems with technology and data quality. For example, the visitor figures for 2016-17 and 2017-18 will have been impacted by the closure of each library during building works.

3.52 However, the figures are distorted by reported problems with the counting technology for visits which worked only intermittently in some libraries and failed completely in others. Although we have no confidence in the visitor figures for those two years, we have included them here for completeness.

**Table 3.4: physical visits to Barnet libraries since 2015-16 (CIPFA, 2016-18)**

Year	Figures
2014-15	1,653,645 (4,411 per 1k pop; ave 4,984)
2015-16	1,606,318 (4,230 per 1k pop; ave 4,928)
2016-17	1,406,868 (3,644 per 1k pop; ave 4,761)
2017-18	680,028 <sup>16</sup> (1,754 per 1k pop; ave 4,436)

- 3.53 Although it is undoubtedly the case that visitor numbers have fallen, they are very unlikely to have fallen to the extent shown above (for the reasons set out in the preceding paragraphs). This is borne out by the figures on book borrowing which have fallen but not to the same extent.
- 3.54 For last year – a year not affected by building works - the borrowing figures have risen again. Furthermore, the level of book borrowing has reportedly increased significantly - rising in the first three quarters of the current financial year (2019-20) by 14%. If this trend is continued, lending levels may return to the level last seen in Barnet in 2016-17. However, this is still likely to remain far below the average for the CIPFA comparator group even though the average figures for that group are likely to continue to fall given recent trends.

**Table 3.5: book borrowing figures for Barnet library service since 2016 (CIPFA, 2016-18)**

Year	Figures
2014-15	1,139,534 (no per 1k pop or ave data)
2015-16	Data unavailable due to LMS crash
2016-17	883,251 (2,288 per 1k pop; ave 3,370)
2017-18	691,313 (1,783 per 1k pop; ave 3,149)
2018-19	787,300 (CIPFA figures not available yet)
2019-20	948,833 (projected; 2,356 per 1k pop) <sup>17</sup>

- 3.55 Barnet had, at the time of the most recent CIPFA report, the lowest number of volunteers in its CIPFA comparator group (25 vs. an average of 251). Barnet also had the lowest number of volunteer hours as a percentage of worked hours in its CIPFA comparator group (0.3% vs. an average of 5.8%, with the highest comparator scoring in the region of 35%). This has reportedly improved more recently, with 34 adult volunteers and 16 young people working in Council-run libraries at December 2019 (making 120 if the Partnership Libraries are included). The proportion of volunteers working in Council-run libraries is likely to remain far below the average for the CIPFA comparator group.

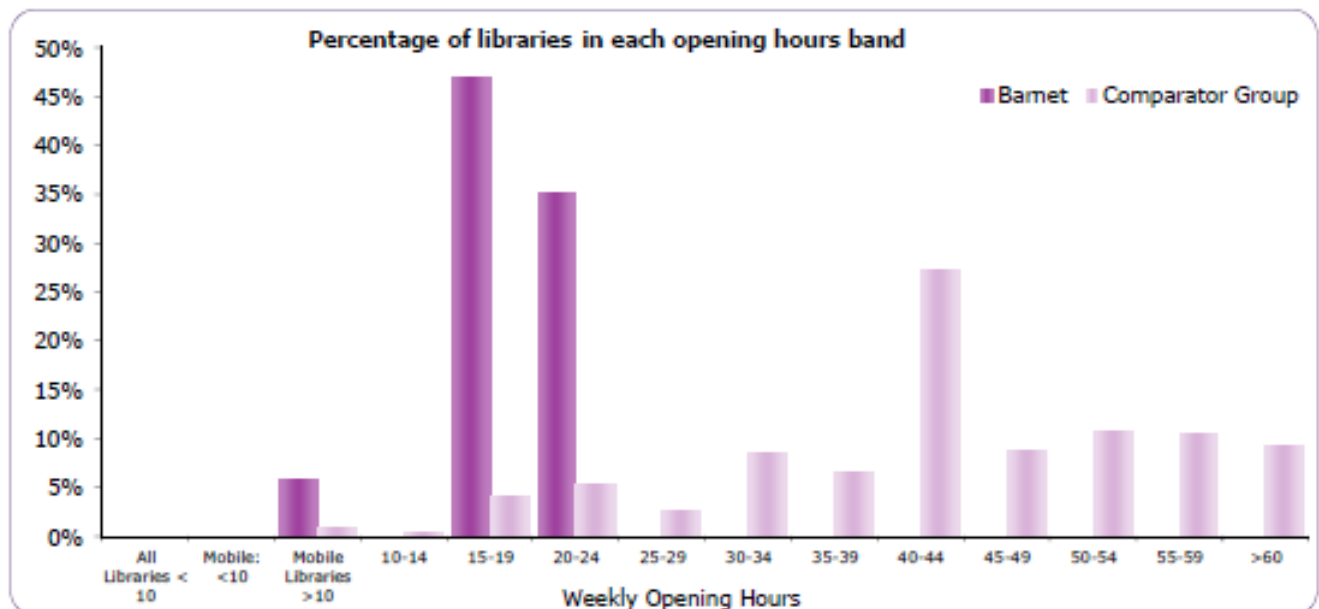
<sup>16</sup> This figure cannot be relied upon due to problems with the counting technology (see preceding paragraphs for an explanation).

<sup>17</sup> This projection has been supplied to us in Feb 2020 by the library service and is based on figures for daily loans from 1st Apr 2019 to 7th Feb 2020. An average has been used to project for the rest of 2020 to arrive at the estimate. The loans per 1k estimate has then been calculated using this projection and the February 2020 Barnet JSNA population estimate (402,700).



- 3.56 The changes made to the service since 2016 have delivered significant savings, but are only the latest in a series of budget reductions over the last ten years as the Council has sought to find ways to maintain services against a reduction in central government funding and increased budget pressures. The budget for the library service has more than halved from £7,314,110 in 2009/10 to £3,536,150 in 2019/20. It should be noted that this does not take inflation into account and so the real terms reduction would be even greater. The scale of the budget reductions is likely to have contributed to the relative decline in usage compared with similar authorities.
- 3.57 CIPFA (2016, 2018) state there has been a 10% gross (11.9% net) reduction in library service spend nationally since 2015-16, resulting in 232 fewer libraries (a 6% reduction), a 6.8% reduction in physical visits, an 11% reduction in book borrowing and a 15.5% increase in the presence of volunteers.
- 3.58 While Barnet's data is unreliable for a variety of reasons, these figures suggest that the fall in borrowing is likely to have been greater in Barnet than the national trend, although it is not possible currently to compare the trends in library visits. Usage is likely to be significantly below average for the comparator group.
- 3.59 Barnet's total opening hours, taking unstaffed hours into account, have increased significantly. However, it is not possible to analyse the pattern of use although in chapter 4 we report the survey responses and the other feedback that suggests that the libraries are being used during self-service opening hours. Furthermore, the CIPFA report does not yet collect information from authorities on self-service opening as only staffed opening hours are reported. The CIPFA report does, however, compare the staffed opening hours (see chart below). This demonstrates that Barnet's *staffed* opening hours fall considerably below the patterns elsewhere.

**Figure 3.5: staffed opening hours compared with other London Boroughs**



Source: CIPFA Public Library Statistics 2018 - Cells 1 to 45



### What people have told us

#### Introduction

3.60 In this section, we have reported what people have told us, whether through the survey, meetings, interviews or focus groups. We have not sought to evaluate or 'weight' people's perceptions or opinions, but we have drawn out those that we think highlight an issue effectively. We have drawn out those views that were particularly common but have also included examples of significant or interesting 'minority' views that should be heard. We have made a number of observations at the end of this section where we draw some conclusions that will inform our findings and recommendations.

#### What representatives of organisations in the borough have told us

3.61 In our discussions with representatives of voluntary organisations and other organisations, points made included:

- The library should be an attractive, open space; a venue which would attract the community in for activities. There was a comment that the decline of other community spaces such as pubs and youth clubs had been replaced by commercially run café spaces which excluded more deprived parts of the community from communal experiences.
- The Council should avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and that libraries should be run to reflect the communities they serve and meet the needs of prospective users.
- The reductions in floorspace meant less space for young people to study, especially for those who needed free access to computers and the internet.
- Poverty is an issue that needs to be addressed and there should be compassion at the heart of how the service is run.

3.62 There was a recognition that the purpose of libraries has changed on the part of one interviewee:

"Libraries should be influencers and places that set ambition and aspiration for the local community".

3.63 One educationalist saw a shift coming in national policy: "We are thinking that reading needs to become more of a focus. The Heads Conference discussed this and Ofsted will be taking more interest in countering the decline in children reading for pleasure."

3.64 There was a broad recognition of the value of reading in the school and the support that the library service can give schools.

#### What people said in focus groups and discussions

3.65 There were a number of areas that we tested in our focus groups and individual and group discussions that related to the library service's vision and strategy. We didn't ask people to comment on the council's vision and strategy specifically, but to tell us how their own experiences and beliefs might inform a vision for libraries.

3.66 When we raised the topic of **how they used** the library service:

- All the **young people** we spoke to were **regular library users** but of those in the focus groups only three used Barnet libraries, preferring to use their school or college library, or an out of borough library. The reasons given were convenience, **lack of knowledge of opening hours**, location and **restricted access due to SSO**. Library users visited primarily for **quiet study and book borrowing**.
- Nearly all the **young people** interviewed had **visited libraries with their parents/carers as children** and had fond memories of them. A significant number enthusiastically recalled the **summer reading challenge**.
- All the **younger adults** we talked to were using the library for **studying**. They were the **least likely group to want to engage** with us when we tried to engage them in the libraries. Most were studying and wearing headphones.
- **Adult** users were the most diverse group. A number used the library to relax and **read the papers** including a bus driver who told us that he and his colleagues appreciated **somewhere quiet and warm** to sit between shifts. We noticed a slight gender split in this age group with more men using the library as a **work/study space** while women were more likely to be **borrowing books**.
- **Older adults** were delighted to be asked for their **opinions** which tended to be quite **strongly held**. All **visited the library regularly**, ranging from daily to 2 or 3 times a month. They **used it for a range of purposes**: reading the papers, book borrowing, computer access and studying.

3.67 When we raised the question of **what the library is for**:

- **Everybody** we spoke to shared the belief that the **library is for everyone**.
- Without exception, the **young people** we spoke to said they wanted the library to offer a **calm and quiet place** to study or read; "It's what makes a library different to anywhere else". Although there was some support for the library to **offer activities for young people**, they were clear that it **shouldn't be at the cost of quiet study**.
- **Young adults** weren't particularly interested in thinking about the library service as a whole as long as it continued to offer somewhere for them to work **without distractions**.
- Some of the **adult** users held very firmly expressed opinions that a library is a **place for quiet study** - not socialising and that **other activities should be separated** from the main body of the library.
- **Older adults** shared a strong belief that the **library is a public space** and a vital resource for everyone. They spoke of the sense of **calm and order** that the library gave which was at odds with everywhere else.
- Interestingly this was a strongly expressed view of the **young people** we interviewed as well.
- "A library is a social space for people to be quiet together." (older person).
- "Libraries are for learning and relaxing somewhere calm." (young person).

**Table 3.6: our observations on what people have told us**

- We were struck by the degree to which the people we spoke to saw the library service as a universal public good that was open to all and one that is there for all age groups. This suggests that the library service could play an important focal role for building community cohesion and capacity.
- While books and reading remained core to people's idea of the purpose of a library, its importance as a *quiet space* was striking, whether for the purpose of reading, working or studying. This has implications for the design and size of the libraries as we shall see in the next chapter.

### Lessons from elsewhere

3.68 Drastic changes have been taking place in library services across the country in response to pressures on public spending as outlined in chapter 2. There have been a range of responses to the financial challenge:

- **Salami-slicing:** reducing opening hours, cutting staffing costs and reducing the budgets for books and other materials. Often labelled 'efficiency savings', most authorities will have undertaken some or all of these measures at various points over the last decade. The savings can be significant, but can result, over time, in a downward spiral in performance (eg the smaller the fund for new books, the less there is to interest readers).
- **Rationalising the library network:** reducing the number of libraries. Generally, this is a process of simply closing smaller branches that are used less. Sometimes, authorities take a more strategic approach, closing a number of smaller libraries in a locality and replacing them with a new, larger library, often in better locations. Closing smaller, part-time libraries tends to produce relatively low levels of savings.
- **Integrating with other services:** merging other services into the library service, such as culture or learning or employment advice. This allows services that share similar objectives or client bases to share buildings and make the most of the potential synergies. The cost of building management can be reduced but further savings will tend to be limited unless there is closer integration of functions.
- **Collaboration and shared services:** sharing library management or back office functions. Some councils have merged their management structures across several boroughs and others have shared back office functions, such as the library computer system. Since library management and back office costs are relatively low, the potential savings are smaller compared with sharing other services.
- **Voluntary effort:** there has been a dramatic increase in volunteering in libraries. This includes volunteers working in libraries managed directly by councils, but many libraries (usually smaller) have been transferred to management by community groups or voluntary organisations. These changes can lead to significant savings over time but require investment.

- **Outsourcing or spinning out into a charitable trust:** transferring the management of the service to the private or voluntary sector. There was a trend of councils outsourcing their services this way, although there was not a competitive market, particularly since the collapse of Carillion. The level of savings has been variable and is influenced by the existing cost base of the service. There was an incentive to achieve charitable relief from business rates, but this has been eroded due to the Government's policy of 'localising' business rates (ie allowing councils to keep business rates they collect rather than passing them all to the Exchequer).
- **Use of technology:** introducing self-service technology. This includes the introduction of terminals in libraries to check out, return or renew books and the introduction of self-service opening. Self-check-out has enabled services to reduce staffing costs, but few services appear to have used self-service opening to reduce staffing levels significantly.

3.69 Barnet considered these and other options when it decided on the transformation strategy in 2016 before focusing on the use of technology; reducing opening hours; and encouraging more voluntary effort. Barnet has also replaced a number of libraries with newer buildings in more central locations.

3.70 However, other strategic options for improving Barnet's library service and its cost-efficiency should continue to be reviewed. One of the most striking examples of a long-term transformation strategy is Tower Hamlets' Idea Store programme which has worked over the last 20 years to create a modernised, fully integrated library and lifelong learning service.

**Table 3.7: the Idea Store programme**



Idea Stores are more than just a library or a place of learning. As well as the traditional library service, they offer a wide range of adult education classes, along with career support, training, meeting areas, cafes and arts and leisure pursuits.

Idea Stores have been the result of a long-term programme that began in 1999 when Tower Hamlets, unveiled its plans to invest £20 million in library and learning services at a time when the national trend was to decrease funding.

The idea became a reality in May 2002 when the first, prototype Idea Store opened at Bow. This was followed by Idea Store Crisp Street in July 2004, Idea Store Whitechapel in September 2005, Idea Store Canary Wharf in March 2006 and Idea Store Watney Market in May 2013.



This programme continues to thrive due to the firm foundations that were established and the Idea Stores' ability to capture the public's imagination and its ability to integrate a range of services, working with a range of partners.

The performance of Tower Hamlets' library service has been transformed over that period, moving from one of London's worst performing services to one of the better in terms of usage.

### Summary of findings and recommendations

3.71 Barnet Council was faced with a difficult financial environment and, given the expressed preference to retain all library sites, difficult choices were made. The vision for the library service is well-rounded, but the gaps in the delivery of the transformation strategy has limited the ability of the service to deliver that vision. There is an opportunity now to use the library service's vision as the basis for a more ambitious, integrated approach that enables the Council to make full use of what the libraries have to offer.

**Table 3.8: summary of findings**

- The Council has, like other local authorities, faced severe financial pressures and had to make difficult decisions about cuts to service budgets.
- The Council has made substantial changes to the service which have reduced the library service budget by more than half in cash terms over the last 10 years.
- The changes made to modernise the service are, in many respects, similar to those made by other authorities, although the Council rejected closing any libraries.
- The decision to maintain 14 libraries and find savings elsewhere in the service contributed to a reduction in staffed opening hours that has been severe.
- The changes planned in the transformation strategy were ambitious and many aspects have been successfully completed.
- Key changes have not yet been fully implemented (eg volunteering), which has exacerbated the overall impact of the changes.
- Compared with similar library services, the Council has been spending less than the average where its spending was once higher than average. This is likely to have accelerated the relative decline in usage.
- The library service has a clear vision for its future role which compares well with national standards for library services.
- It is not clear that the Council's strategic plans recognise the wider contribution that the library service can make to the people who live, work and study in the borough.
- The future vision for the service could be expanded to embrace integration, rather than just co-location, of other, complementary services.
- Users and organisations we have spoken to have stressed the importance of libraries as a shared, but quiet space for all ages.



3.72 Our recommendations in this chapter focus on the general longer-term strategy for the service and are informed by our other recommendations which provide more detail.

### Table 3.9: summary of recommendations

1. To build on the new vision for the library service by ensuring that the Council embraces the wider contribution that libraries can make to the Council's ambitions for the borough.
2. To explore options for integrating other, related services with the library service to maximise their impact and use the Council's property portfolio more effectively.
3. To address weaknesses in the implementation of the current transformation strategy and revisit aspects of the strategy that were not sufficiently resourced.
4. To review the extent of budget reductions and explore the scope for additional investment in the service given the relative decline in the take-up of the service.

# 4. Evaluating the infrastructure, including buildings and ICT

## What we have examined

- 4.1 In the previous chapter, we reviewed the overall strategy for Barnet's library service. In this chapter we begin to examine how the strategy and vision have been put into effect in the design and management of the library buildings and in the way technology has been deployed. We have looked at:
- The presentation and welcome of the library buildings.
  - The use of space, including the reconfiguration of the buildings, and the ambience created.
  - Security, toilets and cleanliness.
  - The ICT infrastructure including the functionality of the new self-service technology.

## What we have found

### The presentation and welcome of the library buildings

- 4.2 We have made scheduled visits to all the libraries during a mix of staffed, Self-Service Opening (SSO) and, in the case of the Partnership Libraries, volunteer-staffed opening, and members of our team have also 'mystery shopped' a number of the libraries. From these visits we have made the observations below which have informed our findings and recommendations.
- 4.3 The new library buildings opened over the past three and a half years at Church End, Colindale and Central Barnet, reflect an ambition to re-locate and redesign library service delivery to the present-day centres of communities and in premises that facilitate modern patterns of library use.
- 4.4 Thus, the new Church End Library is close to the old site but in a more central location and replaces a building that was in many ways inadequate in terms of space and access. The new suite of conference and meeting rooms on the lower ground floor are a positive asset and the Library Service is aware that it now needs to improve the marketing and use of these spaces.
- 4.5 The new library at Colindale, replacing a branch library on the Grahame Park estate, is part of the major redevelopment of that part of the borough and is well located adjacent to Barnet and Southgate College as well as being opposite the new Barnet council offices.
- 4.6 The most recently opened New Barnet Library, replacing former East Barnet, benefits from co-location with a new leisure centre. Although, as indicated elsewhere, there is a need to increase the hours of access as its location with a popular major leisure facility offers great potential.



Figures 4.1 and 4.2: poor signage at Finchley Church End Library and Hendon Library



4.7 The lack of exterior signage is a major issue. With few exceptions (Hendon, where a new sign was provided in conjunction with Middlesex University; New Barnet Library, signed with the leisure centre; Burnt Oak and Colindale) most of the libraries have no main external signage at all. Most also lack up to date signs showing the opening hours, temporarily mitigated to some extent by the provision of A3 printed notices. The Head of Service has been attempting to rectify this, seeking capital funding on the grounds that it should have formed part of the refurbishment programme, but this has not been successful.

4.8 Information provided from outside about Self-Service Opening (SSO) is visible and is generally well presented using the new service logo and a consistent style. However, the size of the text is generally far too small. The clutter that often covers the doors and windows of libraries and other public buildings has generally been avoided but there is, in general, rather too much information.



- 4.9 The Head of Service is currently addressing this and has secured capital funding for electronic help points and information screens for the front doors and inside buildings. This will not only improve first impressions but will enable the Service to easily update information. In addition, it can include short video clips demonstrating how to use SSO (much as airports now demonstrate on a screen how to use the e-passport machines) which will be far more accessible and user-friendly, especially for any people less comfortable with using technology, hence supporting some key target groups.
- 4.10 The exteriors of the buildings are somewhat variable, inevitably reflecting the different ages and architecture. The newest buildings at Colindale, Finchley Church End and New Barnet are attractive and have frontages with extensive glazing, allowing people to see what is on offer inside. However, despite having wide glazed frontages, little use has been made of these shopfronts for marketing what's on offer inside. This requires capital expenditure and needs to form part of a holistic marketing plan.
- 4.11 Some of the older buildings have exteriors that don't reveal much of what is inside – Golders Green, North Finchley and East Finchley being obvious examples – and this may make customers reluctant to enter these libraries during SSO hours. For example, you can see nothing of the interior of the Golders Green library before you enter and then only after walking down a corridor.
- 4.12 Interior reception areas are generally well laid out, the majority in such a way as to invite use of the self-issue terminals, e.g. at Edgware and the newest libraries. Others seem to miss that opportunity, e.g. Hendon's self-issue terminals are somewhat deep within the library area, and Chipping Barnet still has a rather large counter in the same position as before which would encourage customers to gravitate there when there are staff on duty.
- 4.13 All the libraries have benefited from redecoration and new flooring during the refurbishment programme, which is in contrast to the somewhat neglected condition of many London public libraries. The Libraries management group is currently in the process of compiling a list of ongoing needs for redecoration and renewal of furniture and fittings, though if this cannot be funded from the capital budget, the Service will find it difficult to do so within existing revenue budgets and there is a risk of deterioration over the next few years.
- 4.14 There are some good indications of consistent branding in the use of colour and in the shelf-guiding headers. We could, however, detect the influence of library furniture suppliers in the design and layout of the newest libraries, which has been carried through into the other refurbishments. The input of designers/brand consultants could have injected more flair into the interiors for relatively little additional cost. Currently, the interiors feel 'grey' and uninviting with little or no artwork on display.
- 4.15 Even at this stage, it would be possible to commission an interior 'design guide' for the libraries' interiors. As part of the development of the guide, costed options for achieving a positive and affordable impact could be explored for inclusion in a capital investment to finish the implementation of the transformation programme.
- 4.16 Staffing appeared, in general, to be professional, engaged, and offering good customer care to users. In a few instances, there was a little too much focus by staff on their PC screens and a failure to make eye contact. That said, the overriding impression we gained from our mystery shopping and our workshop with staff was of a workforce very much aware of their public-facing role and with the customers at the forefront of their work. We observed a number of staff showing courtesy and sensitivity to the users they were helping.

### Use of space in libraries and changes to their footprint

- 4.17 Barnet followed an approach used by a number of local authorities and looked at a range of key factors. These, and the proposed strategy to address them, are set out in some detail in the report to Council in 2016<sup>18</sup> so we will not rehearse them again in detail here, but in summary the most important considerations were:
- The condition of the current buildings, including the backlog of maintenance and repairs that was estimated to be £2.47m.
  - The suitability of the buildings to provide a modern library service, including access and the ability to use the internal space flexibly.
  - The location of the buildings, given that most have been in the same location for many decades and inevitably the character and infrastructure of the surrounding community has changed. And leading on from this:
    - The potential to redevelop existing sites for mixed use including a new library.
    - The possibility that a library would be better co-located with other public or community services.
- 4.18 Perhaps a little more unusually, Barnet also looked at whether better use could be made of some of the space in the library buildings by reconfiguring the layout and releasing space to be let commercially and generate income that would help address the financial challenges facing the service and the council as a whole. An early proposal suggested a range<sup>19</sup> of library footprints starting from as low as 540 square feet, but as the result of consultation it was recognised that this would have been inadequate, a view which we wholly endorse.
- 4.19 As a consequence, from December 2016 to October 2017, the Council embarked on a programme to remodel all the library buildings apart from Finchley Church End and Grahame Park, which were already scheduled to move, and Burnt Oak. This programme entailed reducing the libraries to revised minimum footprints of 5,300sqft at Core Plus libraries, 2,100sqft at Core libraries, and 1,900 at Partnership libraries.
- 4.20 At the same time, the remaining floor areas were reconfigured to make better use of space and, wherever possible, provide meeting spaces for hire if these did not already exist. The programme of works simultaneously allowed for the installation of self-service entry technology, CCTV and other building adaptations to enable Self-Service Opening (SSO) and redecoration, reflooring and some new furniture. The total cost of this capital programme is reported to us to be £7.03m (including retentions), largely completed by October 2017.
- 4.21 The programme also aimed to create space for commercial letting to generate income that could be offset against the Service's budget savings target. Library premises became the responsibility of the Council's Estates division in its 'corporate landlord' role, which was also tasked with generating the anticipated income, the achievement of which is specifically excluded from our brief and has not been examined.

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<sup>18</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee -Barnet's Future Library Service page 99

<sup>19</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee Barnet's Future Library Service, paragraph 5.3.2, page 40



- 4.22 These changes to the buildings have inevitably been more successful in some cases than others. From our observations, the reduction in public library floor area is low impact in some cases, for example Edgware and Childs Hill. At Golders Green and North Finchley the reductions have had a higher impact, similarly at Mill Hill although the public floor area there was probably previously over-generous.
- 4.23 Hendon has had the most dramatic reduction in floor area from 19,375 (total, approximately 15,800 of which was public space) to 2,153 total sq. ft<sup>20</sup>, but this was a conscious result of the new Colindale Library being designated as the Core Plus library for the locality. The reduction at South Friern is the most glaringly unsuccessful due to the high visibility of a large empty floor area that cannot be readily let for commercial purposes due to the cost of zoning off the emergency exit from the library. We make recommendations below to address the ongoing inadequacies of some of the buildings (including where some of the commercial space has proved difficult to let out).
- 4.24 In our mystery shopping visits during staffed hours after school closing time, we noted that the libraries were very busy with some examples where there appeared to be insufficient space, eg in the children's library areas at Hendon Library or at work tables at Finchley Church End Library. It is possible that overcrowding could deter users if the service is successful in encouraging greater use.
- 4.25 Following through on another aspect of its strategy, the Council has opened three new libraries: Finchley Church End (in September 2017) replacing an inadequate and less centrally located building; Colindale (in September 2016) replacing Grahame Park Library and addressing the major redevelopment in Colindale; and most recently in September 2019 the New Barnet Leisure Centre and Library, replacing East Barnet Library and, as the name suggests, co-located with a major new leisure centre.
- 4.26 The review also highlighted the potential to develop further library sites in the future for mixed use developments, as happened with Finchley Church End and earlier South Friern, or to co-locate with other services or public sector partners, as has happened with East Barnet Library. Future development of the Hendon Library site in partnership with Middlesex University may offer a further opportunity. The 2016 report to Council indicated that "The Asset, Regeneration and Growth Committee will also oversee any future exploration of opportunities to provide modern fit-for-purpose library space (e.g. through regeneration schemes or relocation as part of new commercial or residential opportunities)", though we are unclear what measures are in place to ensure that the committee or its officers are aware of the ongoing requirements of the Library Service.
- 4.27 The process of improving the location and design of libraries across the borough should continue (reflecting a new, more integrated library vision). There is not currently a process in place between library management and officers responsible for regeneration and planning to produce and maintain a 'property shopping list' for the service.
- 4.28 This would reflect both the needs of the service users and the potential that a new, integrated library could contribute to redevelopment projects. Key priorities in this respect would appear to be Golders Green, North Finchley and East Finchley, which would resolve some of the least adequate and somewhat poorly sited libraries, as well as Mill Hill.

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<sup>20</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee - Barnet's Future Library Service page 117 provides an overview of the space reductions.

### Cleanliness and public toilets at libraries

- 4.29 Based on our observations whilst visiting all the libraries, standards of cleaning seem to be generally good and in this respect the libraries don't appear to suffer from the lack of a staff presence during all opening hours.
- 4.30 Standards of cleanliness of the toilets also seemed generally acceptable, with some variations. Most appeared clean and well-maintained, whereas a small number were of a poor standard when we visited. The toilets are cleaned every day, but it would undoubtedly be too expensive to monitor and clean them more frequently, so this level of variability is inevitable.

### Security at libraries

- 4.31 During the initial period following introduction of SSO at all libraries, security cover was deployed fairly extensively, but as experience has demonstrated a low level of incidents or inappropriate behaviour, this has slowly been reduced.
- 4.32 There is now a security presence at all four Core Plus libraries every evening from 6pm-10pm and the Core Libraries have visits by a roaming guard between 3pm-8pm who follows a different route each day dependent on when the libraries have SSO. The exceptions to this are Burnt Oak, which has a permanent security presence as part of the Customer Service Centre, and Hendon and Osidge which have library staff teams based on site, and the Town Hall security staff also attend Hendon at closing time.
- 4.33 In addition, the roaming guard is available to respond to any technical issues that may arise such as a problem with automatic doors or a CCTV camera and the security company are available for call-outs when needed, though this has been necessary on only a handful of occasions over the past two and a half years.
- 4.34 There is, however, a clear need for a protocol involving a wider number of managers in duty cover as currently during the full range of SSO hours the CCTV monitoring desk contacts one of only two senior managers.
- 4.35 It should be noted that the security presence comes at a cost, so if it is possible to increase staffed opening hours (which we explore in chapter 6), the deployment of security staff would need to be reviewed.

### ICT Infrastructure and support

- 4.36 Barnet Council's ICT support is managed by Capita, although two key aspects of library provision, the Library Management System (LMS) and the self-service technology (SSO) are supported by independent providers. The LMS, recently upgraded and replaced with Soprano, is a Capita Libraries product providing a managed service and the SSO is Open+ by Bibliotheca, who currently remain the dominant provider in the public library sector.
- 4.37 An IT Project Manager in Capita acts as the point of liaison with the Library Service and working relationships are good. A Libraries Modernisation Programme is in place as a vehicle for handling upgrades and exploring new technology developments. For example, items currently under review or being actioned include an upgrade to some products that are currently Windows 7 based, enhancements to Open+ self-service; card payments (customers can currently only pay with cash during SSO hours), and digital signage at all libraries.

- 4.38 In line with standard good practice there are two networks in libraries: the Council network, which is accessible only by staff with authorised log-in, and a separate network that supports all public-facing technology including the PCs for public use, public wi-fi and all Open+ kit.
- 4.39 There has been a serious problem with the technology that enables the service to count the number of visitors at each library (as alluded to in chapter 2). This is reportedly a problem that is the result of a mixture of issues, including the hardware, software and networking. Whatever the causes of the problem, its effect is that an important aspect of the performance of the library service cannot be monitored, reported and acted upon.
- 4.40 For the narrow purposes of this evaluation, it also means we cannot examine one of the key 'metrics' that would enable us to assess the impact of the overall changes to the service.
- 4.41 The problems with the visitor count technology must be resolved as a matter of urgency and we would recommend an independent review of the technology and implementation issues to identify what aspects need to be corrected; the extent of any liability on the part of the hardware and software providers; and any costs that the Council will need to incur to resolve the problems.

### TEO (Technology Enabled Opening) and its functionality

- 4.42 Barnet was one of the first public library services to comprehensively implement the use of Bibliotheca Open+ self-service technology to access its buildings outside of staffed hours and in that sense has been something of a pioneer in this field. The pilot project at Edgware Library during 2015 undoubtedly gave the service much valuable experience that was used to inform the subsequent roll-out to all sites.
- 4.43 It must be noted that this technology was first conceived of as a way to extend library opening hours to times when there would otherwise have been no access. The majority of libraries currently using Open+, or one of the variants now available on the market, use it in this way. Indeed the Edgware pilot operated on this basis. Barnet's decision to use TEO self-service to reduce the number of staffed opening hours has therefore been a somewhat more radical step, though it must be noted that at the same time overall hours of library access have been greatly increased (see chapter 2).
- 4.44 Self-Service Opening (SSO) has now been fully in operation at all ten libraries in the borough (apart from the four operated as Partnership Libraries) since October 2017. Initial teething problems with the operation of automatic doors and other associated systems now appear to have been reduced to an acceptable operational minimum, though as noted later in this report, there is a need for a more robust 'on call' coverage of issues that may arise.
- 4.45 The take-up of SSO is variable across the Core and Core Plus libraries and it may be that SSO is lower, and by inference inhibited, at those libraries with poor or no visibility of the interior before a customer enters. For example, data suggests that take-up of SSO at Golders Green library, where there is no visibility of the interior, may be lower than average; this may correlate with other libraries with limited visibility and merits further investigation. Interior designers or architects could examine structural or design solutions as part of a new interior design guide; options could include providing pictures of the interior or screens streaming live pictures of the interiors.

- 4.46 SSO hours are monitored at all times by live CCTV, with the operators making direct interventions when they see inappropriate behaviour and alerting library management and/or emergency services if anything more serious occurs. Statistics held by the service suggest such interventions are relatively infrequent - see 'What the data tells us' below. Arrangements are in place for emergency evacuation of an unstaffed building should the need arise. Regular scheduled drills take place at all library branches, including a scheduled drill in both staffed and unstaffed hours. There have also been a number of unscheduled evacuations (e.g. when an emergency button is accidentally pressed by a service user) that have tested the existing procedures.
- 4.47 However, many respondents to our questionnaire reported that they are deterred from visiting the library during SSO, either due to the absence of staff if they need help or information or due to fears of bad behaviour by other users. Other users of SSO reported that they are satisfied with the current arrangements. The issue, then, is the balance between staffed and unstaffed hours as we will see in chapter 5.
- 4.48 The SSO technology for opening the doors currently requires not only a pre-registered library card but also a person PIN number. There appears to now be a view amongst library management and staff that the PIN is unnecessary as an additional feature and may be an additional barrier that deters some users, as well as problems occurring from time to time with the PIN keypad. We therefore recommend that steps be taken to explore with Bibliotheca the removal of the requirement for a PIN from the hardware and software in use.
- 4.49 A major point of ongoing discussion is the lower age limit at which unaccompanied children should be allowed to use the libraries during SSO hours. Barnet have clearly given careful consideration to this and to the need to balance maximise access by younger people to the libraries with appropriate safeguarding. Barnet's current policy reflects government guidance and is largely in line with other library services. However, the extent of Barnet's SSO hours provides the Council with a particular challenge. The scale of its deployment also provides the Council with a depth of understanding that allows it to make an informed decision.
- 4.50 Currently those aged 15 and over and in Year 11 may register for self-service access with an additional confirmation from their school for those aged 15 and in Year 11. The requirement to involve the school adds an additional administrative process which we consider unnecessary and there is a fairly widely held view amongst library service managers and staff that the age limit could be reduced. This would, of course, be subject to the permission of the parents or guardians, though there is some difference of opinion as to what age unaccompanied access should be reduced.
- 4.51 Given the negative impact on young people who are too young to use SSO unaccompanied, we agree that this policy should be reconsidered. One option would be simply to lower the age limit. Another would be to do so on a trial basis. This could start with a reduction in the age limit to 14, on condition of parental consent as before. This would also obviate the need for an additional approval from the school (to confirm the school year), which is an additional obstacle for Year 11 students under the age of 16 as well as administrative task for staff. This could then be reviewed after six months with the possibility of a further reduction in age if the initial change proved to be a success.

### Whether to keep toilets open during self-service opening hours

- 4.52 The provision of, and access to, toilets in public libraries has always been a somewhat vexed issue in every public library service. In the past, the view was often taken that public toilets are a supplementary facility for users of a library and not a core part of the service offer. That view is increasingly seen as outdated. Access to a toilet is of use to anyone using the library for any length of time, for example to study, and may be particularly important for some people in specific user groups such as children, pregnant women, persons with disabilities and older people. Barnet's Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) addressed the latter point and we have taken it into account in our review of the EIA.
- 4.53 Inevitably the introduction of Self-Service Opening (SSO) has highlighted access to library toilets. The Council did however address this issue at some length in its deliberations of the overall proposals for the library service<sup>21</sup> and concluded that "After careful consideration of all of the factors, the proposal remains that toilet facilities will not be available during TEO hours. Each library will clearly display the opening times of toilets within the library as well as public toilet facilities in the area local to each site".
- 4.54 We have noted that the libraries do indeed display information on the availability of the toilets. Also, the service has made efforts to maximise access by making the toilets available whenever there is any library or staff security presence in the building during SSO hours. Thus, for example, the toilets are opened at any library if there are staff running an activity or undertaking back office work as well as when security staff are on site. At those libraries at which a support team is based in the building e.g. Osidge, Hendon, Burnt Oak, the toilets are opened during the majority of office hours, and at the recently opened New Barnet Library toilets are available in the adjacent leisure centre lobby.
- 4.55 However, this can mean that users visiting a library during SSO hours will not know in advance if a toilet will or will not be open. This could prove a deterrent and has been raised repeatedly in our discussions and in response to the questionnaire.
- 4.56 Some members of the public we spoke to suggested that the toilets should simply be left open during SSO hours, perceiving there to be little real risk. In discussions, it was suggested to us by some users that they felt safer in a library than in many other public places and that the Council was being too cautious.
- 4.57 The Council has reviewed its policy on a number of occasions, but given the strength of the feedback on this issue, we suggest that it should be considered again. There are four principal categories of risk that the Council will need to consider when deciding whether to open the toilets during SSO hours (and when there are no staff present):
- **Risk of harm:** whether users are more likely to come unwell and not be assisted or to be assaulted.
  - **Risk of damage:** whether the toilets are more likely to be damaged as a result of them being open during self-service opening hours.
  - **Risk to service usage:** whether users will use the library service less during SSO if they are not able to use the toilets.

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<sup>21</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee - Barnet's Future Library Service page 21 and page 83 and following



- **Risk of reputational damage:** whether the Council will be blamed and attract bad publicity as a result of an incident or incidents where harm or damage materialise or whether the Council disappoint users by not making the toilets available.

4.58 It is not our intention here to undertake a full risk assessment of each facility or to undertake a complete review of the policy, a policy which has already been reviewed repeatedly. However, we have posed in the table below a number of questions that are informed, in part, by the feedback we have received from users. These, and other, questions should be addressed in reviewing the current policy.

**Table 4.1: questions to consider when deciding whether to leave toilets open during SSO**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Is there an increased risk of harm or damage as a result of leaving the toilets open?</li><li>2. Is that risk greater in some libraries than others?</li><li>3. Is that risk higher or lower inside the library than elsewhere?</li><li>4. Are there measures that the Council does or could take to reduce that risk?</li><li>5. Are those measures proportionate, given the level of increased risk of harm or damage?</li><li>6. Can users (whether adults or parents on behalf of younger users) be allowed to decide for themselves whether to use them or not?</li><li>7. Will the Council accept the risk of bad publicity if an incident of harm or damage takes place?</li><li>8. Will the Council accept that users are less likely to use libraries if toilets are not open during SSO, even if that has a greater adverse impact on particular groups of users?</li></ol> |
|--|

4.59 Consideration will need to be given to both the level and severity of the *comparative* risk that is reasonable to accept *and* to the views expressed in our evaluation. There are a number of options for the approach that could be taken.

4.60 Currently, the Council's stance is risk-averse: the view is that, although the likelihood of serious harm or injury occurring is very low, the impact is potentially catastrophic. However, this view is a narrow one and excludes wider, knock-on risks and does not taken into account either the *comparative* risk or the ability or right of the user to form their own judgements about what is acceptable. For example, users during SSO hours who need to use the toilet and find it closed currently have to leave the building to use a toilet, introducing new potential risk. For young people, whose parents allow them to use a library during SSO hours, are they safer in a library than elsewhere, eg a bus or their school?

4.61 We suggest that other stances should be considered and we have summarised three options here.

**Table 4.2: options for policy stance on leaving toilets open in self-service opening hours**

Policy stance	Features	Impact of policy
<b>'Risk-averse' (current policy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilets open during SSO hours only when staff are on site.</li> <li>Users given information on other toilet provision in the area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimises risk of harm or damage while users are on council premises.</li> <li>Users deterred from using the library or exposed to other risks.</li> <li>Users not allowed to make their own judgement.</li> </ul>
<b>Cautious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilets open during SSO hours only where those toilets are easier to monitor (eg where cubicles open directly into the library).</li> <li>Users given information on other toilet provision in the area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces risk of harm or damage while users are on council premises.</li> <li>Users deterred where toilets remain closed or are exposed to other risks.</li> <li>Users of some libraries not allowed to make their own judgement.</li> </ul>
<b>User choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilets open during SSO hours by default.</li> <li>Users make their own choice whether to use the toilets.</li> <li>Users informed about any risks and how to address them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases risk of harm or damage while users are on council premises.</li> <li>Reduces exposure to other risks.</li> <li>Removes a deterrent to library use.</li> <li>Users allowed to make their own, informed judgement.</li> </ul>

4.62 The current, risk-averse policy has the apparent benefit of absolving the Council of responsibility or blame if something bad were to happen; but it is a real risk - with over a million visits per year, a one-in-a-million chance is likely to happen. However, this policy does not necessarily reduce risks overall as it introduces other, consequential risks.

4.63 A cautious approach could involve a site-by-site assessment. For example, some toilets have an internal lobby (eg Hendon) that may not be easily monitored. Other toilet cubicles open directly on to the library (eg Finchley Church End), making monitoring somewhat easier. Sites with a history of anti-social behaviour or repeated 'tail-gating' (ie people without cards sneak in behind users who have them) could also be excluded.

4.64 An approach based on user choice takes the view that a library is a comparatively safe public space and, in the case of SSO, has a degree of protection from the policy of access depending on a library card. Users would make their own choice based on their own perception of the risks involved. However, where there were repeated problems in a library, the Council would be able to decide how to respond, whether to increase security visits or suspend the toilets.

4.65 Leaving toilets open during SSO when there are no security or library staff in the building has not been trialled as such. However, there was a period when the service was unable to lock the toilets at Chipping Barnet and they were used for smoking and drinking and left in a very bad condition, resulting in complaints. A judgement will need to be made about whether the potential for additional misuse of

the toilets as a resulting of allowing their use during SSO (when staff are not on site) outweighs the dissatisfaction with current arrangements.

- 4.66 We suggest that the current, apparently 'risk-averse' policy should be reviewed by taking a wider view of the risks faced by users and by considering the importance of the issue to users of SSO. We suggest that other approaches should be considered, such as one that takes a site-by-site view or one that allows users to form their own judgement. It would be possible to begin by piloting the 'cautious' approach before deciding whether to move to an approach based on 'user choice'.

### What the data tells us

- 4.67 The absence of reliable visitor data across the service reflects the serious problems with the technology and/or its implementation (as reported above). This is a fundamental weakness that prevents the library service's managers from tracking the effectiveness of their service or the impact of changes. It also prevents Barnet's elected members from reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the service.
- 4.68 Local Gov (2019) report on the Royal Society for Public Health's May 2019 report showing that increasing pressure on council budgets has led to the closure of many public toilets. They reported that "700 council-run toilets in Britain have closed since 2010, which has had a disproportional impact on people with ill health, disabilities, the elderly, women, outdoor workers and the homeless. The knowledge of a lack of facilities nearby acts as a 'loo leash', deterring as many as one in five (20%) from venturing out of their homes as often as they would like. This percentage rises to over two in five (43%) among those with medical conditions requiring frequent toilet use." The worries about having access to a toilet during SSO appears to be reflected in public feedback through the questionnaire.
- 4.69 The level of security cover during SSO is extensive, particularly during the evenings when users might otherwise feel more vulnerable, and the level of incidents logged suggests that this is more than adequate but needs to be maintained. This is reinforced by the feedback from the questionnaire (see 'what we have been told' below) which suggests a lack of confidence in the safety of SSO for a proportion of users.
- 4.70 In addition, CCTV monitoring continues to be in place at all libraries during all SSO hours and seems to be effective for addressing minor behavioural issues or alerting libraries management, a security guard, or emergency services to anything more significant. An incident log is maintained, which categorises occurrences from P1, which requires immediate evacuation and that the emergency services immediately be called; P2 that requires evacuation and that Security be called; P3 which requires that Security be called but may still be a relatively minor matter; and P4 which has only 'minor impact'. We have seen the incident logs for the 18 months from April 2018 to September 2019 and in this period there were no P1 or P2 incidents, and the vast majority were graded P4.
- 4.71 However, this is an issue that should be monitored carefully if our recommendations for piloting a relaxation in the age requirement for self-service opening, for example, are to be accepted.
- 4.72 We have not been able to identify any recent study, or compiled data set, that presents the number of recorded safety or security incidents taking place in UK public libraries, so it is not possible to draw comparisons with other library services or with other public facilities (eg leisure centres). It might seem reasonable to assume (as suggested at a public meeting) that libraries (even during SSO) are safer than 'the street' or many other facilities available to the public, but we do not have any evidence to support or rebut that assumption.

### What people have told us

#### Introduction

4.73 In this section, we have reported what people have told us, whether through the survey, meetings, interviews or focus groups. We have not sought to evaluate or 'weight' people's perceptions or opinions, but we have drawn out those that we think highlight an issue effectively. We have drawn out those views that were particularly common but have also included examples of significant or interesting 'minority' views that should be heard. We have made a number of observations at the end of this section where we draw some conclusions that will inform our findings and recommendations.

#### What representatives of organisations in the borough have told us

4.74 In our discussions with those involved in voluntary organisations, self-service opening was a nuanced issue:

- There are mixed feelings about SSO - a lack of knowledge of opening hours, personal safety issues and desire for someone to be on hand to help were mentioned but there was also acknowledgement that it allows for longer opening hours for those that can manage it.
- Older users are reported to have adapted to the changes, whether staffed or self-service opening: "Some were initially upset with self-service, but people have worked round it.")
- However, the sense of library as a safe space is very important - hence the concern expressed about SSO: "We look to help others, to be aware of their needs and talk to people. We want this to be a safe space".
- People were said to travel further to use a library if they know that it will be staffed - they want the friendly feel. It was also said that many users face social isolation and a welcoming presence is an important part of the experience.

4.75 When considering the nature and fabric of the buildings, we found:

- Mixed view about the quality of the buildings. There was an appreciation of the refurbishments where they have happened but frustration where there are old or inaccessible buildings.
- There was concern that the reductions in floorspace meant less space for young people to study especially for those who needed free access to computers and the internet.
- From those involved in Partnership Libraries, there was feedback that the Council's estates department moved at too slow a pace which was a source of frustration.

#### What people said in response to the questionnaire

4.76 Looking first at the fabric and interiors of the libraries, there were a number of questions which found more satisfaction than dissatisfaction<sup>22</sup>. For example:

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<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of measuring satisfaction and dissatisfaction, we have added together the scores for quite satisfied and very satisfied to produce a total score for 'satisfied' and for quite dissatisfied and very dissatisfied to produce a total score for 'dissatisfied'.

## Evaluation of libraries transformation

- **Décor and appearance:** overall, people were more satisfied than dissatisfied, with 47% satisfied (19% were dissatisfied; neither 30%; don't know 5%).
- **Furniture and tables:** overall, people were more satisfied than dissatisfied, with 46% satisfied (19% were dissatisfied; neither 29%; don't know 6%). However, people with disabilities are less satisfied with furniture (35% satisfied; 29% dissatisfied; 33% neither; 2% don't know), although opinions on this topic run close across all respondents.
- **Tidiness and cleanliness:** overall, people were more satisfied than dissatisfied, with 61% satisfied (12% were dissatisfied; neither 22%; don't know 5%).
- **Atmosphere and behaviour:** overall, people were more satisfied than dissatisfied, with 52% satisfied (22% were dissatisfied; neither 22%; don't know 4%).

4.77 There was one issue about which there was more dissatisfaction than satisfaction. For example:

- **Toilets:** overall, people reported they were marginally more dissatisfied than satisfied, with 32% dissatisfied (27% satisfied; neither 15%; don't know 26%). However, older people who expressed an opinion tended on balance to be slightly more satisfied with toilets (34% don't know; 28% satisfied; 24% dissatisfied; 15% neither).

4.78 There was one area where responses threw up interesting differences between different categories of respondents:

- **Space available:** overall, people were marginally more satisfied than dissatisfied, with 38% satisfied (34% were dissatisfied; neither 18%; don't know 10%). However, people with disabilities were slightly more dissatisfied (38%) than satisfied (31%) (neither 25%; don't know 6%) with space available, although the differences across all respondents are not that significant.

4.79 There was one area where a substantial proportion of respondents didn't know enough to provide an opinion:

- **Community rooms:** don't know (38%), followed by dissatisfied (23%); neither (20%); satisfied (19%).

4.80 Turning to SSO, we found that 69% of those responding to the survey had used the library during SSO hours. Among these users, we found people were more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with:

- **Information about opening hours:** satisfied (50%), followed by dissatisfied (28%); neither (21%); don't know (1%).
- **Information about SSO:** satisfied (49%), followed by dissatisfied (28%); neither (22%); don't know (1%).
- **Applying for SSO:** satisfied (43%), followed by dissatisfied (33%); neither (19%); don't know (5%).

4.81 There were also questions where there were as many (or nearly as many) respondents dissatisfied as satisfied:

- **Getting into the library:** satisfied and dissatisfied (44% each), followed by neither (11%); don't know (1%). However, people with disabilities are more dissatisfied about this (51% dissatisfied; 35% satisfied; 15% neither; 0% don't know).
- **Atmosphere and behaviour:** satisfied (41%); followed by dissatisfied (36%); neither (22%); don't know (1%).

4.82 There were also a number of areas which found more dissatisfaction than satisfaction.

- **Sense of safety and security:** dissatisfied (46%); followed by satisfied (35%); neither (18%); don't know (1%).
- **Ease of use and reliability of equipment:** dissatisfied (40%); followed by satisfied (30%); neither (22%); don't know (8%).
- **The fact that toilets may be closed:** dissatisfied (70%); satisfied (4%), followed by don't know (15%); neither (11%). However, people with disabilities were more dissatisfied about this (80% dissatisfied; 2% satisfied; 8% neither; 10% don't know).

4.83 The three main factors that would encourage them to use the libraries more during self-service opening hours were:

- Toilets that are open more often (36%).
- Better sense of safety and security (33%).
- Easier to get into the library (32%).

4.84 The top three priorities were largely consistent across the board as we can see in the table below. It is also of interest that people with disabilities rate toilets that are open more often as their highest priority.

**Table 4.3: top three priorities for improvement as rated by survey respondents**

Over 65s	Under 65s	Disabled	Not disabled	Young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier to get into the library: 35%.</li> <li>• Toilets that are open more 31%</li> <li>• Better sense of safety and security 30%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better sense of safety and security: 35%</li> <li>• Easier to get into the library: 31%.</li> <li>• Better info about SSO: 19%.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toilets that are open more 47%</li> <li>• Easier to get into the library 34%</li> <li>• Better sense of safety and security 33%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better sense of safety and security: 33%</li> <li>• Easier to get into the library: 31%.</li> <li>• Better info about SSO: 21%.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easier to apply for SSO 31%</li> <li>• Easier to get into the library 31%</li> <li>• Better sense of safety and security 31%</li> <li>• Toilets that are open more 31%</li> </ul>

4.85 It should be noted that **23% said nothing would encourage them to use self-service opening.**



- 4.86 We found that 34% (49 of 143 respondents) of parents or guardians of a young person aged 16-18 or in year 11 had allowed them to use SSO (66% said no – 94 of 143). In addition, 45% (21 of 47) of those parents who had allowed this were confident in them being in a library when no staff were on duty (36% unconfident (17 of 47); 14% neither (7 of 47); 4% don't know (2 of 47)).
- 4.87 When considering what the minimum age should be for young people to be able to use the libraries during SSO, most parents, among those who were prepared to allow their child to use a library during SSO, favoured an age limit lower than 15. Some even favoured much younger age limits:

**Table 4.4: survey results for parents answering: “From what age might you allow your under 16-year-old child to visit a library on their own when no staff are on duty?”**

Choice	Responses (%)	No. of responses
11 and under	6%	22
12 or older	19%	70
13 or older	10%	37
14 or older	13%	47
15 or older	8%	29
16 or older	15%	53
I would not allow them at all	29%	107

- 4.88 The survey invited people at the end to describe the impact on them of the changes made to the library service. We have drawn out some examples here that illustrate the concerns they raised:

**Table 4.5: comments from survey respondents about the impact of the changes**

Issue	Verbatim comments
Space and furniture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "New Barnet Library has no space for anything"</li> <li>• "Because the space is greatly reduced, I find the library less comfortable to be in; sometimes there is not enough seating and children now crowded into the main room can be distracting."</li> <li>• "Closure of separate children's library space and upstairs activity room at north Finchley mean I do not take the kids there. I used to go weekly."</li> </ul>
Toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Disabled people have difficulty entering the library. I was not allowed to enter Hendon library once though I needed to inject insulin &amp; use the toilet."</li> <li>• "I am disabled - I cannot use the library when no toilets are open. If I fall, who will help me up without staff there? I am afraid to go on my own or</li> </ul>

Issue	Verbatim comments
	<p>with my young daughter in case there are any more dodgy men in there, so I am, in effect, unable to use the library."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I can only use self-service myself and can no longer bring my children (especially my son who is disabled) because they cannot be in a place without an available toilet."</li> </ul>
Self-service opening and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Don't believe CCTV is working as have seen incidents occur but no one has done anything about them"</li> <li>• "Disabled people have difficulty entering the library. "</li> <li>• "As disabled woman, I am too frightened to use the library when no staff are there. I fear falling over with no one around, being alone in an empty building, being attacked and unable to run away. I have complained about this before. I now feel excluded from library services."</li> <li>• "I feel uncomfortable for my safety as anyone can walk in when someone else walks in so I have to keep watching who is in the library".</li> <li>• "There is a serious issue with tailgating; people entering unstaffed libraries behind me, whether or not they have a ticket, or lost it or don't have one at all, it shouldn't be the responsibility of members of the public to say "You can't come in."</li> <li>• "Planning a trip to a specific library is often dependent on whether staff will be available, due to concerns over safety and accessibility of toilets".</li> <li>• "After the initial teething problems, I find it all very easy to use and accessible."</li> <li>• "At first I hesitated to use the library after changes were made. But then I loved it - and my two young sons love it too. We have a lot of flexibility - can come to library almost any time of the day."</li> </ul>
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "As a teacher, I am aware that young people cannot go in and study alone which means this discriminated against young people with no place/space to work at home. Many of my students have complained about this."</li> <li>• "My teenage daughter no longer feels it is a place for her to go and study - previously she used to go after school and in the holidays".</li> <li>• "My daughter couldn't use the library for GCSE revision so had to go to libraries in Haringey. I do not want to enter when no staff are on site due to safety concerns."</li> </ul>

4.89 The survey invited people at the end to list their ideas for change. We have drawn out some examples here in the table below.

**Table 4.6: ideas for change from survey respondents**

Issue	Verbatim comments
Toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Having the toilets open all the time."</li> <li>• "I would like the library toilets open even when self-service mode on. There are no nearer toilets to go and if you go further you need to take all your belongings with you. Then you will lose the space."</li> <li>• "Without staff, toilets are not available. They need to be!"</li> </ul>
Space and furniture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "More furniture and space for me to bring my children to read."</li> <li>• "Re-arrange furniture - impractical to have users standing behind and browsing bookshelves while others on PC."</li> <li>• "Better children's space and facilities, former children's room is no longer available and toilets/baby changing facilities no longer open"</li> <li>• "Separate children's library space".</li> </ul>
Self-service opening and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Bring back properly staffed libraries and do away with the self-service"</li> <li>• "I don't think the self-service system works easily for anyone."</li> <li>• "Have self-service but far better security and options for assistance (either remote working staff or phone options for example)..."</li> <li>• "I am a qualified librarian. I am able to access the library and facilities easily. It really annoys me that when the library is in 'self-service' mode people who want to use the library are turned away because they have not registered for access. The opening times displayed outside need to be much clearer together with an explanation as to how to obtain a ticket and pin."</li> <li>• "I would like to see detailed step by step 'how to' guides (possibly with pictures for what you click/press/select) next to every item in the library - how to print, how to return books, how to look up an item, how to reserve an item, how to find a book using the codes etc. When the library first changed to self-service this was very frustrating to try and figure everything out, and it is just that we are frequent library users that I persisted. I can imagine that a less patient or able person would get frustrated and give up."</li> <li>• "It would be good to have self-service at libraries that do not currently have it"</li> <li>• "Just get the I.T. infrastructure working!!!"</li> </ul>
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Availability to secondary school children of any age."</li> <li>• "We need more staffed our (sic) so that our independent travelling children can go after school, with or without an adult. Parents should be able to give permission for teenagers to use self-service. After all, this demographic travels to school independently and should be encouraged to use libraries!"</li> </ul>

### What people have said at meetings

- 4.90 Across the two public meetings, people raised the following points and observations relating to infrastructure, buildings and ICT:
- **Income generation and space for hire:** perceptions that the newly designated hire spaces are underused, that it is difficult to find out their availability and the process for hire.
  - **Buildings:** perception that the Council's long-term ambition is to consolidate its estate and sell off redundant buildings (including libraries), leading to a lack of interest in facilitating the success of particular libraries and room hire facilities.
  - **Toilets and hygiene:** concerns about cleanliness and food hygiene at Chipping Barnet.
  - **Decoration:** general agreement that the facilities were drab and needed a full overhaul and 'brightening up' to reflect the inspirational role of a library.
  - **Mixed experiences of SSO:** one example was quoted of difficulties due to time-demanding PIN and card entry process and the outwards-opening (i.e. 'opening at you') door system at East Finchley; there was another example of a very positive experience at Osidge library, with a clear timetable and well-lit entrance.

### What people said in focus groups and discussions

- 4.91 There were a number of areas that we tested in our focus groups and individual and group discussions that related to the library buildings and technology. We also probed in particular people's views on self-service opening.
- 4.92 When we raised the **ambience and welcome** offered by libraries:
- **Young people** wanted to **modernise** the library to attract young people, recognising that the way a library presents itself has an impact. They thought **more comfortable chairs** or bean bags, rather than hard, uncomfortable chairs would create a more welcoming atmosphere. They thought that a small **café area** would be good for people who wanted to stay for the whole day without having to leave to get refreshments. They felt that there was an impression that the libraries were for old people.
  - This view wasn't echoed in other groups although one woman who was visiting a library for the first time told us: "**I never visit libraries because they're full of weirdos.**"
  - **Noise** was the main concern for **adult users** – they particularly complained about young people making noise after school. For older adults this was less of a concern – although this might be because they are less likely to use the library at that time.
- 4.93 When we raised the question of **space** in libraries:
- All the groups we spoke to agreed that there was not enough space in the library, particularly the inability to **separate off the children's area** and the study spaces. This relates back to the noise issue and was the source of most complaints.
- 4.94 When we asked about **toilets** in libraries:

- **Young people** told us that; "It's silly to lock the toilets - **people should be trusted** to behave. After all you need to have a card to be in there in the first place".
- **Older adults** were less concerned about the toilets being locked during SSO as they were more likely to **use the libraries during staffed hours** and for shorter periods of time.
- The most concerned were the **adult users** who used the library for study or workspace and found it **very disruptive** to have to leave the building to use a public convenience elsewhere.
- Only one adult user expressed hygiene concerns about the toilets during SSO.

4.95 When we raised the topic of **security and safety** within libraries:

- **Young people** disagreed about **how safe they felt** in the library. Most felt that the ambience remained the same during SSO and felt comfortable being alone in the library at these times. Others had witnessed incidents in and around the library (Burnt Oak) which had deterred them from using it again.
- **Older people** were the only other group who expressed a concern about how safe they felt in the library during SSO as "there would be no one to help in an emergency"
- All the groups appreciated the **security staff** being present not only for reasons of safety but because it helped to **keep the noise levels down**.

4.96 When we asked about **ICT/self-service** in the libraries:

- All the young people who had used the self-service technology thought it worked well.
- We observed all age groups using the self-service technology and nobody told us they had experienced any problems.

4.97 When we raised the topic of **SSO** in libraries:

- Most **young people** who used Barnet Libraries had **borrowed someone else's card** to gain entry during SSO even if they were old enough to have their own.
- **Parents of young children** said it **stopped spontaneous visits** to the library as they didn't always carry their card with them.
- **Younger adults** appreciated the **extra access** it gave them to use the library and only one person had experienced any problems with the technology.
- **Other adults** found the SSO to be easy to use and convenient - the exception being Church End which was reportedly unreliable and tended to stick.
- **Older adults** were **sharply divided** between those who found **SSO to be easy** to use and convenient and those who **hated it with a passion on principle**.
- **Older adults** weren't as worried about the technology as much as the younger population assumed.

4.98 When we raised the **age of young people to gain access during SSO**:

- After much discussion, **young people** generally agreed that the age should be **lowered to 14** so that year 10s who are studying for their GCSEs would have somewhere to study during exam times.
- **The parents of younger children** thought the age could be **reduced to 12/13** – the age they would let a child out alone.
- **Younger adults** didn't have a view on this – when asked, they thought 15 was about right.
- **Adult users disagreed** on the age for young people's access - some would clearly **prefer if they weren't allowed in at all**. 15 seemed to be acceptable to most.
- **Older adults weren't concerned** with this as an issue - some thought 15 was about right but were worried for their safety late at night.

4.99 When we asked about the **locations** of libraries:

- **Young people** thought that the libraries **weren't distributed evenly** around the borough: "Some areas have lots of libraries around them and some are isolated".
- Some of the **adults and older adults** used the libraries which were most convenient for transport links.
- **Older people** at Chipping Barnet liked being able to **buy a coffee** at Waitrose to take into the library where they read the papers.
- People appreciated the proximity of **supermarkets** for using the toilets during SSO.
- **Free parking** was a factor in which libraries some people chose to visit.

**Table 4.7: our observations on what people have told us**

- From these results, it appears that respondents are, on balance, satisfied with the physical fabric and cleanliness of the buildings and the décor. It was acknowledged that the décor has been improved during the refurbishments, but many users will not be aware of what else is possible (although some agree that the interiors are drab).
- While the survey suggested that people were, on balance, more satisfied and dissatisfied about the amount of space available, that was not true for people with disabilities and concern was repeatedly expressed that there was less space for young people. Our own observations suggested that space in some libraries was at times very constrained and that it was sometimes difficult to navigate around people sitting at tables.
- Concerns were expressed about being disturbed by noise from other users. The loss of study or children's library areas from some libraries was cited as the cause of noise disturbance in libraries where there is now less space to allow some separation. In the

last chapter, we highlighted the importance to people of libraries as a quiet space, so this is likely to remain a source of complaint for a proportion of users.

- A substantial majority of those completing the survey had used the libraries during SSO hours and many of those we spoke to were happy to use them during those hours. However, there are a number of problems reported by those willing to use the library during those hours, including their sense of safety and concerns about the possibility that toilets would not be available.
- There appears to be support for reducing the minimum age from which young people are able to use the library during SSO hours, particularly among parents, but no obvious overall consensus what the right age should be.
- A significant minority of respondents to the survey said nothing could persuade them to use self-service opening and in interviews and discussions we found that the reasons ranged from principled opposition to a concern about the sense of safety and security in a public facility that might not be staffed.
- The issue of safety and security is a general issue of concern, with high levels of concern among young people (whether during staffed or SSO hours) and issues raised about people 'tailgating' their way into the library during SSO hours.

### Lessons from elsewhere

4.100 As indicated in this chapter, a number of Barnet's libraries would benefit from relocation to new premises designed in line with a new vision for the library service, and at the same time co-location and integration with other public or community services could offer real benefits. Many of the most successful new libraries in recent years have been those co-located in this way:

- Hertfordshire: in Hemel Hempstead, The Forum, a new hub which houses Dacorum Borough Council, voluntary services and a new library, opened in 2017.
- Chester Library: Storyhouse, which combines a new theatre, cinema and library in the heart of city, opened in 2017. The interior design standards can be seen in this link to a [video](#) about Storyhouse<sup>23</sup>.
- York: the new Explore Centre, with library, café and community hub opened in 2018.
- Anglesey: Holyhead Library opened in a new location with a community hub in the Grade II listed market hall building, which had formerly been derelict, in 2019.

4.101 Dramatic improvements in performance and cost efficiency have been achieved by authorities that have taken a planned and strategic approach to the location and design of the libraries in their networks.

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<sup>23</sup> The video can also be reached by typing this URL into your browser:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=17&v=RISXsLKx-uk&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=17&v=RISXsLKx-uk&feature=emb_logo)



- 4.102 Libraries that have relocated to the new centres of shopping districts have seen instant increases in service take-up. Libraries perform best when they are well-sited and visible. Barnet has relocated a number of libraries to more prominent locations and the options for relocation and integrating with a wider service offer should continue to be explored.
- 4.103 There are a number of other library services that have invested in professional interior design of their libraries. While this might require an additional, upfront investment, this can ensure a more effective control of specifications and the cost of procuring furniture. This will also include the design of signage (both interior and exterior) and the use of shopfront displays.

### Case study 4.1: John Harvard library



Southwark Council's John Harvard library was refurbished in 2009 with a limited budget. Located prominently on a busy thoroughfare, it advertises its presence and offers an attractive frontage.

Since 2009, its design has been adapted further to provide for an updated café space with a good quality café offer.



### Summary of findings and recommendations

4.104 There has been a complete overhaul of the buildings in the library network since 2016, with new, modern libraries opened and older libraries being refurbished. Reductions in space have been accompanied by the introduction of self-service opening technology. While there have been some positive changes, we found scope for improvement and examples where the transformation strategy's reliance on technology has had adverse impacts because key aspects of the strategy (eg volunteering) has not been successfully implemented. We address the issues of opening hours and volunteering in chapters 5 and 6.

**Table 4.8: summary of findings**

- The older library buildings have been refurbished, furnished and redecorated to an acceptable standard, although the interior design is dull and unimaginative.
- The new library buildings are, overall, attractive and well-designed, generally in more prominent positions within their localities, although little use is made of shopfronts.
- A number of Barnet's libraries would benefit from relocation to new premises designed in line with the new vision for the service.
- There is no procedure in place for the library service's needs to be taken into account automatically as part of regeneration plans to take advantage of any future opportunities.
- Signage and information on the outside of the buildings are poor overall, albeit with some better examples.
- Staff generally offer a professional and friendly welcome to users of the library service although further training in customer service could be helpful.
- The general cleanliness of the library interiors and toilets is good overall (with some exceptions).
- Toilets tend to be closed during self-service opening, a source of complaint for users, though there has been some attempt to address this whenever any library or security staff are in the building.
- Security coverage is in place during self-service hours and appears to be generally effective in reducing the risk that behaviour will deteriorate.
- The overall ICT infrastructure includes the key elements of modern library technology, although there have been problems with implementation.
- The failure to implement successfully new visitor count technology is a fundamental weakness and undermines the effective management of the service.
- The footprint of most libraries has been reduced significantly. In some locations, particularly at busy times, this may leave insufficient space.
- It has proved difficult to let out all of the space that has been designated for renting out and the lettable space in South Friern Library cannot be separated out for letting.
- Self-service opening technology generally works as planned, although the card and PIN process can be off-putting. There are promising plans in place for airport-style instruction screens.
- Self-service opening works successfully for many users who welcome the extended hours on offer. However, there are complaints, eg if toilets are closed.

- The Council has taken an apparently 'risk-averse' approach to the opening of toilets during self-service opening hours which is too narrow and does not take knock-on risks into account.
- A substantial minority of users are adamant that they will not use unstaffed libraries, often as a matter of principle and often because they are concerned about safety.
- The age limit for self-service opening is providing a barrier to young people using the libraries and there is support for younger age limits.

4.105 Many improvements could take place quickly and at minimal cost. Others are more long-term in nature and should be informed by an updated library strategy. Our recommendations are summarised below.

### Table 4.9: summary of recommendations

5. To invest urgently in high standards of exterior signage and in new, artistic design standards for shopfronts and interiors following an initial design feasibility study to develop costed options for the interior design of libraries.
6. To keep the availability of space in library buildings under review in order to find opportunities to increase the footprint of the busiest libraries and to support the potential for greater service integration.
7. To increase the footprint of South Friern Library, given the difficulty in letting vacant space commercially due to the constraints of the site.
8. To review any future vacancies in commercial space and in advance of any lease renewals and consider returning it to library use or other complementary uses.
9. To develop a 'library regeneration' list with officers in planning and regeneration to help identify long-term opportunities for improved sites as part of redevelopment plans.
10. To undertake an independent review of the failure to implement new visitor count technology effectively and fund an urgent recovery plan to correct the problems.
11. To explore with the supplier of the technology for self-service opening (Bibliotheca) the removal of the requirement for a PIN from the entry system.
12. To investigate whether a design solution can be found (ideally as part of the recommended design feasibility study) to avoid users being put off from using a library during self-service opening because they cannot see inside.
13. To pilot keeping suitable toilets open during self-service opening hours, before considering whether to let users decide whether or not to use the toilets.
14. To pilot a phased process of reductions in the lower age limit for self-service opening (subject to parents' permission).
15. To remove the requirement for schools to be involved in the approval process for allowing Year 11 children aged 15 to use self-service opening.
16. To spread urgently the on-call duty management cover roster for incidents occurring outside of office hours so that cover not just fall on a few individuals.

# 5. Evaluating the service offer

## What we have examined

- 5.1 In this chapter we have looked at how the service functions at a more detailed level. Some of this analysis considers operational issues before examining how these affect the service's users. We examine:
1. Library stock and its management.
  2. Online library services and digital media.
  3. Public access terminals and wi-fi access.
  4. Information and self-help provision.
  5. Use by the community and local organisations.
  6. Events and activities in libraries for adults and children.
  7. Inclusion services including the Home Library Service.
  8. Library locations and access.
  9. Take-up and satisfaction with a focus on children, young people, older adults and vulnerable groups.
  10. Funding and operational efficiency.
  11. Operational governance and performance management.

## What we have found

### Library stock and its management

- 5.2 Management of libraries stock of books and other media, including online resources, is the responsibility of the Service Development Manager: Stock and Resources and a team of 5.5fte librarians, working in cooperation with the Library Customer Service Managers in the libraries. It should be noted that this small team also has other responsibilities as outlined elsewhere in this chapter.
- 5.3 This manager and these two teams therefore oversee the entire life cycle of library stock and media at all stages: maintaining awareness of new trends and specific items, including digital media; selection; purchasing; acquisition and payment; allocation to libraries; promotion (including events and activities in libraries); review of current holdings; withdrawal of underused or outdated items; as well as reservations for specific items and inter-library loans. It should be noted that there is also a Service Development Manager responsible for Early Years and Schools.
- 5.4 Focusing the activity of the library service's professional librarians and their activity in a small boroughwide team has now been the preferred model in virtually all authorities over the past ten to twenty years, reflecting the need to operate at reduced cost. In this Barnet is no different and it is our perception that the Development Team functions well and delivers to a high standard not only in stock management but also in its other duties, notwithstanding a high workload. Digital and online media are considered in more depth in the next section.

- 5.5 The service has for some years used ‘supplier selection’ (ie the stock is selected by suppliers in line with a general specification from the Council), with oversight by the Development Librarians. This has streamlined this aspect of the workload, and the recently replaced Library Management System (LMS) offers more tools to assist with the management of stock.
- 5.6 The reduction in recent years in the numbers of staff needed to handle the acquisitions process has also been made possible by the introduction of online ordering and receipting and direct delivery of new stock to the library branches although we understand that there are still a few teething problems with the invoicing aspect of the new LMS acquisitions module.
- 5.7 In short, the management of all aspects of library stock/media in all formats, appears to function very efficiently in Barnet’s library service.
- 5.8 Library stock/media is of course the lifeblood of any library service, many of which have in recent years succumbed to financial pressure to cut the media purchasing fund to levels that have had a visible impact on what is on offer to users in the libraries.
- 5.9 Barnet’s total media purchasing budget in 2018/19 is £454,880 and has seen a substantial reduction from £623,420 in 2015/16 as part of the Council’s agreed strategy for the Library Service.
- 5.10 There has been a further reduction in real terms since then and CIPFA 2017/18 Actuals statistics indicated that the authority’s expenditure on all media was an average of £1.049 per 1,000 population against an average in the Comparator Group of £1,171. This suggests that any further reduction in the media fund, were one to be proposed, needs to be approached with caution.
- 5.11 Borrowing a book remains the principal reason for people to use their libraries and there is a risk of a spiral of decline if users find less to interest them as a result of cuts to the budget for books and other materials. Although our survey results suggest that users are generally satisfied with the range of the book stock, Barnet’s rate of borrowing is significantly below average (see chapter 3).

**Table 5.1: budget for books and other media**

Year	Media fund budget <sup>24</sup>
2015/16	623,420
2016/17	473,420
2017/18	473,420
2018/19	454,880
2019/20	454,880

<sup>24</sup> Not adjusted for inflation.

- 5.12 This trend is to some extent reflected in the CIPFA Comparator Group statistic for acquisition of new stock, in which, for example, Barnet's purchasing rate per 1,000 population was 84.7 items against a group average of 105.3, placing the authority in 11<sup>th</sup> place out of 15, although is likely to be affected by the timing of book purchases during the period of closures and the implementation of the new IT system.
- 5.13 On the other hand, the stock replenishment rate (the time taken in years to – theoretically - replace the lending stock) is 13.6 in Barnet against a group average of 16, placing them 5<sup>th</sup> out of 15 in the Comparator Group<sup>25</sup>.
- 5.14 Nevertheless, Barnet's total book stock is recorded by CIPFA as being 1.158 per 1,000 population against a Comparator Group average of 1.142, with audio-visual materials (excluding digital resources) at 102.1 against an average of 75.8. (This higher than average figure, now a little out of date, is probably reducing as Barnet gradually phases out the deployment of stock in media such as DVDs which are now rapidly falling out of use).
- 5.15 However, the relatively lower comparators for the media fund and acquisition of new stock do not take into account the efficiency with which the budget is being spent and the stock managed which, as already indicated may mean that, because of effective oversight by the Development Team, Barnet's media fund in fact performs above average. The above average comparators for Stock Turn and Total Stock tend to support this conclusion.
- 5.16 This is borne out by our observations when visiting all the borough's libraries, where the general appearance is of sufficient stock, in good condition and up to date<sup>26</sup>. The decision to clearly identify tiers of Core Plus, Core and Partnership Libraries and to clearly define the service offer at each via a Product Catalogue, will have help to ensure that stock is deployed more efficiently and to maximum effect.
- 5.17 Furthermore, a key consideration in all the above must be the trend towards the use of digital media as well as going online to seek information and other resources. The trend towards digital media was a key element in the proposed transformation and reduction in the cost of the Library Service<sup>27</sup> and the extent to which this has been achieved is considered in the next section.
- 5.18 It is also of note that the Service has now removed the charge for reserving items in stock at any of the borough's libraries, a move which we commend as it enhances access to stock for all customers regardless of which library may be most convenient for them to use.

### Online library services and digital media

- 5.19 Another basic proposition in the transformation of the Library Service<sup>28</sup> was the increased focus on digital media and online resources, which has over the past ten years changed how many people view and use their local library service.

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<sup>25</sup> CIPFA 2017/18 Actuals

<sup>26</sup> It is not within the scope of our brief to undertake a systematic review of stock on library shelves.

<sup>27</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee -Barnet's Future Library Service

<sup>28</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from CELS Committee page 10



- 5.20 Barnet proposed to enhance the digital offer and thereby to reduce expenditure on physical resources, but also argued that the increased emphasis on new technology has in part changed the extent to which some customers wish to make physical visits to a library building, reducing the need for the same number of staffed hours.
- 5.21 We have reviewed Barnet's online and digital library offer, which appears to be reasonably comprehensive as well as reflecting the needs of the Borough's residents and of particular communities. CIPFA 2017/18 Actuals indicated that Barnet's holdings of e-books matched the average in the Comparator Group. Baseline digital subscriptions include Overdrive, for which the Borough receives a large discount and has one of the biggest collections in London; a more recent subscription to Borrowbox, which costs more but has a more dynamic feel and take-up is increasing; RB Digital for magazines and newspapers; and has now added Pressreader. The Service Development Manager continually scans the horizon to add to the resources available and amongst others is now looking at a music streaming service.
- 5.22 We also undertook a high-level review of the digital offer in the 14 other CIPFA Comparator Authorities and found that Barnet offers all the 'standard' resources offered by the others. Some of the other authorities signpost additional sources which are generally available, which may be a helpful approach worth consideration. We recommend that Barnet look at the holdings of the comparator authorities to see whether any of their approaches and/or resources could enhance the Digital offer.
- 5.23 Statistics made available to us confirm that take-up of digital resources is already growing fast, albeit from a very low base:
- E-books: in 2017/18 there were 1769 individual users, which by mid-2019 has risen to 2245.
  - E-audio: in 2017/18 there were 683 individual users risen to 2231 in 2019.
- 5.24 We understand that the Service wishes this element of online and digital provision to be seen as, in a sense, 'the fifteenth library'.
- 5.25 This ambition is not inappropriate but we recommend that to achieve this, thought needs to be given to a clearer brand and associated marketing so as to raise awareness and significantly increase take-up. For example, 'Digital Library' will not be meaningful to many potential customers, and indeed 'digital' is not an entirely accurate term, hence the need for a succinct and immediately obvious term that encapsulates online information and e-resources.
- 5.26 We do note, however, that the Service has a Community Leader for ICT and is already making efforts to promote use, for example offering workshops during Get Online Week – see the section below on 'Events and activities in Libraries for adults and children'.

### Public Access Computers and Wi-fi access

- 5.27 Following a national initiative, The People's Network, implemented in 2002 and initially funded from one of the National Lottery funding streams, public libraries have been providing computers for public access. Despite an increase in home computer and laptop access and huge advances in the capabilities of mobile phones, these computers remain popular and well-used and are a key reason why many people use their local library.



- 5.28 The report to Council<sup>29</sup> on future library service provision in 2016 indicated that “Provision of computers and free access to the internet will continue to be a core feature of all categories of library, including Partnership libraries”. The network has been maintained in Barnet and enhanced by a self-release print and payment feature, which seems popular and enables full use of these computers during SSO hours.
- 5.29 These computers are often particularly well used by unemployed people or those living in areas of high deprivation where home ownership of a computer may be lower. Although unemployment in the borough is below the London average there will still be numbers of people who use the libraries to help find work or training. Similarly, whilst the borough has overall relatively low levels of deprivation, there are a number of areas where it is much higher.
- 5.30 Access to computers in libraries is essential for those who cannot afford their own equipment at home, particularly given that many official processes are now ‘digital by default’. The support available from staff is important for those who are less confident in completing online forms.
- 5.31 CIPFA Statistics<sup>30</sup> indicate that Barnet has 166 computer terminals available for public access. CIPFA suggests that this is low compared with the Comparator Group (42.8 per 1,000 population against an average of 58.6 and placing Barnet 13<sup>th</sup> out of 15) but from our observation when visiting libraries, the computers are popular but there appeared to be sufficient for demand.
- 5.32 A public wi-fi network is available to registered users in all libraries during all hours of opening, both staffed and in SSO mode. This also includes the four Partnership Libraries.
- 5.33 The new self-release print and payment facility is being introduced to allow use by customers using their own devices and the wi-fi network.

### Information and self-help provision

- 5.34 The world of information and self-help has dramatically changed over the past 15-20 years as a result of use of the internet, associated technology and social media and continues to do so at a startling rate.
- 5.35 As a result, the traditional role of the reference library supported by a large collection of hard copy resources has also been superseded, though the essence of that function remains and should form part of a good public library service.
- 5.36 The chief reason for this, often overlooked, is that the explosion of online sources and information is largely unorganised and unregulated. A not unsubstantial proportion of the ‘information’ thrown up through a search engine can at worst be propaganda or at the very least written from a non-neutral perspective, as well as frequently being out of date. Material circulating on social media sites is likely to be even less reliable because it has been posted to promote a particular point of view.
- 5.37 In this context the key role that a public library service can play lies in:
- The skills of qualified information professionals to rapidly evaluate information using a set of criteria once used for print material but equally valid today, as well as to navigate the mass of information available online.

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<sup>29</sup> 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee – Barnet’s Future Library Service

<sup>30</sup> CIPFA 2017/18 Actuals

- The opportunity that this presents to validate and package information so that users can both more easily access what they need but also rely on its validity.
- Providing access to a range of digital material that might otherwise not be available to individuals, or only at cost, once again ensuring the quality of the offer.

5.38 Barnet Library Service has responded to these opportunities by:

- Creating and maintaining web pages that give access to the services it has on offer, including events and activities, as well as signposting reliable sources of information.
- Providing an enhanced range of material in digital formats.
- Offering an online enquiry and homework service via email, which is staffed Monday to Friday 09:30-17:30 by the librarians in the Development Team. This is available both to customers from their home or work, but also from the library sites during SSO operation.

5.39 We note and commend the fact that a number of library staff are trained and have access to update the library web pages, meaning that they maintain their accuracy and freshness.

5.40 In common with many public library services, there are usually no professional librarians on frontline duty during staffed hours, although members of the Development Team are available online and by phone. The service also circulates a weekly 'Things to note' email to all staff, which will include any service developments or initiatives within the service or anything of note elsewhere in the Council that may lead to enquiries in libraries. Reflecting good practice elsewhere, we recommend that consideration be given to the Development Team running training sessions for frontline Customer Services staff in enquiry handling techniques, particularly those newer to the service.

5.41 Those attending the staff workshop highlighted the frequent extent to which other departments of the Council are referring customers to the libraries to find information about a variety of subjects and services.

### Use by the community and local organisations

5.42 Nine of the ten libraries directly managed by Barnet Council have space to hire for meetings and events, the exception being Burnt Oak. These vary in size from smaller to medium-sized rooms at Colindale, Edgware, Golders Green, North Finchley, East Finchley, Hendon and Osidge, through to the two rooms at Chipping Barnet library with capacity for 40 and 60 people. The most extensive suite of rooms is at the new Finchley Church End Library where flexible room partitions and a kitchen allow for any size of meeting up to and including large conference events or parties. The four Partnership libraries also have smaller spaces available for hire.

5.43 In a number of cases these meeting spaces were created during the redesign and overall reduction in floor area at the libraries as part of the transformation programme. The Hyde Room, the larger space at Chipping Barnet, was given over to commercial space but was more than compensated for by the new room suite at Church End.

5.44 Room bookings over the past twelve months indicate that these spaces are being used by the local community, public and commercial organisations for a variety of meetings and activities including by residents' associations, council departments and community and charitable organisations as well as individuals. Clearly the space(s) at Church End have the most potential to increase use and generate income and the Library Service is aware of the need to increase marketing of the space for private events.

- 5.45 Whilst it was not within the scope of this review to look at the market rate for comparable spaces in other local venues, the scale of charges for non-concessionary use does appear somewhat low and we recommend that this be reviewed.
- 5.46 The 'diary' for bookings has until now been held in each library rather than managed centrally and this can lead to delays in responding to enquiries, but a new system has just been installed, which the Service has used as a back-office system since January 2020 and which will go live with the public in April.

### Events and activities in Libraries for adults and children

- 5.47 Barnet Library Service runs an extensive programme of events for children and adults using the meeting spaces in the libraries as well as in areas in the libraries themselves e.g. for children's activities. The scale of the programme is dependent on the hard work of frontline staff, working with specialist library staff and other partners.
- 5.48 Of particular note is the extensive programme for under-5s run by the small Early Years and Schools Team who run some nine sessions a week. Although many of these are charged for, the level of demand and take-up indicates that they are high quality activities for which users are happy to pay. Income from these activities is in the order of £400-£500 a week.
- 5.49 Events for older children and adults are run by the Stock and Services Development Team of librarians as part of their work alongside other responsibilities for library stock and information, including digital and other online resources and general service initiatives, in co-operation with frontline staff.
- 5.50 Of particular note is Barnet Libraries' Year of Learning, the publicity for which describes it as "... an exciting programme of events and learning opportunities for everyone in the borough".
- 5.51 During 2019 there have been activities for children, teenagers and adults with a different theme each month, which range from learning to juggle, attending a creative writing workshop, building a CV, improving language skills, attending a live music or theatrical performance, learning more about using social media, or attending talks and classes.
- 5.52 Feedback from our workshop with a group of library staff indicated that as well as being a good programme for customers the Year of Learning has provided a positive focus for staff following a period of intense change and generated energy and enthusiasm.
- 5.53 Regular events include adult reading groups, conversation cafes (to practice English with fluent speakers); ICT classes delivered by Barnet and Southgate College; library staff and volunteers; Knit and natter group; Senior citizens social group, coffee mornings and afternoon tea; Job Clubs, Lego Clubs and programmes of talks by authors, local experts and alternative health providers.
- 5.54 The library service also participated again in Get Online Week<sup>31</sup> during October 2019 with a series of free events and workshops to promote use of the online library resources, basic digital skills, a surgery on social media, and a session on staying safe online.

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<sup>31</sup> Get Online Week first began over 12 years ago as an initiative to bring digital inclusion to national attention in the UK and has since grown into a week-long annual celebration, with thousands of events taking place each year.

- 5.55 In the first nine months of the year beginning April 2019 there have been an impressive 2,750 events with 43,057 attendees. A vibrant programme of events and activities, as well as wider use of library buildings by local people, is a key indicator of a good public library fulfilling its role at the heart of the local community, as is reflected in the Universal Offers referred to in chapter 2.
- 5.56 Many public library services have in recent years, faced with the need to reduce costs and maintain other aspects of the service, unfortunately greatly diminished or virtually ceased this activity. Libraries can act as ‘cultural hubs’ for the community, but this requires funding and sustained commitment.
- 5.57 In this respect our impression is that Barnet Library Service performs well and is to be commended for maintaining and, reportedly, expanding this important strand of work with the benefit of funding from Arts Council England. This partial reliance on external funding presents a risk that this impressive programme might not be maintained at the same level in future.

### Inclusion services including the Home Library Service and Mobile Library Service

- 5.58 In common with most public libraries, Barnet offers a home delivery library service to people who are for a variety of health reasons unable to visit a static library. The service makes four-weekly visits to individuals as well as visiting residential/sheltered housing locations<sup>32</sup> to make a deposit of large print books every eight weeks.
- 5.59 Clearly this is a service needed by only a minority of the population, but for these people it provides a vital lifeline, not only for the loan material provided but also the personal visit and contact. Barnet employs a small team of staff to operate this and the Mobile Library, unlike some authorities where the service is operated by another agency and/or uses volunteers to make the deliveries, and thus arguably retains greater control over the quality of the service offer. The quality of the service is probably, at least in part, the reason for the comparatively high take-up.
- 5.60 Total issues and renewals of items show a steady decline in recent years, as shown in Table 5.2 below, but CIPFA statistics<sup>33</sup> indicate that Barnet’s Home Library Service continues to have one of the highest number of registered users in the Comparator Group (784 users) placing the borough at 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 15. This represents 2 people per 1,000 population against a comparator average of 1.3. The number of registered users in fact shows a slight increase on the previous year when the number of users was 756.

**Table 5.2: home library service: annual issues and renewals**

Year	Totals
2013-2014	35,675
2014-2015	35,029
2016-2017	29,275
2017-2018	28,775
2018-2019	20,238

<sup>32</sup> There are 74 residential/sheltered housing sites are registered with the service

<sup>33</sup> 2017/18 Actuals

- 5.61 Barnet is one of only three boroughs in the CIPFA Comparator Group that still operates a mobile library. This in part reflects a trend across London to phase out mobile library services in the face of budget constraints and the capital expenditure required to replace vehicles at intervals.
- 5.62 Unsurprisingly, mobile services were in the past used more in the outer London boroughs and in the Comparator Group the only two other mobile services still operated are by Enfield and Redbridge. Barnet Council made a conscious decision in its Vision and Strategy<sup>34</sup> to retain the Mobile Library Service and was at that time in the process of commissioning a new vehicle that is now in use.
- 5.63 Table 5.3 indicates that numbers of issue/renewals from the Mobile Library Service has declined over recent years. However, loans in 2018/19 have increased somewhat over the previous year, which may in part reflect some increase in take-up by customers who prefer not to use SSO at the static sites.

**Table 5.3: mobile library service annual loans**

Year	Totals
2013-2014	18,967
2014-2015	15,844
2016-2017	13,176
2017-2018	10,652
2018-2019	11,008

- 5.64 The mobile library visits 11 sites on a weekly basis and on one day a week makes two- or four-weekly visits to playgroups, nurseries and schools.

### Library locations

- 5.65 A key element of the proposals for the transformation of the Library Service was that all fourteen of the existing libraries would be retained. The report that the Council agreed at its meeting in 2016<sup>35</sup> indicated that the current locations of the libraries and the geographical spread of library services across the borough, as well as the distance of travel to each site, had been fully considered.
- 5.66 Given that the locations of the libraries have remained largely unchanged, we do not propose to discuss this further at any length. It is, however, worth noting from that report that *“Based on Transport for London’s Strategic modelling over 99% of Barnet’s residents within 30 minutes travel distance of a library site”*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from CELS Committee Appendix, page 31

<sup>35</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee - Barnet’s Future Library Service

<sup>36</sup> Page 47 paragraph 5.9.7

- 5.67 The only subsequent changes to the library locations have been the opening of a site a short distance from the old site of the new Finchley Church End library; the opening of the new Colindale Library replacing the former Grahame Park as part of the major regeneration of the whole area, and the recent replacement of East Barnet Library with a new facility as part of the New Barnet Leisure Centre and Library.
- 5.68 We do not believe any of these changes will have significantly altered travel distances to a library across the borough. The Mobile Library Service should be kept under review in the forward strategy as the need may become greater if the Council does decide to rationalise the current network in future.

### The locality model

- 5.69 What has changed as a result of the libraries transformation is the delivery model and structure for library services. Prior to this, as explained in the 2016 report, *“Libraries are currently split into two categories, half being leading libraries and the other half being designated local libraries. These categorisations were set relatively informally, with leading libraries those which were predominantly busier, larger and open longer and local libraries mainly smaller, less busy and open slightly fewer hours”*.
- 5.70 The current ‘locality model’ is based upon three categories of library provision: Core, Core Plus and Community, with a clear service specification associated with each category set out in a product catalogue that is described in detail in Appendix C of the 2015 report. Using that model the libraries have been grouped into four clusters or ‘localities’ as follows:
- Colindale, Golders Green, Hendon, Childs Hill.
  - East: Chipping Barnet, Osidge, New Barnet.
  - North: Edgware, Burnt Oak, Mill Hill.
  - Central: Church End, East Finchley, North Finchley, South Friern.
- 5.71 Each locality thus has one Core Plus library, one or two Core Libraries, and one Partnership Library<sup>37</sup>. The libraries are now managed on a locality basis and service access considerations take into account the library provision available in each area at any one time. For example, the patterns of staffed and SSO opening have been planned to maximise the opportunity to access a staffed library in the locality.
- 5.72 In arriving at this categorisation and its application to each library, the Service took into account a Needs Assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment, both of which are included as appendices in the 2016 report.
- 5.73 Some effort has been made to communicate to customers the service offer at each type of library and as we commend the general principle of being clear what is on offer, where, and when, which is often rather opaque in library service delivery.

### Opening hours

- 5.74 What has changed and is probably still the single most controversial aspect of the libraries transformation for many residents, is the opening pattern and staffing of the libraries.
- 5.75 Again, the new model is described in considerable detail in the 2016 report and we will not repeat this detail here, but key points are:

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<sup>37</sup> Appendix Page 631 and following of the 4 April 2016 report to council includes maps of the locality model



- As already noted in this report, staffing is the largest element of expenditure in any library service and given the financial pressure with which Barnet Council was faced it was felt that there was little alternative but to considerably reduce the workforce.
- In this context, and given the decision not to close any library, the only real alternative was to reduce the opening hours.
- Barnet has sought to address this by reducing *staffed* opening hours at all the libraries, using the locality model as a template for this, whilst introducing new technology to enable Self-Service Opening (SSO) without any staff present and at the same time to considerably increase the total number of hours when the borough's libraries can be physically accessed.
- In arriving at the current pattern of opening hours, staffed and SSO, the service took into account a number of factors such as peak usage times, local demographics of each area, use by targeted groups, the wider locality and whole library network opening pattern, and inevitably also the ability to efficiently rota the staff.

- 5.76 Opinion as to whether these changes have increased or reduced access to the library service will clearly depend to a considerable degree on the expectations, confidence, patience and needs of individual library users. Our consultation indicates that some users find the extended morning and evening opening of benefit and are unconcerned about the libraries being unstaffed for periods during the day. Others have found the lack of staff to be a deterrent to use and continue to find the patterns of opening confusing. These concerns may disproportionately affect some members of the community more than others (eg people with disabilities and children and young people) as we have identified in our EIA at Appendix vi.
- 5.77 We believe that there is a third, possibly quite large, grouping of customers who do not in principle object to using the libraries during SSO operation but have not found an easy opportunity to register their membership card, did not have proof of address with them again or find the technology bewildering, and perhaps have simply stop trying to use the library. To address these problems, we recommend the implementation of a number of hours at each library with volunteers present in a Meet and Greet capacity, and a re-run of the earlier Here to Help programme. Consideration should also be given to removing the requirement to verify their address again.
- 5.78 The former was a core part of the original proposal and now needs to be implemented urgently, and the latter appears to have been popular and successful following the introduction of SSO at each library but, given that many people use their library only an 'as needed' basis at often quite wide intervals, it may simply not have served to cover a sufficient proportion of customers.
- 5.79 The recently opened New Barnet Library currently has limited opening hours as a Partnership Library. This needs, if possible, to be resolved by an arrangement with the leisure centre so that with oversight by leisure centre staff the library could be left open for longer periods. There may of course be some cost to this and operational issues to resolve.
- 5.80 Despite the availability of SSO, we consider that the reduction in staffed opening hours (whether staffed by employees or volunteers) has gone too far. The age threshold for being able to use a library acts as a barrier for young people who want to visit the library on their own; and users do want help from library staff from time to time.
- 5.81 However, we recognise the financial challenges facing London Boroughs and so priorities would need to be set if additional funding could be made available. The following choices could usefully be considered:



- Saturday opening: this would have the potential to benefit the widest cross-section of user categories.
- After school: this would particularly benefit young people and parents of young children.
- Core plus: as the larger libraries in a locality, longer opening hours could have a greater impact.

5.82 Any decisions on additional funding would need to be informed by operational practicalities.

### Library membership

5.83 Customers do not have to register as a library member to use the library per se, only for specific services such as borrowing loan items or accessing a computer in the library. We note that it is possible to register as a member of Barnet Library Service online, which is a positive move, but of course the customer still needs to visit a library in person in staffed (or volunteer covered) hours to pick up their card.

5.84 However, what SSO operation has done is to introduce the need for an initial staff intervention to upgrade the membership cards of users for SSO access. Given the difficulties outlined in the previous section, this has, in effect, introduced a barrier to membership and library use and is likely to have impacted on levels of use. Our recommendations if implemented could be expected to go some way to address this.

5.85 Staffed hours have reportedly been timetabled to as far as possible respond to the needs of older people, families and children after school. However, for many users, that is not their experience. The pattern of opening is complex and so is difficult for many (particularly young people) to remember (as reported in responses to our questionnaire).

### Take-up of services and customer satisfaction

5.86 As we have indicated in chapter 4, one of the difficulties that the Library Service has experienced during and after the Libraries Transformation, and which we have encountered during our review, has been the lack of reliable performance data. The most useful management information would be:

#### Table 5.4: suggested key performance indicators for the library service

- Visitor count of physical visits to libraries, including the patterns of visits (eg between staffed and SSO hours).
- Issues/renewals of loan items.
- Issues of digital materials.
- Levels of social media engagement.
- Accesses to the library web pages, which will give some indication of the use of other online resources.
- Attendance at events and activities.
- User satisfaction (from periodic surveys or event 'happy sheets').
- Volunteer numbers, including retention and satisfaction (from periodic surveys).

- 5.87 However, the most meaningful indicator of the take-up of services at any library building, and specifically at different times of the day and week is a visitor count (as we stressed in chapter 4). In Barnet's case, the ability to further distinguish how this may differ during self-service and staffed opening would be of great value.
- 5.88 Statistics for issues and renewals of loan items would add to this picture, providing distinction can be made between those undertaken in the libraries and renewals done online, though in the national context of the increasingly diversified use being made of libraries and steady decline in issues this statistic is of somewhat less significance than in the past.
- 5.89 The Service has not undertaken any recent surveys of customer satisfaction, so it is not possible to compare the returns from the questions on satisfaction in our questionnaire.
- 5.90 However, numbers of complaints do give some indication of whether customers are significantly dissatisfied with a service. The number of complaints about the library service registered formally with the directorate complaints team have been as follows:
- 2015/16: 24
  - 2016/17: 35
  - 2017/18: 42
  - 2018/19: 24
- 5.91 These numbers do not include comments or complaints made informally to staff in the libraries but the number of formal complaints does not seem excessive and after a slight rise during the two years that the libraries transformation programme was underway they appear to have settled back to the original level.
- 5.92 Whilst we have not undertaken any analysis of the complaints they appear to have been a mix of the issues some customers may unfortunately experience when using any service (technical or procedural problems with the service and occasionally about the staff) together with some that reflect the changes made such as the programme of closures; problems accessing the library during SSO; the lower age restriction for doing so unaccompanied; and a number about the introduction of charges for the late return of children's stock.

### Operational governance and performance management

- 5.93 The Library Service is located in the Family Services Directorate of Barnet Council, with the Head of Service for Libraries reporting to the Divisional Director, Commissioning. There is no one 'correct' place for libraries to sit within a local authority and, although the service has moved around somewhat in Barnet in the past, it has been located with Childrens and Family Services for the majority of that time, which seems to work in Barnet.
- 5.94 The Head of Service is now a fourth-tier post and seems to receive good support from senior management. Unlike the rest of the directorate the Library Service is the responsibility of the Community Leadership and Libraries Committee, which ensures that it receives focus at a political level.

- 5.95 Following the last restructuring completed in 2017, three management posts report to the Head of Service: an Operations and Customer Services Manager; a Service Development Manager - Stock and Services; and a Service Development Manager – Early Years and Schools. The roles and responsibilities of each of these is outlined in chapter 6 on Staffing Levels, Deployment and Skills.
- 5.96 The Libraries management team, comprised of these four posts, meets weekly to discuss operational matters and has a quarterly themed awayday to address more strategic issues. In addition, the initiative over the past eighteen months involving a wider group of staff in developing a new vision and values, described in chapter 3 has through the pillar group structure has to an extent engaged all the staff in the management of the service.
- 5.97 Due to a range of factors, we have struggled to meaningfully identify the impact of the transformation programme on take up of the service: a period of library closures for changes to the buildings; failure of the old LMS and introduction of a new one; problems with the technology that should operate gate counts; as well as the overall level of transformational change: hence it is our assumption that the Service's management also have only somewhat subjective impressions of the impact.
- 5.98 It was an omission by the Council, faced with the huge level of change proposed by the transformation of the Library Service, that it did not at the outset identify a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that would enable them to monitor the impact of these changes.
- 5.99 That said, and in the apparent absence of quality data to track the impact to date we therefore recommend that as a matter of urgency the Council should agree a set of KPIs for the Library Service, based on those suggested in table 5.3, that will enable them to monitor trends in service use through the Directorate and Library Service management teams and at regular intervals the Community Leadership and Libraries Committee (CLL).
- 5.100 In some cases, urgent steps may need to be taken (as recommended in chapter 4) to address the current inability because of unreliable technology to collect some of this data, e.g. gate counts of visitors.

### What the data tells us

#### Comparisons with other boroughs

- 5.101 We have compared Barnet's libraries with those in the CIPFA comparator group at numerous points in this chapter. However, there are a number of other comparisons which are worth noting:
- Barnet has the second highest number of libraries in its CIPFA comparator group (4.4 total service points per 100,000 population vs. an average of 4.0), reflecting the decision in 2016 not to close any libraries. In comparison, there were an average of 0.2 closures per 100,000 population.
  - Barnet has an above average number of mobile libraries in its CIPFA comparator group (0.3 total service points per 100,000 population vs. an average of 0.1).
  - Barnet has a slightly above average number of active borrowers in its CIPFA comparator group (137 per 1,000 population vs. an average of 134).
  - Barnet scores lowest in its CIPFA comparator group for physical visits (1,754 visits per 1,000 population vs. an average of 4,436). However, as outlined in chapters 3 and 4, these figures cannot be relied upon.

- Barnet has a below average number of website visits in its CIPFA comparator group (350 per 1,000 population vs. an average of 873).
- Barnet scores lowest for total book issues in its CIPFA comparator group (1,783 issues per 1,000 population vs. an average of 3,149).

### Accessibility and opening hours

5.102 Total weekly opening hours have increased since 2016 (from 634.5 hours to 844.5 hours per week), but the number of *staffed* opening hours has reduced from 634.5 to 268.5, a reduction of 58%. The service states that the following opening hours are currently in operation:

**Table 5.5: total weekly opening hours across the library network**

Library	Staffed	Self-service	Partnership <sup>38</sup>	Total
Burnt Oak	15.5	35.5	-	51
Childs Hill	-	-	18	18
Chipping Barnet	23.5	68.5	-	92
Colindale	23.5	68.5	-	92
East Finchley	16	53	-	69
Edgware	23.5	68.5	-	92
Finchley Church End	23.5	68.5	-	92
Golders Green	15.5	53.5	-	69
Hendon	16	53	-	69
Mill Hill	-	-	17.5	17.5
New Barnet (formerly East Barnet)	-	-	21	21
North Finchley	15.5	53.5	-	69
Osidge	15.5	53.5	-	69
South Friern	-	-	24	24
<b>Totals</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>576</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>844.5</b>

<sup>38</sup> Partnership libraries do not offer self-service opening.

### What people have told us

#### Introduction

5.103 In this section, we have reported what people have told us, whether through the survey, meetings, interviews or focus groups. We have not sought to evaluate or 'weight' people's perceptions or opinions, but we have drawn out those that we think highlight an issue effectively. We have drawn out those views that were particularly common but have also included examples of significant or interesting 'minority' views that should be heard. We have made a number of observations at the end of this section where we draw some conclusions that will inform our findings and recommendations.

#### What representatives of organisations in the borough have told us

5.104 It was felt that children and families needed better access to the libraries and a different offer, eg:

- For children and families with English as an additional language, the opening hours were particularly confusing and it was difficult to communicate how the system worked to them:

"Currently it only works for people who have grown up with, or understand how a traditional library service works".

- There was a general sense of a gap in provision for younger people, eg:

"We're driving young people into their bedrooms as there are no community spaces for them".

- This was seen to further compound the disadvantage faced by young people needing somewhere to study who live in cramped and overcrowded conditions without access to the internet. There was concern expressed by headteachers and youth workers that young people of 14 and 15 can no longer use the library after school hours without a parent or their permission. One educationalist told us:

"We close the school and homework club at 4.30 and in the past our pupils would go on to the library for revision purposes."

- There was an almost universal view that books are not the reason that young people would use the libraries, the need is for a wider offer; to act as a hub or open space for them. There was a perception that the library service isn't in a position to do more given the changes to the service.

#### What people said in response to the questionnaire

5.105 In our analysis of the survey results, we have identified the following key headlines in relation to the service offer:

- Survey respondents **use the library** either **at least once a week** (31%) or at least once a month (31%).
- Unsurprisingly, most respondents **use the library service** to **borrow a book** (83%). Other common uses include to read books (33%) or find out some information (27%). Finding information is of particular importance for disabled people (42%), whilst reading newspapers or periodicals is particularly important to older people (36%).

- **More were dissatisfied than satisfied with the opening hours:** dissatisfied (48%), followed by satisfied (37%); neither (13%); don't know (1%).

5.106 In terms of satisfaction<sup>39</sup> with the service offer, we found greater satisfaction than dissatisfaction for the following:

- **Range of books:** satisfied (53% overall; 45% older people; 42% disabled people; 57% young people), followed by dissatisfied (30% overall; 40% older people; 42% disabled people; 26% young people); neither (14% overall; 12% older people; 15% disabled people; 11% young people); don't know (3% overall; 3% older people; 2% disabled people; 6% young people). The level of satisfaction amongst older people and disabled people is lower than other affected groups.
- **Information available:** satisfied (44% overall; 39% older people; 37% disabled people; 46% young people), followed by dissatisfied (21% overall; 18% older people; 26% disabled people; 23% young people); neither (25% overall; 32% older people; 31% disabled people; 17% young people); don't know (11% overall; 10% older people; 6% disabled people; 14% young people).
- **Events and activities:** satisfied (26% overall; 14% older people; 20% disabled people; 24% young people); dissatisfied (17% overall; 11% older people; 20% disabled people; 9% young people); neither (22% overall; 34% older people; 30% disabled people; 29% young people). However, 35% didn't know (overall; 42% older people; 30% disabled people; 38% young people).

5.107 **Most respondents** (54%) were **aware of the free online services** that the library service pays for. However, it is notable how often the highest scoring category of responses for satisfaction with online resources was 'don't know':

- **eBooks:** satisfied (37%), followed by dissatisfied (12%); neither (26%); don't know (25%).
- **Online dictionaries:** don't know (39%), followed by neither (30%); satisfied (27%); dissatisfied (4%).
- **Family history:** don't know (51%), followed by neither (27%); satisfied (17%); dissatisfied (5%).
- **Life skills:** don't know (52%), followed by neither (26%); satisfied (14%); dissatisfied (8%).
- **Online newspapers:** don't know (37%), followed by satisfied (32%); dissatisfied (7%); neither (24%).
- **Research articles:** don't know (50%), followed by neither (24%); satisfied (14%); dissatisfied (12%).
- **Ease of use:** satisfied (33%), followed by dissatisfied (14%); neither (30%); don't know (23%).

5.108 The lack of awareness of the online resources available is likely to be linked to the fact that many users also didn't know enough about the IT facilities available in the libraries to express an opinion:

- **Computer terminals:** don't know (39%), followed by neither (24%); satisfied (22%); dissatisfied (15%).

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<sup>39</sup> For the purpose of measuring satisfaction and dissatisfaction, we have added together the scores for quite satisfied and very satisfied to produce a total score for 'satisfied' and for quite dissatisfied and very dissatisfied to produce a total score for 'dissatisfied'.

- **Printers and photocopiers:** don't know (44%), followed by neither (23%); satisfied (22%); dissatisfied (10%).
- **Advice on using computers:** don't know (51%), followed by neither (22%); satisfied (15%); dissatisfied (12%).
- **Free Wi-Fi:** don't know (41%), followed by satisfied (31%); dissatisfied (6%); neither (21%).
- **Online materials:** don't know (41%), followed by satisfied (25%); dissatisfied (10%); neither (24%).

5.109 A **majority of respondents report visiting a library less often** (56%) since the changes were introduced over the last three years. This is largely consistent across the board when we look at specific groups (over 65s 55%; under 65s 58%; disabled 59%; not disabled 57%; young people 46%).

5.110 A **significant majority also report that the changes to the library service** over the last two to three years have **had a negative (68%) impact** on them. In particular, 75% of disabled people reported a negative impact.

5.111 Other notable responses included:

- Only a **slim majority (53%) know the opening hours** of their most used library.
- **Less than half** of respondents (47%) **know when staff are going to be on duty** in their most used library.

5.112 When asked what would encourage users to use the library more:

- Overall, respondents' **top 5 priorities for improvement** that would encourage them to use the library more often are **availability of staff (68%); range of books (61%); opening hours (55%), events and activities (28%) and toilets (24%)**. The top 5 priorities were largely consistent across the groups as we can see in the table below. It is also interesting to observe the contrast between general satisfaction with books (see earlier in this chapter) and the fact that this topic appears among the top three priorities for all groups.

**Table 5.6: top 5 priorities for improvement – by category of survey respondents**

Over 65s	Under 65s	Disabled	Not disabled	Young people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of staff 68%</li> <li>• Range of books 68%</li> <li>• Opening hours 57%</li> <li>• Toilets 22%</li> <li>• Atmosphere and behaviour 20%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of staff 69%</li> <li>• Range of books 59%</li> <li>• Opening hours 54%</li> <li>• Events and activities 31%</li> <li>• Toilets 25%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of staff 70%</li> <li>• Range of books 61%</li> <li>• Opening hours 56%</li> <li>• Toilets 34%</li> <li>• Events and activities 20%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of staff 68%</li> <li>• Range of books 62%</li> <li>• Opening hours 54%</li> <li>• Events and activities 29%</li> <li>• Toilets 22%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening hours 60%</li> <li>• Availability of staff 54%</li> <li>• Range of books 46%</li> <li>• Events and activities 34%</li> <li>• Food to buy 26%</li> </ul>

5.113 The survey invited people at the end to describe the impact on them of the changes made to the library service. We have drawn out some examples here that illustrate the concerns they raised:



**Table 5.7: comments from survey respondents about the impact of the changes**

Issue	Verbatim comments
Range of books and information available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “There are nice people there who go out of their way to find out information...”</li> <li>• “Book selection is poor (I was told several years ago that a firm do the selection) often it panders to well publicised books”</li> <li>• “Compare it with the public library in Mile End. We have few books and no resources. For an affluent borough it is simply a disgrace.”</li> <li>• “Drastic reduction in book stock.”</li> </ul>
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Staffs (sic) are great and encouraging and activities are amazing.”</li> <li>• “As a parent of young children we have seen a crucial local utility stripped from us. My older children enjoyed rhyme time in the libraries- these activities aren't there.”</li> <li>• “I suffer from depression. Having somewhere safe to go with my baby, where there were coffee mornings and baby groups and weight loss groups helped me tackle my postnatal depression. Now that lifeline had been cut off. I feel isolated.”</li> </ul>
Online services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “IT needs big upgrade - it creaks along and needs lots of staff help to make it work.”</li> <li>• “The online catalogue should be kept upto date and to reflect the stock in the libraries.”</li> <li>• “The computer facilities however have improved”</li> </ul>
Opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The staffed opening hours are so restricted that children under 16 cannot go to study after school any more on most days. It's ridiculous”</li> <li>• “Although the Libraries are "open" longer hours the biggest downside is the unavailability of staff at times when I need to get information”</li> <li>• “At first I hesitated to use the library after changes were made. But then I loved it - and my two young sons love it too. We have a lot of flexibility - can come to library almost any time of the day.”</li> </ul>

5.114 The survey invited people at the end to list their ideas for change. We have drawn out some examples here:

**Table 5.8: ideas for change from survey respondents**

Issue	Verbatim comments
Availability of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Staff everyday and toilets open every day, as it was in the past. Who came up with the stupid idea to have staff part time?”</li> <li>• “Staff the libraries with qualified helpful staff.”</li> <li>• “There should always be one person in charge. Either an employee or a volunteer.”</li> </ul>
Range of books and information available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “More journals available electronically (via RBdigital). Allow access to family history resources remotely (via self-service credentials, possibly).”</li> <li>• “Improve acquisition of books, let us donate books or suggest books to acquire. More diverse romance, not just Mills &amp; Boon! (Most great LGBTQ romance is self-published, as small presses are closing.)”.</li> <li>• “Better selection of books, more copies of new releases.”</li> <li>• “better promotion of online periodicals.”</li> <li>• “... a facility to recommend new book purchases”</li> </ul>
Opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Staff them with librarians. Open them during the day, every day. Sometimes, open them during the evening.”</li> <li>• “Extend opening hours at New Barnet Library. “</li> <li>• “Bring back staff in regular hours eg 9-6pm.”</li> </ul>
Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Have evening socials and book reviews etc. At the moment the few that are available are during hours when people with children would find hard to attend.”</li> <li>• “... more activities for under 5s”</li> <li>• “More art events to take place within the library. More events for kids”</li> <li>• “... curtail some of the events - the over-emphasis drives readers away.”</li> </ul>
Toilets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Because I am Disabled the policy of closed toilets and lack of staff excludes me from the library. This is downright discrimination and infuriates me.”</li> <li>• “Accessible toilets at all times “</li> <li>• “Toilets to be open at all times and someone to be present in case of emergency“</li> </ul>
Atmosphere and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “better staffing levels to help with bad behaviour from some of the users who now get in”</li> <li>• “Be stricter on adults who regularly sit in the young people’s areas so young people do not have room.”</li> <li>• “Do not allow - the eating of smelly food/men to take off their shoes and put their feet up!!”</li> </ul>

### What people have said at meetings

- 5.115 Across the two public meetings, members of the public raised the following points and observations relating to the service offer:
- **Statutory duty:** despite the Secretary of State's finding that the Council was meeting its duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient service', there were a number of attendees that believed the Council was falling short of this duty.
  - **The library service's strategy and vision:** a lack of clarity about what the service's strategy and vision actually is, and how easy it is for the public to know about and understand it.
  - **Opening hours:** general consensus that the current pattern of opening hours are difficult to remember and that Partnership library opening hours (when 21 hours a week) are much too limited and an observation that the inability to drop in at any branch creates a perception that Barnet libraries are 'unfriendly' places that casual users are unable to visit whenever they want.

### What people said in focus groups and discussions

- 5.116 There were a number of areas that we tested in our focus groups and individual and group discussions that related to the current library service offer.
- 5.117 When we raised the topic of **library stock**:
- **None of the young people** we spoke to **borrowed books** from the library.
  - The **parents of children** we spoke liked to read with their children in the libraries but **didn't borrow books** because they worried about forgetting when to bring them back and paying fines.
  - **Adults** agreed that **books are generally good**, but the textbooks tend to be outdated and popular books are hard to get hold of.
  - **Older adults** were most likely to **borrow books** and were generally satisfied with the selection.
  - Others **read the papers** and were happy with this service.
- 5.118 When we asked about **online and digital resources**:
- **Most people** we spoke to have **no awareness of the digital library offer**. They didn't think it was promoted anywhere other than the library. They had no knowledge of the libraries' **social media** presence and said they wouldn't be interested anyway.
  - A couple of **adult** library users liked the online ordering system, but they found it was a clunky procedure to log on - **couldn't they have an app** instead?
  - Some people had signed up for **emails** for specific events and would like more general newsletters for groups and timings. Others said they didn't always get **email alerts** for the books they had ordered.
- 5.119 When we raised the issue of **public access PCs and Wi-Fi**:

- **Young people** wanted more **laptops** rather than desktops (and they suggested there are currently age restrictions on some computers) They thought that the **limit on computer use** to an hour was annoying as they needed a lot longer for their studies.
- For **young adults** this is the priority area. Most were there to study or work and **reliability of the technology** is paramount. Some felt that the **computers were slow** to respond and were unreliable. Others said that the computers and **printers often didn't work**. Most used their own laptops but **appreciated the Wi-Fi**.
- This view was shared by other **adult users** who agreed that the **PCs were slow** but **the Wi-Fi was good**.
- Of the **older adults** who used the computers they agreed that the **system was very slow** and **valued help from staff**.

5.120 When we raised the topic of **events and activities**:

- The **parents** we spoke to who had been attending a baby and toddler rhyme time session were the only people who attended group events or activities. The **young people** expressed an interest in having more things to do but not if it meant a loss of space for quiet study.
- None of the other adult groups had a view on this.

5.121 When we discussed the **locality model**:

- **Nobody** we spoke to fully understood the locality model. They were aware that some libraries were bigger or open for longer hours, but they **weren't interested in how this worked**.

5.122 When we raised the topic of opening hours:

- **Young people** thought that library opening hours are **confusing** and need much **clearer signage**. "You only find out when you get there".
- **Parents** thought that the opening hours and arrangements for SSO were **confusing** and for some, it stopped them being spontaneous about dropping into a library when they were out and about with the children.
- **Adults and younger adults** were not **concerned** about the opening hours as they were more likely to use the library during SSO and were confident doing so.
- **Older adults** expressed frustration with the opening hours which were **hard to remember** - particularly for casual and spontaneous visits which were popular with this group.

**Table 5.9: our observations about what people told us**

- From the results of the survey, we can see that our respondents are frequent library users, so they are likely to know their preferred branches well. Many respondents use the service traditionally (i.e. to borrow or read a book).
- On balance, people seemed to be satisfied with much of what is on offer in the libraries eg the range of books and the information. There was also greater satisfaction than dissatisfaction with the events on offer, but a substantial proportion did not know about them (or weren't interested). Interestingly, the survey suggested that people's second highest priority for improvement was the range of books.
- There are a significant quantity of 'don't know' or 'neither satisfied or dissatisfied' responses in relation to the service's technology, ICT and digital offers. This may mean that this area is not a priority to many respondents, eg because they prefer to use their own equipment at home. The lack of awareness among many users about the online resources that are available suggest that they need to be marketed better.
- Many of our respondents don't know, and are not happy, with the opening hours currently on offer to them, as well as reporting that they are unhappy with the overall changes that have been made to the service and respondents have said that they now visit a Barnet library much less often. It is not possible to verify how typical that is due to the failures of the visitor count technology (described in chapter 4).
- Overall, our respondents reported that they had been impacted negatively by the changes. This was largely consistent across the groups we engaged with although there were some indications that people with disabilities felt a higher degree of negative impact and there were concerns expressed repeatedly about the impact on young people's access during SSO hours. These particular impacts are consistent with our other findings and we make recommendations to help mitigate them. We have addressed these impacts in the EIA in Appendix vi.
- The suggested top priorities for improvement offer a clear steer in terms of what users want to see more of from the service, including a greater availability of staff, longer staffed opening hours and improvements in the range of books.

### Summary of findings and recommendations

- 5.123 We found an encouraging number of examples of good practice in the service on offer and in its underlying operational practices. These included the efficiency of the management of library stock and the range of events and activities. However, the extent of the reduction of staffed opening hours presents a barrier for users such as unaccompanied young people under 15 years of age and there are indications that people with disabilities feel particularly impacted. For many people, the resulting pattern of opening hours is confusing.
- 5.124 We should stress that it is extremely unlikely that the Council could reduce its spending on libraries in order to address severe financial pressures without there being a negative impact on users. However, there are particular impacts on some groups of users which we recommend should be addressed. We have examined those further in the attached Equalities Impact Assessment, together with our recommendations for mitigating those impacts.
- 5.125 We are not arguing with the Secretary of State's finding that the Council continues to meet the statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service, but we have highlighted measures that should be addressed in order to improve the experience of the library service for all sections of the community.

#### Table 5.10: summary of findings

- Management of all aspects of library stock/media in all formats appears to function very efficiently in Barnet's library service and the libraries appear to have adequate stock in current and good condition.
- The media purchasing fund has been substantially reduced over a number of years but streamlined stock selection and deployment have minimised the impact of the reductions. The media fund is, however, now at a level where any further reduction in real terms would be inadvisable.
- The Service provides a good range of digital and other online resources and has taken steps to enhance the offer, though the overall 'online library' offer would benefit from more focused 'packaging' and marketing to increase take-up.
- Provision of public access computers in the libraries is adequate and these appear to be well used and appreciated although the computers are reported to be old and slow (they are due to be upgraded soon). Wi-fi is available at all libraries and again is well used. The new self-release print and payment facility is being extended to allow use by customers using their own devices and the wi-fi network.
- The Service has made considerable adjustments to reflect the dramatic changes in recent years in the world of information and self-help as a result of use of the internet and associated technology. The Service offers an online enquiry service, though this would now benefit from wider promotion.
- Nine of the ten libraries directly managed by the Council have rooms available for hire and room bookings over the past twelve months indicate that these spaces are being used by the local community, public and commercial organisations for a variety of meetings and activities. There may be potential to review commercial hire rates for these spaces, in the context of local market rates, to generate increased income.
- Barnet Library Service runs an extensive programme of events for children and adults using the meeting spaces in the libraries as well as in the libraries themselves, for example for children's activities. This is a key indicator of a good public library fulfilling its role at the heart of the local community.

- In common with most public libraries, Barnet offers a home delivery library service to people who are for a variety of health reasons unable to visit a static library. Take-up of this service appears to be above average, suggesting the service offer is good.
- Alongside this the Service also operates a mobile library, use of which has increased somewhat over the previous year, which may in part reflect some increase in take-up by customers who prefer not to use SSO at the static sites.
- As a result of the libraries transformation the delivery model and structure for library services has changed. The current 'locality model' is based upon three categories of library provision: Core, Core Plus and Community, with a clear service specification associated with each category and we commend the general principle of being clear what is on offer, where, and when.
- Probably still the single most controversial aspect of the libraries transformation for many residents, is the opening pattern and staffing of the libraries. Opinion as to whether these changes have increased or reduced access to the library service will clearly depend to a considerable degree on the expectations and needs of individual library users. These concerns are raised particularly by some members of the community more than others (eg people with disabilities and children and young people).
- The reduction in staffed<sup>40</sup> opening hours has gone too far, particularly given the low number of volunteers. The reductions act as a deterrent to many library users from using the library and act as a particular barrier to young people who cannot access the library on their own during SSO hours if they do not meet the minimum age requirements.
- Due to a range of factors we have struggled to identify meaningfully the impact of the transformation programme on take-up of the service. The factors include a period of library closures for changes to the buildings; failure of the old LMS and introduction of a new one; problems with the technology that should operate gate counts; as well as the overall level of transformational change.

5.126 A number of our recommendations build on the operational strengths we have identified in the service. The most challenging recommendation is to increase staffed opening hours, but this would require additional funding, something that is very difficult to deliver in the current financial climate in local government.

### Table 5.11: summary of recommendations

17. To maintain the Media Fund at its current level in real terms.
18. To continue to review and enhance the digital offer and to consider greater promotion of this and the wider online library offer, by packaging it as 'the virtual branch library'.
19. To increase promotion of the online enquiry service operated by the Service Development Team (Stock & Services).
20. To invest in a training programme of customer care and information/enquiry handling skills for staff in the frontline Operations Team.
21. To seek to generate increased income from the spaces for hire in the libraries through improved marketing and a review of commercial hire rates for these spaces, in the context of local market rates.

<sup>40</sup> We define 'staffed' opening hours as those in which library employees and/or volunteers are on the premises and available to provide support to library users.



22. To increase staffed opening hours<sup>41</sup> to ensure a more consistent and extended pattern of staffed opening (see our specific recommendations on funding, staffing and volunteering in chapter 6).
23. To re-run the previously successful Here to Help sessions in an attempt to promote and explain Self-Service Opening and register more users with cards to access SSO opening.
24. To remove the requirement for users to present a proof of address again when re-registering their library to keep the barriers to library use to a minimum.
25. To identify a small basket of key performance indicators (including the indicators at table 5.3), to be regularly reviewed by the Libraries management team and reported to Committee, without which it will continue to be difficult to accurately identify the ongoing impact of the transformation programme.
26. To ensure as a matter of urgency that the data required to report these indicators can be accurately collected at all the libraries as part of the investment programme recommended in chapter 6.

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<sup>41</sup> We define 'staffed' opening hours as those in which library employees and/or volunteers are on the premises and available to provide support to library users.

# 6. Evaluating the resourcing of the service

## What we have examined

6.1 In this section we have looked at:

1. Staffing levels, deployment and skills.
2. Workforce development and involvement.
3. Community participation, volunteering and community management.
4. Joint work and shared services.
5. Funding levels and economic efficiency indicators.

## What we have found

### Staffing numbers and their role

- 6.2 Prior to the transformation programme and the staff restructuring in 2017 it was reported that, as at September 2015, the service was staffed by 114.7 full time equivalent (fte) posts, employing approximately 155 individuals. 98.5fte of that total (139 individuals) were delivering services directly to customers via the library branches and outreach services, with the remainder based centrally but many of those in service development and professional roles, so directly supporting service delivery, and a small team providing essential central support.
- 6.3 Staff related costs<sup>42</sup> in 2015 made up 70% of the total library budget, so it was inevitable that Barnet, faced with intense pressure upon budgets, would need to focus attention on this area of expenditure.
- 6.4 It is perhaps worth noting that from a national, indeed international, perspective the contribution of professional or trained staff has always been a key element in the delivery of high-quality library services.
- 6.5 Over recent years the main content of public library work has shifted, chiefly due to increased automation of transactional tasks (issuing, tracking and returning loans) and the huge impact the internet has had on the sourcing of information as well as the digitisation of materials.
- 6.6 To address these changes, but also in the face of ongoing pressure on budgets, the make-up of the public library workforce in the UK has also changed so that now far fewer roles require a professional qualification in library and information management, and greater emphasis has been placed on increasing the skills base of 'paraprofessional' staff and releasing them from undertaking high volumes of more routine transactional work.
- 6.7 Barnet has followed these trends, a number of years ago introducing self-issue/return terminals in its libraries and in earlier staff restructuring focusing frontline service delivery more on 'customer service' staff, whilst reducing staffing costs accordingly.

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<sup>42</sup> Employee salaries and related costs including training, allowances, travel, insurance, etc.

- 6.8 It is worth noting here that the public tend not to distinguish between categories of library staff, referring to them all as 'librarians', though in fact 'librarian' is a term really reserved for those with a higher-level qualification in library and information management. This is not to detract at all from the skill sets of the other staff, merely to note that feedback such as "Bring back the librarians" can be somewhat misleading.
- 6.9 It is, however, important to recognise that qualified and/or trained library staff do still add value to, and are a key part of, quality service delivery in any library. The main focus of their frontline role is now the 'navigational' skills to guide customers through the vast, frequently unorganised online and other information resources, provide knowledge and advice on reading and the use of non-print materials, and promote and encourage access to the world of learning, leisure and life in general, to quote Barnet's own library logo - see chapter 3. Barnet's decision to significantly reduce the number of hours when the libraries are open staffed needs to be weighed in this context as does our assessment of the impact this has had on service take-up and customer satisfaction which we addressed in chapter 5.
- 6.10 Within this wider context, and the specific proposals to offer extended periods of Self-Service Opening, Barnet undertook a restructuring of library staffing. This followed standard protocols for consultation with staff and trade unions and the new arrangements were implemented with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.
- 6.11 The staff establishment for the library service has now been reduced to 64.4fte posts, a reduction of nearly half. Although the service had for some time been holding posts vacant the process was inevitably only achieved through some redundancies, some voluntary but others compulsory. Inevitably the process caused huge anxiety and distress to staff: this was clearly expressed in our workshop with a representative group of staff, though they also felt that they and colleagues are now starting to move on and focus on delivering a quality service within the current framework.
- 6.12 Staff costs are now £2,538,509 (2018/19 Estimates) representing 74% of the total budget. CIPFA statistics indicate that (2017/18 Actuals) Barnet's expenditure on library staffing was £2,421,443 giving a figure of £6,244 per 1,000 population compared to an average of £7,207 in the Comparator Group and placing Barnet 10<sup>th</sup> out of 15. It should be noted that a number of other authorities will have also cut staffing following the closure of branches.

### Staff deployment

- 6.13 Following the staff restructuring, three management posts report to the Head of Service:
- An Operations and Customer Services Manager, supported by four Library Customer Services Managers who manage the 10 libraries directly run by the Borough, the Home and Mobile Service as well as a small Community Engagement team responsible for liaison with the Partnership Libraries and other work with volunteers, plus a small operational admin team.
  - A Service Development Manager - Stock and Services, who manages all aspects of stock acquisition and management, E-systems, and a team of 5.5 Service Development Librarians.
  - A Service Development Manager – Early Years and Schools, who manages a team of 3 librarians working with Under 5s, and the School Libraries Resources Service.

- 6.14 Frontline staffing of the libraries is now at the minimum for daily operation of the current staffed opening hours pattern, with a modest allowance to cover annual leave, sickness, training and any other absence.
- 6.15 In practice this means that the Service needs to have more or less the maximum allocation of people on annual leave each day in order to have sufficient days in the year for everyone to take their entitlement.
- 6.16 Staff cover is in part only achieved because the current opening pattern means that teams of staff open two libraries on the same day, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. Nowhere is staffed between 12:30 and 14:00 because this is for travelling time and lunch and in turn removes the need to provide cover for lunchtime opening. The exception to the closures at lunchtime is at Core Plus libraries on Saturdays when they are open from 9am to 5pm.
- 6.17 What little time is not then needed for frontline duties is given over to complete backroom tasks that managers and staff struggle otherwise to complete during the three-hour periods when they are covering staffed opening.
- 6.18 This pattern of deployment is very tight but appears to work. However, one of the key concerns expressed by staff is that carrying out the same routines for two sites on the same day, with limited travelling time in between that can in practice take up part of their lunch break, is very tiring. Whilst clearly library opening patterns should be firstly designed around customer need, we suggest revisiting this system once volunteering levels have increased over the course of the next few years.
- 6.19 The use of volunteers to support paid staff is now a key feature of almost every public library service. Volunteers, if recruited and managed well to ensure that they have the right skill set and level of commitment, are generally welcomed by staff and can be accepted by the trade unions provided the role is well defined and within certain limits.

### Single staffing with volunteers

- 6.20 We are aware that single staffing of libraries or any public service is a sensitive topic and the concept of single staffing with a support role by volunteers, is raised in the following section as an option for consideration once volunteering has become core to the way the service works, rather than a recommendation for the immediate future.
- 6.21 The 2016 report to Council did touch upon the subject of what was referred to as ‘Lone working’<sup>43</sup>, noting that “Some local authorities across the country operate lone working within libraries. This approach is more often adopted in smaller, rural libraries and is rare in London”. Barnet did not pursue this further at the time.
- 6.22 As noted by Barnet, there are libraries elsewhere in more rural areas that operate with only one member of staff on duty. There are now, however, some authorities that operate a model of single staffing supported by volunteer(s), which may address some of the justified concerns about a ‘single staffing’ model in metropolitan and suburban areas. Those concerns fall broadly into:

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<sup>43</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee -Barnet's Future Library Service page 35

- **Safety of staff:** for a lone worker this can in part be addressed by a comprehensive risk assessment and measures such as panic buttons and safe rooms, and live CCTV monitoring could also provide some reassurance. The presence of one or more approved/trained volunteers would, however, largely address this, subject to a protocol whereby, as at present using only paid staff, the library cannot open as staffed without two or more people on duty.
- **Range and depth of service provision and quality of customer care:** having only one member of library staff on duty there would limit the capacity to run events and complete back office tasks such as banking, processing reservations, handling new stock or preparing promotions and displays. Volunteers could assist with some though not all of this, but the end result would be some dilution of the quality of service offered during advertised staffed hours when customers would come expecting to find a fully trained person on duty.

6.23 We emphasise that *this option is not being raised as a means to further reduce paid staffing*, not least because of the pressures on timetabling already outlined. Rather, we recommend it as an option to be explored further with a view to potentially *extending library staffed opening hours* when volunteering numbers have increased over the next few years.

6.24 In any case, apart from the need to work through the other issues, in the light of the difficulties to date recruiting volunteers (see the section on volunteering later in this chapter) it would not at the present time be feasible to guarantee the necessary level of volunteer support. It may, however, be that people would be more willing to volunteer to work alongside a paid member of staff than to offer a 'meet and greet' role supporting some of the SSO hours; this could be explored during the new initiative to recruit more volunteers.

### Workforce development and involvement

6.25 For the past eighteen months Library Service management and staff have been working on an ongoing process that has developed a new Vision and shared Values, as well as a logo for the service, which also provides a framework for future service development and long-term sustainability.

6.26 Initially a core group of staff worked with an external facilitator to develop a practical framework designed to:

- Engage staff at all levels within the library service more effectively, empowering them to become more involved in decision making, help them to focus on the future and to raise staff morale.
- Develop better business intelligence and horizon scanning, collecting the right information to inform future service planning and identify and head off future risks more easily.
- Increase the profile of the library service both within and beyond the council to increase use and understanding of the service and to contribute to long term sustainability.

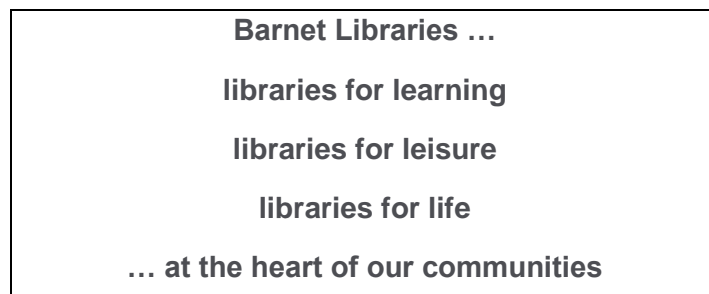
6.27 This has since been rolled out to involve a wider group of staff and through them the whole workforce. A business improvement tool known as the 'Six Pillars' methodology has been used and extended to focus on seven key business areas:

- Strategic Leadership & Business Direction (service priorities, pace of change).
- Brand & Market Position (the range of services and how they are understood).
- Knowledge Management & Business Intelligence (MI, good ideas from elsewhere).

- Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship Management (feedback to and from library customers, staff, members etc).
- Resource Efficiency & Skills Deployment (staff, buildings, other resources).
- Financial Planning & Controls (budgets, income, grants).
- Operations (day to day policies and procedures – why we are here).

6.28 This process has resulted in a new vision statement, which aims to be a simplified and clear representation of the range of services offered by the Library Service. Library staff are now using this to raise the profile of the service across the council and within the wider community and to articulate the value of what they do more effectively. The vision (shown previously in chapter 3) is:

**Figure 6.1: summary of service vision used for marketing purposes**



6.29 In addition, the staff group devised a set of internal organisational values to help refocus the service on the future and shape the way they work moving forward:

**Figure 6.2: the library service's organisational values**





- 6.30 We were impressed by the extent to which staff seem to be engaged with the new Vision and Values and were able to tell us what they were and their purpose. Many staff seem to have been motivated by this process and feel that, after an inevitably difficult period of change, they are now able to look forward and focus on the future of the service.

### Community participation, volunteering and community management

#### Introduction

- 6.31 In chapter 3 we alluded to the increasing involvement of communities, and individuals within those communities, in helping to provide public services generally but particularly libraries. Reflecting this trend one of the proposed objectives for the Library Service in Barnet's first consultation with residents was that it should be: **"A library service that engages with communities:** Library buildings continue to act as focal points of community activity, with further integration of services and use of library spaces which reflects local needs"<sup>44</sup>.
- 6.32 Specifically, two key elements of the Library Service transformation were a model for devolved community management of some of the smaller libraries, and the recruitment of more volunteers to support the directly managed libraries, particularly to provide volunteer support during some of the Self-Service Opening (SSO) periods at these libraries.

#### Community management

- 6.33 Barnet has since implemented the first of these proposals so that the libraries at Childs Hill, East Barnet, Mill Hill and South Friern have all been transferred to direct management by three community groups under the model known as Partnership Libraries.
- 6.34 Under this model these libraries continue to be branded as part of the borough's library network, leasing the buildings rent free though paying utility costs. They share library stock with the other libraries and have full access to the Library Management System. They also have in-library self-service machines but do not have SSO to provide for unstaffed periods.
- 6.35 Each is contracted to provide a minimum of 15 hours volunteer-staffed opening a week, though in practice all have achieved an increase on that, and all three of the community partnership organisations (East Barnet, recently reopened as New Barnet, and South Friern are operated by the same partner) have chosen to employ a paid manager to supervise the library as well as their other activities.
- 6.36 For each library the Council gave a grant of £35k in the first year, tapering down to £28k and then £25k in the following two years. The Partnership Libraries also receive professional support and guidance from two Library Community Engagement Officers, which has undoubtedly contributed to the success to date of the model.
- 6.37 From our site visits we were generally impressed by the quality of provision at the Partnership Libraries, there being no immediately obvious difference between the service offer and that in the directly managed libraries, though we have not tested further the level of expertise of the volunteers. It is evident that much depends on the skills and enthusiasm of the managers and we hope that this input will be maintained by all the partners.

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<sup>44</sup> Council 4 April 2016 Referral from CELS Committee page 12.

- 6.38 Understandably, the partner organisations are also subject to financial and other pressures on not only the library operation but their other educational and community activities and are experiencing varying degrees of success. We note that there is currently no exit strategy for how the failure of one of these organisations might impact on the library service and suggest that this is a risk that needs to be evaluated in terms of the impact it may have on the Council.
- 6.39 In general, the model Barnet has adopted for partnership provision of part of the library service appears to be a success and has not experienced some of difficulties encountered in other local authorities. It is also appropriate to have clearly distinguished this tier of 'within the library service' provision from that at the two Community Libraries at Hampstead Garden Suburb and Friern Barnet, where in past years local organisations assumed total responsibility for offering a form of library service.
- 6.40 Barnet Council's approach since 2016 to the community management of libraries as part of these changes is notable in avoiding the mistakes made by some other authorities, which have decided to close a library and then asked the community if they would like to run it, often with no resources. Barnet has instead collaborated with the groups taking on the management of the library, and provided financial resources and ongoing support. However, the level of the grant is tight and should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is realistic given the changing pressures, demand, successes and challenges of the Partnership Library model.

### Volunteers

- 6.41 The other aspect of community participation that Barnet proposed to pursue was an increase in the use of volunteers in the ten directly managed libraries. To date this appears to have met with little success.
- 6.42 The "Barnet's future Library service" report to CELS Committee in March 2015 indicated that "since the introduction of the scheme in late 2011, volunteers have donated over 13,600 hours helping to shelve library books, to assist the Local Studies and Archives Service, and to support key library events and activities such as baby rhyme time and language conversation cafes. Young volunteers have provided invaluable assistance in the development of library services to children and teenagers ... through work experience programmes and through volunteering schemes to support the annual children's summer reading challenge".
- 6.43 However, since then, numbers of volunteers and volunteer hours seem to have dropped rather than increased (this does not take into account volunteering at Partnership Libraries), and CIPFA statistics for 2017/18 suggest that Barnet had the lowest level of volunteer hours of any service in the fifteen-borough Comparator Group. These figures have a degree of inaccuracy due to different recording methods, but Library Service management acknowledge that volunteering has fallen off and needs a renewed focus.
- 6.44 This seems to be in part due to the huge workload associated with the level of change the Service has been through, but there was also a conscious decision to focus the efforts of the Community Engagement Officers on successfully establishing the Partnership Libraries.
- 6.45 The impression held by library managers is also that there is less enthusiasm to volunteer in libraries: this may perhaps in part be due to a wish not to be associated with changes that have led to a degree of local controversy, but we also question whether individuals are less willing to volunteer when there are no paid library staff on site to provide reassurance and back-up. The relative success of the volunteer-supported Partnership Libraries perhaps reflects a preference for a greater sense of 'ownership' in a project rooted more clearly in the local community.

- 6.46 We understand that the Library Management Team now have measures in place to recruit more volunteers, now having a protocol and role profiles for volunteers and are planning to start before the end of the current year. The proposal is to revisit the original intention to provide 'Volunteer Supported Hours' for part of SSO operation, whereby the volunteers would provide a Meet and Greet role and assist users the basic operations of the library and the technology.
- 6.47 During a trial period volunteers would cover 3 hours of SSO on a day when a library would otherwise be unstaffed for the whole day, also whilst a library manager is in the building undertaking back-room tasks to address the possible reluctance to work without any supervision, though this would not form part of the ongoing model.
- 6.48 This trial would provide useful experience, but we are concerned that the effort involved may be misdirected. We would question whether it is right to focus on recruiting volunteers to support SSO, rather than taking a broader-based approach to the recruitment and use of volunteers. We expand on this issue further in the next section.
- 6.49 Whilst there are several library campaign groups in the Borough, there are at the current time no Library Friends groups. Whilst in other authorities these vary greatly in the tangible contribution they make to the service, we suggest that it may be worth exploring the formation of such groups where there is a particular local interest in the library and that this may in turn provide a vehicle to increase volunteering and practical support.

### Towards a new volunteering model

- 6.50 In chapter 5, we concluded that the Council had reduced the opening hours of the library service too far. In this section, we suggest how the service could reconsider its planned use of volunteers in order to find ways of increasing the number of hours during which staff and volunteers are present.
- 6.51 We have concluded elsewhere that the failure to increase the number of volunteers working in Core and Core Plus libraries has exacerbated the impact of the changes to the service. However, the presence of volunteers during SSO would not, on its own, be likely to resolve all the problems associated with the new library model.
- 6.52 We suggest that the service should focus on developing a properly researched and resourced long-term volunteering plan for the library service.
- 6.53 First, we encourage the Council to revisit thoroughly its assumptions about the roles that volunteers could play in the library service. In the past, some authorities constrained tightly how volunteers can be used and the extent of their contribution, limiting their role to 'supplementing' the work of library staff. Other authorities have demonstrated the potential for volunteers to make a contribution across a wider range of roles, becoming core to the overall operation of the service.
- 6.54 We believe it would be a mistake to concentrate on recruiting volunteers to provide a presence during SSO hours. Instead, given the strategy that the Council has adopted for the library service, we would suggest that a long-term volunteering plan for the library service is researched, drawing on the experience of authorities successful in recruiting volunteers and of the organisations managing Partnership Libraries in the borough. The research should also draw on the views, ideas and experience of existing volunteers as well as staff and trade unions.

6.55 The plan will need to set out:

- The range of roles that volunteers can undertake, together with areas of flexibility.
- The approach to recruiting, inducting and retaining volunteers.
- How marketing will be undertaken and maintained.
- Training and support for library staff in learning how to work effectively with volunteers.
- Targets for volunteer recruitment and retention over the next 2 to 3 years.
- The resources dedicated to supporting and co-ordinating volunteers.
- The support and advice that will be used from other organisations.
- An implementation and project plan.

6.56 The setting of targets for volunteer recruitment should be ambitious, reflecting the achievements of authorities such as Merton, who are reported to have had 500 volunteers working with the service (see case study later in this chapter). It should be noted that Merton has half the number of libraries and roughly half the size of the population of Barnet, so the Council could reasonably aim, in the long term for even higher levels of volunteering. However, this requires careful research and planning.

6.57 Second, and in parallel with the development of the volunteering plan, it is essential that resources are identified to deliver the plan and then maintain and support volunteering in the short to medium term. We recommend the appointment of volunteer co-ordinators to focus. At this stage, the effort to recruit volunteers cannot be expected to form part of the 'day job' for the service.

6.58 As the work with volunteers becomes central to the way the service functions, it will be possible to reconsider how volunteer co-ordination is resourced. It will also be possible over time to consider how the mix of employees and volunteers could be used to extend 'staffed' (whether employee or volunteer) opening hours. This process should be undertaken in close consultation with volunteers, staff and their trade unions.

### What the data tells us

#### Expenditure

6.59 Barnet has below average levels of total revenue expenditure in its CIPFA comparator group (£11,033 per 1,000 population vs. an average of £12,878).

6.60 Barnet has below average levels of net expenditure in its CIPFA comparator group (£10,340 per 1,000 population vs. an average of £11,766).

#### Income

6.61 Barnet has below average levels of total revenue income in its CIPFA comparator group (£693 per 1,000 population vs. an average of £1,112).

### Employee costs

- 6.62 Barnet has below average employee costs in its CIPFA comparator group (£6,244 per 1,000 population vs. an average of £7,207).
- 6.63 Barnet has below average employee costs per employee in its CIPFA comparator group (£25,489 vs. an average of £30,713). This suggests the balance of staff may be more junior or weighted towards the frontline.

### Use of volunteers

- 6.64 Barnet has the lowest number of volunteers in its CIPFA comparator group (25 vs. an average of 251). This does not take into account volunteers at Partnership Libraries, but demonstrates nevertheless the potential for a much greater involvement by volunteers in Council-run libraries.
- 6.65 Barnet has the lowest number of volunteer hours as a percentage of worked hours in its CIPFA comparator group (0.3% vs. an average of 5.8%, with the highest comparator scoring in the region of 35%). This suggests there is real potential to do more in this area, given comparator behaviours under similar financial pressures.

## What people have told us

### Introduction

- 6.66 In this section, we have reported what people have told us, whether through the survey, meetings, interviews or focus groups. We have not sought to evaluate or 'weight' people's perceptions or opinions, but we have drawn out those that we think highlight an issue effectively. We have drawn out those views that were particularly common but have also included examples of significant or interesting 'minority' views that should be heard. We have made a number of observations at the end of this section where we draw some conclusions that will inform our findings and recommendations.

### What representatives of organisations in the borough have told us

- 6.67 When speaking to organisations in the borough, we heard the following:
- The main concern amongst the voluntary organisations interviewed was the relationship between the Council and the voluntary sector. While some described having good relationships with individual council staff, feeling supported and listened to, there was a contradictory sense that the Council as a whole is less transparent - and that the "Council is still on a journey from being a contractor with tons of money to give away and dictate all sorts of things on the periphery. Now we're doing you a favour".
  - Organisations said that the narrative needs to change if the Council wants to get volunteers: good intentions aren't enough, there needs to be a culture change to encourage wider participation, particularly in areas of higher deprivation where there is less appetite for volunteering but demand for services is high.
  - It was stressed that volunteers need training, managing and access to interesting and varied work - and that the Council don't seem to realise this need for an infrastructure. One organisation reported an officer saying: 'what is it about the voluntary sector? You've always got your hands out'.

- Despite this it was also said that volunteers placed with the library service enjoy working there and find the service responsive. It is a popular placement for many.
- Resourcing was a common concern particularly over the lower staffing levels in libraries.
- This cuts across all organisations and there is frustration that voluntary organisations are also struggling to make ends meet financially - particularly in areas of higher deprivation.

6.68 In our discussions with schools and headteachers we were told:

- There was an impact due the financial situation affecting schools not only because they can't afford as many books, but because SSO restricts how excluded and children with additional needs can access the libraries.
- There was real appreciation for the library reading challenges and school book borrowing service.
- People wanted more information about volunteering and thought it would be good to have **work experience** opportunities for students.

### What people said in response to the questionnaire

6.69 In our analysis of the survey results, we have identified the following key headlines, and members of the public raised important points and observations, in relation to resourcing:

- A substantial majority of our respondents are **satisfied** with **the quality of service by staff** (65%); followed by dissatisfied (15%); neither (13%); don't know (7%).
- However, they are **dissatisfied** with **the availability of staff** (61%); followed by satisfied (22%); neither (13%); don't know (3%). This is generally consistent across the board (see the table below), but people with disabilities are particularly dissatisfied (71%).

**Table 6.1: availability of staff – by survey respondents**

Over 65s	Under 65s	Disabled	Not disabled	Young people
Dissatisfied 64%	Dissatisfied. 61%	<b>Dissatisfied 71%</b>	Dissatisfied. 61%	Dissatisfied 51%
Satisfied 20%	Satisfied 23%	Satisfied 16%	Satisfied 23%	Satisfied 26%
Neither 14%	Neither 13%	Neither 10%	Neither 14%	Neither 17%
Don't know 2%	Don't know 3%	Don't know 3%	Don't know 3%	Don't know 6%

- Library users will **sometimes interact with a member of staff** (49%), with a significant quantity **needing to speak with them on every visit** (22%) and **once every 2-3 visits** (also 22%); followed by never (4%); don't know (3%).
- A **majority of respondents have experience of using the library when staff are not on duty** (69%); followed by a smaller number who do not have experience (31%).



- A significant number **of respondents do already undertake voluntary work** (44%); followed by 'no' (54%); don't know (2%). A significant number also indicated they would be **interested** (21%) **should volunteering opportunities arise** in Barnet's libraries; followed by uninterested (56%); neither (23%).

6.70 The survey invited people at the end to describe the impact on them of the changes made to the library service. We have drawn out some examples here that illustrate the concerns they raised:

**Table 6.2: comments from survey respondents about the impact of the changes**

Issue	Verbatim comments
Quality of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Actually now I go most often to Friern Barnet Community Library. They are open more hours than any other Barnet Library, the staff is friendly and helpful..."</li> <li>• "At south Friern There is a big difference in the quality of staff - some very professional and helpful and working very hard, others just not able to be helpful."</li> <li>• "I haven't been able to find information in one place about what is on for children in Barnet libraries. Joining Haringey libraries was so much easier and they always seem to have staff. They gave me a booklet of everything they have on, so I am now driving to use their services instead of what is local to me."</li> <li>• "Massive change. Please do not reduce staff hours! Nothing can substitute people."</li> </ul>
Staff availability and interactions with staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "A library is not a library without librarians. The entire atmosphere changes. I stopped going to North Finchley library because it's horrible without staff... Whoever thought the changes were a good idea clearly does not understand the impact libraries can have and should have."</li> <li>• "I don't feel motivated to visit the library during self-service, I like the staff being present. I need help and company and I detest self-service hours. I am against the changes made and want it reversed."</li> <li>• "It is so sad to find no staff there, who you get to know, and are trained to advise you on the books you may want, or the information you need."</li> </ul>

6.71 The survey invited people at the end to list their ideas for change. We have drawn out some examples here:

**Table 6.3: ideas for change from survey respondents**

Issue	Verbatim comments
Quality of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Full time opening, employ proper librarians full time, expand space, more books!!”</li> <li>• “I am not aware of all the services available. However I would suggest some special needs facilitates, days or specific hours - with sensory books and activities. specific guidance for families who have children taking exams and where they can get supporting materials for 11 plus, GCSEs, A Level and other examinations“</li> <li>• “More open on Sundays - often a good day for people with other commitments More staff on duty Toilets always available when library open“</li> <li>• “Do something about your woeful online offer. How useless is an online study/research facility that can only be used in the library. When you've cut the number of PCs it also just adds insult to injury. Do something about the poor choice and quality of the material on offer.”</li> </ul>
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Would it not be possible to hire 16-18s to get some work experience to provide extra staff on a budget?”</li> <li>• “Volunteers on duty during self-service hours to ensure safety and appropriate behaviour“</li> <li>• “You need more staff. Volunteers shouldn't be used, people should be paid for doing the amazing job that they do. So pay people and bring back libraries that are a safer place for the communities to enjoy.”</li> <li>• “You need to invest in libraries, and have fully qualified librarians onsite more often. You cannot rely on volunteers to run the libraries, would you be happy to find out that your surgeon was a volunteer and unqualified?”</li> </ul>

## What people have said at meetings

6.72 Across the two public meetings, members of the public raised the following points and observations relating to resourcing:

- **Treatment of staff:** we heard a comment that the Council and its politicians have treated its librarians ‘abominably’, pushing through ideological changes that have increased stress levels amongst its library staff and reduced the levels of service.
- **‘Skeleton’ staffing:** a perception that libraries are being run by the bare minimum of staff, ‘propping the service up’ and causing safety risks to the public.
- **Funding:** general consensus that they would like to see a significant real terms increase in funding for the library service.
- **Volunteer skills and training needs:** clear messages that the public do not view volunteers as a replacement for a trained professional librarian; that the level of customer service they expect is not being met in many branches when they have to interact with a volunteer; and expectations that volunteers should receive a library skills-focused training package on induction.

- **Public interest in volunteering:** any initial interest in becoming a volunteer is being tempered by the perception that they would be placed in branches not near home and/or given tasks to complete equivalent to being a simple 'meet-er and greet-er' which is not considered appealing.
- **Popularity of staff:** general consensus that the library service's managers and staff are popular, professional and are doing a fantastic job, despite the challenges they face; however, people were disappointed that staff visibility has been reduced, believing that 'volunteers should be a support, not a replacement, for a paid member of staff'.

### What people said in focus groups and discussions

6.73 There were a number of areas that we tested in our focus groups and individual and group discussions that related to the resourcing of the service.

6.74 When we raised the topic of **staff**:

- **Young people** had very **mixed feelings** about staff. Some said they didn't notice if staff were present or not although more agreed that it's **nicer to have person than a machine**. They thought that some **staff are very friendly** and recommend good books.
- Their main staffing concern was connected to security saying that that it was the librarian's responsibility to **keep order in the library**. One suggestion was for **security staff to be trained as library assistants** so they could help people during SSO.
- The only view expressed by **young adults** was at the **lack of staff to help with any computer problems** during SSO. They were the least likely to engage with staff, consider volunteering or worry about security.
- Other **adults** preferred **staff** on duty as "they **set the tone for the library**". This group also felt **security guards did a good job** of keeping the noise levels down when young people were in but they would **prefer to have library staff** who could help them with any problems with the technology.
- **Older adults** were much more likely to express strong feelings; they universally **preferred to use the library when staffed**. Some people even **refused to use the SSO on principle** because **it meant cuts** to staffing levels and a lot of people said "it was **better before**".

6.75 When we discussed the topic of **volunteering**:

- **Young people** didn't care if volunteers were on duty or not – one group was amazed to find out that staff got paid by the Council as they **thought that all library staff were volunteers**.
- **Adults and younger adults didn't have a strong feeling about volunteering** apart from one man who felt it was taking people's jobs.
- **Older people** expressed **outrage at the replacement of paid staff with volunteers** (including from one volunteer who said she felt guilty). One man had volunteered in the libraries but had given it up because he didn't feel he was given enough to do.

6.76 When we asked about **views of Barnet Council**:

- **Older people** were the group that had the strongest opinions. They had very **low levels of trust** in the council and a number who were scathing, believing that the "Running down of the library service is a deliberate act to stop people using them so they can close them down".

**Table 6.4: our observations on what people have told us**

- It is clear from our feedback that people are, overall, satisfied with the service that Barnet's library staff provide to their users. This is great news and the staff deserve recognition and praise for this. There was also recognition that the staff performed well within their limited resources.
- However, users are not happy that staff are often unavailable. In addition, users do want to interact frequently with a member of staff (if not every time) they enter a library building. This suggests a high level of demand for staff support which contrasts with the general trend in library services to encourage the public to serve themselves more. It was notable that many users suggested self-service facilities (eg self-checkout) needed to be easier to use.
- A significant proportion of those we have engaged with were opposed to the use of volunteers in libraries, arguing that library staff have essential skills that cannot be replicated by volunteers without professional training. There was a fair degree of scepticism about the quality of support that can be offered by volunteers and about the library service's ability to use them effectively.
- A significant number of survey respondents (over 20%) indicated they would be interested in potential volunteering opportunities with the library service. In our experience, there is often an untapped pool of people who would welcome the chance to undertake a meaningful volunteering role in a library and the survey response suggests that is unlikely to be different in Barnet.
- A number of those we spoke to wanted to see more money spent on libraries and a number of voluntary organisations expressed a willingness to help the service, but needed resources of their own to make that possible.
- Voluntary organisations running Partnership Libraries reported that they worked well with the library service, but reported some problems (eg with the responsiveness of the estates service) and raised the level of the grant.

### Lessons from elsewhere

- 6.77 Other authorities' experience of introducing volunteering includes Merton. While not operating any community run libraries, the Council has made volunteers a core part of the operation of the library service.

#### Table 6.5: comparator example – Merton's library volunteer network

- Over 500 volunteers have contributed their time to one of the seven libraries in Merton over the last year, with over 27,000 hours of volunteering being completed. Merton's successful volunteering model is widely recognised across the country, receiving a number of awards including praise from Volunteering England.
- Cabinet member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah said: "Our volunteers come from all walks of life and bring a broad range of experience to their roles. People volunteer for a variety of reasons, it might be to meet new people, improve their skills or to give something back and make a difference to their local community. We have hundreds of volunteers making a huge difference to our award winning library service and this is our chance to recognise them for their hard work and commitment."
- For more information, read: <https://news.merton.gov.uk/2019/06/03/merton-celebrates-library-volunteers/>

### Summary of findings and recommendations

6.78 The transformation programme for the library service was ambitious and initiatives, such as Partnership Libraries, were planned effectively and appear to have started well. Other aspects of the programme have not progressed well, such as the recruitment of volunteers. Volunteering is key to the success of the model and to self-service opening and needs to be supported with sufficient resources. As a result of this gap, the reduction in staffing numbers and in staffed opening hours has impacted on satisfaction and service take-up.

**Table 6.6: summary of findings**

- Staff numbers and costs have been severely reduced as a result of the transformation programme and the model that Barnet has adopted means that the deployment of staff is very tight.
- At the same time the model adopted has inevitably meant that staffed opening hours are quite thinly spread across ten sites. An effort has been made to balance opening patterns against the needs of particular groups and across all locations but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that there are too few staffed hours.
- In general, the model Barnet has embarked upon for Partnership Libraries appears to have been successful so far and has not experienced some of the difficulties encountered in other local authorities. However, there are some issues to be addressed and the level of resourcing will need to be kept under review.
- Community participation, with 70 volunteers, is demonstrably good at the four Partnership Libraries but this has not extended to the deployment of volunteers at the other ten libraries.
- The Service has started to focus on recruiting volunteers and this needs to be a key initiative over the coming year. This will only be possible with additional resources to take this initiative forward, learning from other library services that have successful volunteer programmes. This would involve strengthening the small team of Community Engagement posts to provide 'volunteer co-ordinators'.
- The transformation programme did not resource the recruitment of volunteers sufficiently and the failure to recruit volunteers alongside the introduction of SSO has resulted in an adverse impact on users and exacerbated the negative perceptions of users about Self-Service Opening and the limited number of staffed hours.
- Given the level of change the organisation has been through, levels of staff commitment, forward-thinking and enthusiasm are very good, reflecting well on the workforce themselves but also on the steps taken by the service management to engage staff in developing service priorities and initiatives such as the Year of Learning.
- The replacement of East Barnet Library with New Barnet Library and Leisure Centre could not have been foreseen when the tiering of the libraries was put into place but now means that a new, very visible, library facility is closed while users of the leisure centre enjoy lengthy opening hours.

6.79 To build on those elements of the programme that have begun well and to address those that have only achieved partial success we recommend a number of investments for the Council to consider. We recognise that any increase in resources for a service will have a knock-on impact elsewhere in the Council's services and that decisions will need to be taken in the round.

6.80 During the course of the report **we have suggested capital expenditure** on:

- **Signage and interiors:** subject to a costed feasibility study and design standard.
- **Technology:** fixing the visitor count technology, informed by an independent review of its causes.

6.81 We also suggest increased revenue expenditure on:

- **Volunteering:** resources need to be invested to support an ambitious volunteering plan.
- **Staffing resources:** increasing the number of library employees to reduce the impact caused by the severe reduction in staffed opening hours.

6.82 In making its decisions in response to our recommendations on expenditure, we suggest that officers are asked to identify costed options before the Council considers further what is realistic given the overall financial pressures it faces and how best to target it.

### Table 6.7: summary of recommendations

- |  |
|--|
| <p>27. To develop and resource an ambitious volunteering plan that targets a dramatic increase in the use and deployment of volunteers.</p> <p>28. To invest, for the medium term, in the creation of dedicated volunteer co-ordinator posts to accelerate the process of recruiting, developing and retaining volunteers across a range of volunteer roles.</p> <p>29. To increase staffed opening hours by increasing the number of library employees in the short to medium term at least until adequate numbers of volunteers can be recruited and the use of volunteers stabilised.</p> <p>30. To undertake a capital investment to reflect the future vision for the service, with improved interior design and external signage and to address weaknesses in the deployment of technology.</p> <p>31. Engage Inclusion Barnet and GLL (the leisure centre operator) in dialogue to ensure increased access to New Barnet Library.</p> |
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## 7. Summary of recommendations

### Introduction

7.1 This section provides a summary list of our report's recommendations.

**Table 3.9: summary of recommendations**

1. To build on the new vision for the library service by ensuring that the Council embraces the wider contribution that libraries can make to the Council's ambitions for the borough.
2. To explore options for integrating other, related services with the library service to maximise their impact and use the Council's property portfolio more effectively.
3. To address weaknesses in the implementation of the current transformation strategy and revisit aspects of the strategy that were not sufficiently resourced.
4. To review the extent of budget reductions and explore the scope for additional investment in the service given the relative decline in the take-up of the service.

**Table 4.9: summary of recommendations**

5. To invest urgently in high standards of exterior signage and in new, artistic design standards for shopfronts and interiors following an initial design feasibility study to develop costed options for the interior design of libraries.
6. To keep the availability of space in library buildings under review in order to find opportunities to increase the footprint of the busiest libraries and to support the potential for greater service integration.
7. To increase the footprint of South Friern Library, given the difficulty in letting vacant space commercially due to the constraints of the site.
8. To review any future vacancies in commercial space and in advance of any lease renewals and consider returning it to library use or other complementary uses.
9. To develop a 'library regeneration' list with officers in planning and regeneration to help identify long-term opportunities for improved sites as part of redevelopment plans.
10. To undertake an independent review of the failure to implement new visitor count technology effectively and fund an urgent recovery plan to correct the problems.
11. To explore with the supplier of the technology for self-service opening (Bibliotheca) the removal of the requirement for a PIN from the entry system.
12. To investigate whether a design solution can be found (ideally as part of the recommended design feasibility study) to avoid users being put off from using a library during self-service opening because they cannot see inside.
13. To pilot keeping suitable toilets open during self-service opening hours, before considering whether to let users decide whether or not to use the toilets.
14. To pilot a phased process of reductions in the lower age limit for self-service opening (subject to parents' permission).
15. To remove the requirement for schools to be involved in the approval process for allowing Year 11 children aged 15 to use self-service opening.
16. To spread urgently the on-call duty management cover roster for incidents occurring outside of office hours so that cover not just fall on a few individuals.

**Table 5.11: summary of recommendations**

17. To maintain the Media Fund at its current level in real terms.
18. To continue to review and enhance the digital offer and to consider greater promotion of this and the wider online library offer, by packaging it as 'the virtual branch library'.
19. To increase promotion of the online enquiry service operated by the Service Development Team (Stock & Services).
20. To invest in a training programme of customer care and information/enquiry handling skills for staff in the frontline Operations Team.
21. To seek to generate increased income from the spaces for hire in the libraries through improved marketing and a review of commercial hire rates for these spaces, in the context of local market rates.
22. To increase staffed opening hours<sup>45</sup> to ensure a more consistent and extended pattern of staffed opening (see our specific recommendations on funding, staffing and volunteering in chapter 6).
23. To re-run the previously successful Here to Help sessions in an attempt to promote and explain Self-Service Opening and register more users with cards to access SSO opening.
24. To remove the requirement for users to present a proof of address again when re-registering their library to keep the barriers to library use to a minimum.
25. To identify a small basket of key performance indicators (including the indicators at table 5.3), to be regularly reviewed by the Libraries management team and reported to Committee, without which it will continue to be difficult to accurately identify the ongoing impact of the transformation programme.
26. To ensure as a matter of urgency that the data required to report these indicators can be accurately collected at all the libraries as part of the investment programme recommended in chapter 6.

**Table 6.7: summary of recommendations**

27. To develop and resource an ambitious volunteering plan that targets a dramatic increase in the use and deployment of volunteers.
28. To invest, for the medium term, in the creation of dedicated volunteer co-ordinator posts to accelerate the process of recruiting, developing and retaining volunteers across a range of volunteer roles.
29. To increase staffed opening hours by increasing the number of library employees in the short to medium term at least until adequate numbers of volunteers can be recruited and the use of volunteers stabilised.
30. To undertake a capital investment to reflect the future vision for the service, with improved interior design and external signage and to address weaknesses in the deployment of technology.
31. Engage Inclusion Barnet and GLL (the leisure centre operator) in dialogue to ensure increased access to New Barnet Library.

<sup>45</sup> We define 'staffed' opening hours as those in which library employees and/or volunteers are on the premises and available to provide support to library users.

## Library service outcomes and objectives - CELS Committee, 28 October 2014

The outcomes and objectives for the library service agreed by the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee on 28 October 2014 are set out below.

**Table Ai.1: 2014 outcomes and objectives for the library service**

<b>A library service that provides children and adults with reading, literacy and learning opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading and learning materials are provided for loan and library use, in traditional print/hard copy formats as well as provision of e-book, e-audio and online learning resources.</li> <li>• The Barnet Digital Library will increase reading and learning opportunities for local people, while the physical library estate continues to offer access to reading, literacy and learning opportunities for children and adults.</li> <li>• At least 95% of Barnet residents can reach their local public library by public transport and have access to study space and to learning activities run for communities by communities and by local partners.</li> <li>• Outreach and development is targeted at those most in need, with strategic partnerships in Education, Adult and Children’s Services, and appropriate local partners.</li> <li>• The service continues to deliver onsite and online literacy activities and reading schemes (The National Reading Offer) such as the Summer Reading Challenge, Six Book Challenge and City Reads.</li> </ul>
<b>A library service that engages with communities.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library buildings continue to act as focal points of community activity, with further integration of services and use of library spaces which reflects local needs.</li> <li>• Opportunities for local people to shape and support library services are increased, through an expanded range of volunteering roles and advisory groups.</li> <li>• Social media and new technologies are increasingly used to deliver peer to peer customer interaction and support, offering residents the opportunities to share reading recommendations, advice and support.</li> <li>• Local commercial partnership opportunities are exploited where possible.</li> </ul>

### **A library service that makes knowledge and information easily accessible.**

- Local and Council information is provided in both hard and soft copy forms.
- The library service continues to act as a gateway to local services, expanding its use of self-service technology to increase access to those provided by the Council.
- Online library services, accessible 24:7, offer the library service increased opportunities to deliver literacy, learning and information services out of hours and to those unable to visit static service points.
- Users of the physical libraries have access to modernised ICT equipment and ICT learning support.

### **A library service that can withstand current and future financial challenges and safeguard services for vulnerable people.**

- Barnet's libraries are configured in such a way as to support the Council in meeting these challenges.
- Income from services, assets, trading and other unique capabilities is maximised in order to take the universal free-to-use library service to the maximum number of people.
- Opportunities presented by new technology and improved volunteering support are maximised to preserve libraries as physical spaces/community assets.

## Summary of borough needs and assets

### What the data tells us

#### Barnet's needs

##### The implications for the library strategy of the borough's needs

37. This appendix provides an overview of the borough's current needs, future needs and the most pressing needs that the service can help to address. Those needs - and the Council's political priorities - should inform the strategy for Barnet's libraries and their role in the lives of the people who live, work and study in the borough.

38. We begin by examining the wider economic, social and demographic needs that that the library strategy needs to take into account, before examining the data that informs the 'targeted' services that libraries can provide.

### Wider demographic, economic and social trends

#### A growing and ageing borough

39. The population of Barnet is large and growing. It has a large proportion of young working people who have been attracted to the area for its relatively affordable housing, good transport links and pleasant parks and open spaces.

- Barnet has the **largest population** of all the London boroughs at an estimated 400,600
- **The population of Barnet has grown** by 21.4% between 2001 and 2017. This is similar to the London population growth of 20.5% and higher than the England average (12.5%). When compared to its CIPFA nearest comparators, Barnet was ranked 5th highest out of 16 similar local authorities.
- The population of the borough is **projected to grow by a further 9.3%** by 2035 based on Borough Preferred Option (BPO) population estimates, compared to a 2018 baseline
- There is a **high proportion of working age people** with the most populous age bands being 30-34 years and 35-39 years for both male and females.
- There is projected to be a small overall increase in working age people over the period to 2035 but increases of 50% or more in this age group are concentrated in areas of **planned regeneration** under the "Delivering for Barnet" programme. with both Golder's Green and Colindale expected to show the greatest increases over the period.
- The number of **people aged 65 and over is predicted to increase by 33%** between 2018 and 2030, compared with a 2% decrease in young people (aged 0-19) and a 4% increase for working age adults (aged 16-64), over the same period.

### Summary of implications for library strategy

- Barnet's growing population is likely to increase the demands on the Council's services, including the library service.
- There will be a dramatic increase in the numbers over 65, resulting in increased demand for high-cost services for older people. Libraries can play a preventative role for older people.
- This increase in the proportion of older people could increase the potential pool of volunteers to help with the library service.

### Prosperity, child poverty and attainment

- The borough is relatively prosperous and has high levels of educational attainment. However, Barnet contains pockets of deprivation which are concentrated, but not exclusively, in the West of the borough. This is reflected in turn by the third of children who live in poverty. These inequalities are reflected in educational attainment.
- Barnet is ranked 25th out of 33 local authorities in London for deprivation making it **relatively prosperous**. The wards with higher levels of deprivation tend to be concentrated in the west of the borough (e.g. Burnt Oak, Colindale, West Hendon and Childs Hill). However, there are pockets of relatively high deprivation within more prosperous wards, such as Brunswick Park and Edgware.
- This gap is reflected in educational attainment which, while being higher than average across the board, has a significantly larger attainment gap at 16 than most other boroughs. Young people clearly have aspirations to do well and by 19, Barnet has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest score in London for educational attainment.
- 24,308 **children live in poverty** according to the End Child Poverty (ECP) coalition in 2018. This equates to slightly less than 30% of all children which is lower than the London average but in Burnt Oak and Colindale the percentage rises to over 40%.
- The wards predicted to have **the greatest increase in their CYP** population between 2018 and 2025 are found in the west of the borough (e.g. Colindale, Mill Hill and Golder's Green), which are due for regeneration. Areas with the greatest decrease in their 0-19 populations are concentrated in the wealthier east of Barnet (e.g. Garden Suburb, Coppetts and Woodhouse).
- Barnet has a 14.7 Avg 8 score **educational attainment gap** in between pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and other pupils. So, although educational attainment across the board is above average, the gap between children and young people who live in the more deprived areas of Barnet and their more affluent peers is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in London.
- Barnet has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest score in London for **educational attainment at 19**.

### Summary of implications for library strategy

- The relative prosperity of the borough means that a substantial proportion of the borough may choose not to borrow books or use free computer terminals.
- While generally prosperous, there are areas with high levels of deprivation which need adequate resources.
- Study spaces for young people are particularly important for those living in the most deprived areas.
- Self-service opening currently excludes, and possibly disadvantages, young people below the age of 15 from accessing quiet study areas.
- Areas being regenerated are predicted to have the greatest increase in children and young people with implications for how libraries are resourced for this age group.

### Housing costs and homelessness

40. Barnet has not been immune to changes in the housing market and the impacts of housing and welfare reforms over recent decades. The rising cost of home ownership has led to more people living in private rented accommodation which in turn puts pressure on the council to accommodate families made homeless due to eviction and puts pressure on services associated with supporting children living in poverty.
- Barnet has relatively low levels of **homelessness**, at 2.88 persons per 1000 population, ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 32 London boroughs; the most common reason for applying to the council as homeless was eviction from private rented accommodation; in line with national trends, 95% of homeless households are of working age.
  - The number of households in **temporary accommodation** has risen to 2579 of which 35% are placed outside the borough due to a shortage of affordable, suitable temporary accommodation within Barnet. Most temporary accommodation is in the private sector.
  - **Housing affordability** is a major concern with both rents and house prices in Barnet high compared to the national average.
  - **Home ownership has fallen** over the last ten years due to increasing prices and reducing supply. By 2025 half of the borough are expected to live in privately rented accommodation. Average monthly rents have increased by 25% between 2011 and 2017 with rent levels higher than the average for Outer London and almost twice that of the average in England.

### Summary of implications for library strategy

- Increasing number of households in temporary and short-term tenancies is likely to result in overcrowding leading to more demand for study space for children and young people.

### A relatively safe borough, but crime is a concern

41. Barnet is a relatively safe place, with lower rates of violent crime and gang activity. Nevertheless, it is the top concern for Barnet residents who worry about lower-level anti-social behavior as well as about the prevalence of drugs. Again, there are pockets in the borough of higher levels of offending, with a worrying trend in anti-Semitic hate crime.



## Evaluation of libraries transformation

- Barnet is a relatively **safe place** to visit, live and work. The crime rate for all recorded crimes for the year ending in June 2018, was 70.48 per 1,000 residents, the 8th lowest in London. The rate of Violent crime is even lower: Barnet having the 2nd lowest rate in London with 5.6 offences per 1000 population
- Crime is the **top overall concern** by Barnet residents (39%) although 60% of residents are very or fairly satisfied with how police and council are dealing with crime.
- Residents report that their top ASB concerns are: '**rubbish and litter** lying around' (44%), followed by 'people using or dealing drugs' (31%).
- The risk of crime in Barnet **varies according to location**. In the year ending November 2018, the highest crime volumes were found in West Hendon (7.8% of recorded crime), Child's Hill (7.8%) and Colindale (6.6%),
- Barnet has lower than average **levels of gang activity** with 24 flagged offences, just 2.2% of such offences in London in 2017. There were 51 youth victims (aged under 25) of knife crime, accounting for 2.4% of such offences in London. Factors contributing to the vulnerability for both victims and offenders including being male, aged 16-17 and having been a Looked After Child.
- Violence and sexual offences in Barnet were 18.15 per 1,000 residents, which was the 3rd lowest in London. Barnet had the 4th lowest rate of domestic violence but trend is upwards.
- In the 12 months to October 2018 is compared to the previous year, **anti-Semitic hate crime** in the borough rose by over a third (37%), 185 recorded incidents.

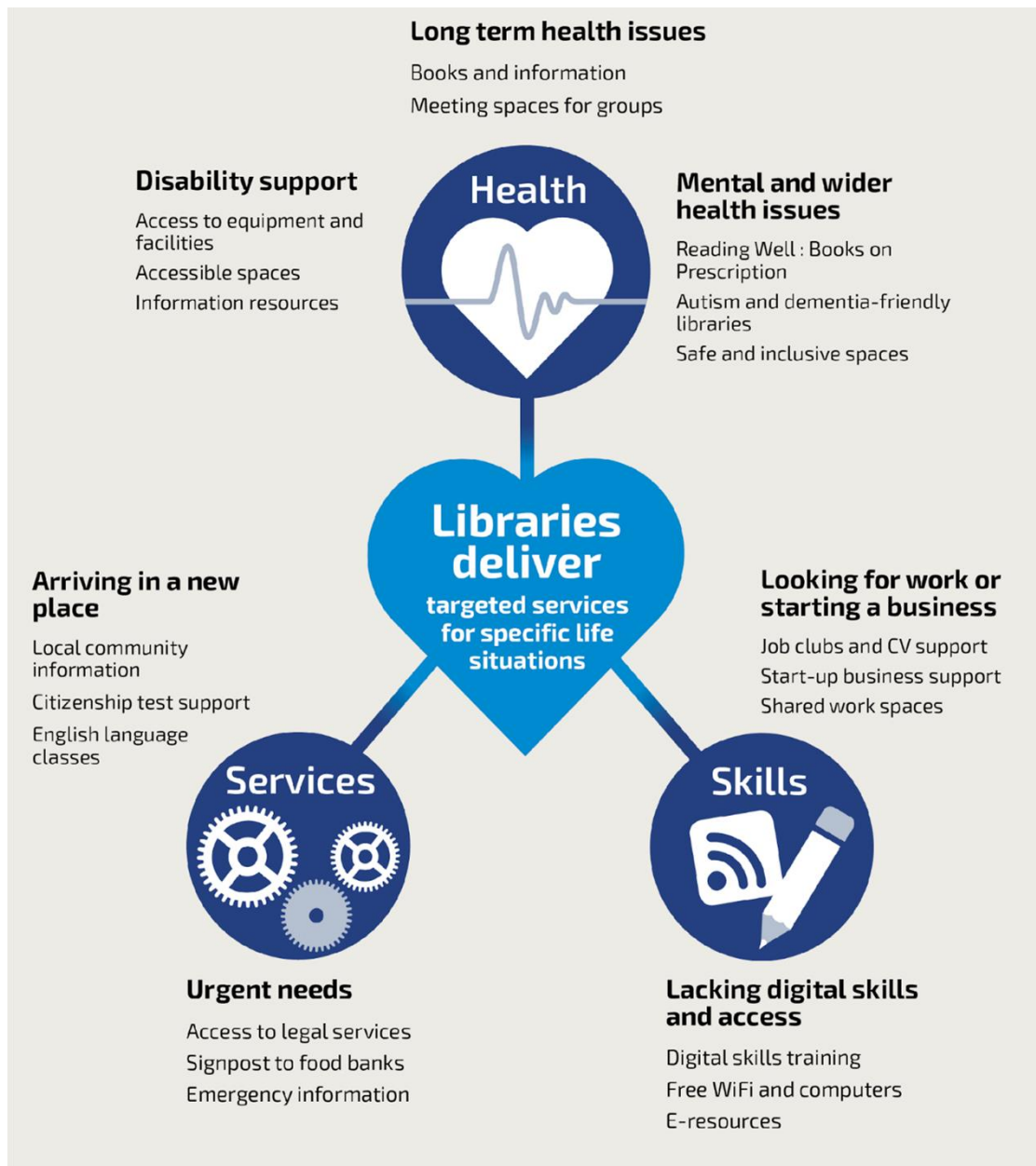
### Summary of implications for library strategy

- Work could be done to understand the extent to which fear of crime could be preventing people from accessing libraries during self-service opening.
- Libraries could play a part in countering hate crimes by taking a lead in promoting and celebrating cultural diversity.

The borough’s needs – implications for targeted services

42. Our review of the Borough’s needs is informed by the borough’s Universal Offers for libraries and the Libraries Task Force’s description of the targeted and preventative services that libraries can provide.

Figure Aii.1: targeted services which libraries can help to



### Targeted services: skills

43. People here work hard and there is a low unemployment rate. However, there is a large proportion of people in low paid work and employment and Barnet has a higher than average gap between the highest and lowest paid.
- The poverty rate and **child poverty rate** are below the London average, but an anticipated increase in inward migration caused by poorer households being priced out of inner London boroughs will exacerbate the situation.
  - 4.5% of Barnet's working age people are **unemployed** – lower than the London average. But 25% of those in work are **low paid** i.e. at rates below the London Living Wage.
  - Barnet has higher than average **income inequality** as defined by household income as a proportion of median income
  - According to the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy, 18% of the borough's adult population are described as **digitally excluded** and that the Council aims to reduce this number as far as possible.

#### Summary of implications for library strategy

- Low paid workers and the unemployed are more likely to need computer and Wi-Fi resources to access job applications and benefit claims.
- Poorer and older people may not have internet access at home or the computer skills needed.

### Targeted services: health and disability support

44. Older people in the borough are relatively long lived and continue to enjoy a high proportion of home ownership. However, as this population ages, there will be an increase in the long-term medical conditions associated with the elderly as well as the associated social isolation.
- Barnet **residents live longer** compared to the average for London with an average of life expectancy of 85.5 for women and 82.2 for men. These figures place them 5<sup>th</sup> out of 32 in London.
  - **Mortality is considerably higher** in the most deprived areas of the borough, compared to the least deprived. The life expectancy being on average 7.6 years less for men and 7.9 years less for women than those in the least deprived areas.
  - Over three-quarters of older adults in Barnet are **homeowners**, likely to be living in their own homes in the community, making them vulnerable to possible social isolation.
  - Between 2018 and 2031, a 41% increase in **long term illness** that affects daily activities a lot is predicted for older people.
  - In addition, an increase of 14% in **common mental disorders** is predicted among the Barnet adult population between 2018 and 2031
  - The older population (aged 65+) in Barnet is predicted to increase by a third between 2018 and 2030. A variety of **housing options** will need to be available to meet the needs and expectations of this growing segment of the population.

### Summary of implications for library strategy

- Increasing levels of social isolation among older adults is likely to result in greater demands on the library service
- As the population living with long term illness or disability increases, the role of the library as an accessible community space becomes more important. Accessible toilets are particularly important for this group.

### Targeted services: community support and cohesion

45. The borough has a very diverse population and continues to be an attractive destination for migrants, the largest proportion coming from the EU.

- The borough is **attractive to migrants** from across the world. In 2016/17, there were a total of 11,685 registered Barnet residents based on country of origin, from over 90 countries. A third were from Romanians (33.3%), followed by Italians (8.0%) and Polish people (6.4%).
- In 2018, the **largest ethnic category is White British**, accounting for 40% of the borough population. However, by the year 2030, this proportion is predicted to shrink to 36% as the Barnet population is projected to become increasingly diverse, with the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in the borough population rising to 42.3% in 2030.
- **Faith:** Christianity is the largest faith in Barnet accounting for 41.2% of the total population. The next most common religion is Judaism (15.2%), with Barnet now accounting for one in five (20.5%) of all Jews in England and Wales.

### Summary of implications for library strategy

- The borough is becoming increasingly diverse, with increases in the number of people for whom English is not a first language and who may benefit from support to improve their literacy in English.

## Save Barnet Libraries submission to Activist for Library Service Evaluation

1 February 2020

Members of Save Barnet Libraries met with Activist in October 2019 to outline our broad concerns based on detailed evidence gathered over the past three years and issues raised by over 5000 residents in the course of the Council's consultation process in 2015–2016.

We write now to address Activist's preliminary findings, announced at public meetings in January 2020. The findings are highlighted in bold with our comments below.

**It is not clear that the Council's strategic plans recognise the wider contribution that the library service can make.**

We agree with this finding. It fits with residents' experience of the council's failure to take on board the concerns and ideas of residents and the wide impact of the cuts.

A few specific examples include:

- Library buildings provided highly valued community space for hire by the hour. This increased the benefit of the library as a community asset and in some cases directly encouraged library use (for example children attending Kumon classes also used the library). These rentals were acknowledged to be a growth area<sup>46</sup> yet were turned into inflexible leasehold spaces that cost substantial sums to create, reduced library use AND failed to earn the projected income.
- The reduction in access to computers, IT classes and staff support in libraries was introduced without reference to the parallel process of promoting the increase of digital-only council services and benefits<sup>47</sup>. Job Centres were also closed.
- Barriers to library access for young people were introduced at the same time as schools made sharp reductions in school libraries as a result of drastic budget cuts.

The Council has also obstructed residents from providing feedback.

- Fundamental changes to the Council's constitution introduced in July 2019 severely limit residents' ability to comment and submit questions on agenda items at Council committee meetings. The type of public participation at the Communities Leadership and Libraries meeting in June 2019, which succeeded in extending the scope of this review,<sup>48</sup> is now blocked.
- Given the seriousness of the issues at stake, the Council's publicity for the review process was minimal and reluctant. From the outset we asked why library card holders could not be emailed with the survey but received no response. Despite the review being planned since July/August, no article was placed in Barnet Today. We believe this is due to the very low political priority given to this review. For example, while the Barnet Young People's Survey was recently conducted by interviews in school time, the library survey was not.<sup>49</sup> The Barnet Young People's Survey mentions libraries but asks no follow-up

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<sup>46</sup> Press article Barnet Times. Link to CLL public comments and questions:  
<https://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=694&MIId=9961>

<sup>47</sup> Council digital inclusion strategy

<sup>48</sup> CLL meeting public comments and questions June 2019

<sup>49</sup> FOI information

questions that could elicit information useful to this review. The Council's UNICEF "Family Friendly Borough" programme fails to address library provision for young people.

- The Barnet Youth Assembly (a Council-organised body) was critical of the impact of the library cuts on young people in 2018 but its findings were dismissed out of hand by the Director of Family Services, who said, "*Libraries are there, young people are using them, there is an increase in satisfaction. I will make sure when we do the review, we will be looking at how to continue to promote libraries in Barnet, because I am concerned that young people feel they can't go to a library when they can.*"<sup>50</sup>

### **Faced with serious financial pressures, the Council has cut the library budget by half in real terms over the last 10 years.**

#### **The transformation programme was under-resourced**

The service cuts have severely impacted on library users and staff. They were justified as necessary due to financial pressures. The costs of implementation were supposed to be paid back in two years.<sup>51</sup> But, in fact, the cuts were expensive and based on untried assumptions, particularly about the commercial possibilities of library buildings and the feasibility of unstaffed libraries.<sup>52</sup> Residents warned councillors about this during the consultation process.

There are substantial shortfalls in predicted savings. The Council has tried to hide the true picture as this would undermine the original justification for the cuts. But full transparency is necessary and shortfalls in savings must not be used to justify further cuts to the service. Instead, funds must be allocated to increase staffed hours and resources.

- The "transformation programme" was supposed to make savings of £2.156m p.a. by 2019/20. This was to be made up of £1.61m of cuts and £0.546m of increased income through commercial lettings.
- The costs of the plan kept changing, but the figures provided in March 2016 indicated that the full costs of implementation were about £6m (about £3m of which was for creating commercial spaces).
- In fact, £14m was allocated to the project.<sup>53</sup> The Council refused to say what this sum was for or to admit the implications for the payback period.
- In November 2017 the Council stated that the "capital cost of the library service refurbishment and remodelling programme are circa £7m-£8m".<sup>54</sup> The costs increase is not explained.
- The Council states that the target of £1.61m of income savings has been reached. However, this fails to take into account the cost of security guards, which exceeds £570k (up to December 2019) and which has not been allocated to the library service budget.<sup>55</sup>
- The target income of £0.546m p.a. by 2019/20 from commercial spaces has not been reached. The information provided about actual earnings so far is unclear and targets have changed without explanation.<sup>56</sup>
- Even if earnings at commercial spaces had reached their target, the actual payback time was over five years (£0.546m income compared to £3m projected cost). In fact, it will be far longer than this. This is a shocking indictment of this plan especially given the very serious impact of the loss of these spaces to library use.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.times-series.co.uk/news/16279229.barnets-youth-assembly-wants-better-libraries/>. The reference to an increase in satisfaction derives from statistics from the Barnet Youth Survey 2017, which was conducted before all the changes had come into effect.

<sup>51</sup> March 2016 CELS committee report Barnet Future Library Service para 5.3.2

<sup>52</sup> Commercial lettings target were "assumptions" based on desktop research conducted by the property department. Security guards were completely unplanned for in March 2016 although they had been relied on in the pilot at Edgware.

<sup>53</sup> Annual Procurement Plan 2017-18

<sup>54</sup> CELS meeting answer to public question 15/11/17

<sup>55</sup> Council information provided to Theresa Villiers MP asking questions on behalf of residents. SBL examined invoices for security guards for 2018-19.

<sup>56</sup> Chart from Estates Department emailed to Councillors 2 July 2019. Compare with chart from Barnet Future Library Service March 2016



- It is also shocking that some building improvements such as a disabled lift in East Finchley, were installed only to provide access to the commercial spaces which have mostly lain empty. Residents had pressed without success for this provision while the library was in full public use.

### **Internal space may now be insufficient, particularly when busy**

#### **Public access computers appear sufficient and well-used**

The spaces that were turned over to commercial rental must be returned to the library service, starting with those that are empty or do not have secure tenants. Internal space would be even more insufficient if library usage levels returned to pre-cuts levels (which must be the aim of this review). The lack of suitable space at times causes friction between different uses; computer provision and support is not sufficient to meet need.

- What comparison has been undertaken between computer usage pre and post 2016/17 to establish that provision is sufficient to meet need?
- The layout of computers at some branches is too squashed to allow study space alongside and/or privacy, for example while filling out online applications.
- Computer classes run by trained providers used to take place at all branches but no longer can do so – in part we understand due to the lack of space.
- There was no space-utilisation survey undertaken at Chipping Barnet library prior to the redesign and reduction of library space and facilities.<sup>57</sup> We believe this to be the case at all branches. This shows a fundamental disregard of residents' needs and ties in with the failure to conduct a proper needs assessment.
- The removal of children's rooms (Golders Green, North Finchley and Hendon) is a particular problem. A space utilisation survey would have picked up how popular these spaces were and the impact of their removal on children's use of the libraries.
- Students no longer have sufficient study space at many branches. School libraries are not a sufficient replacement: they may be open for only 1 hour after school for study hall but this isn't enough for GCSE students. Students in some areas are travelling to neighbouring boroughs (e.g. Camden or Haringey) to have sufficient space. Other students are forced to revise in cafes (e.g. Golders Green area), which is not an acceptable alternative to public provision.

### **Rooms could be better used with marketing**

Marketing cannot address the inherent problems posed by unstaffed opening and reduced space to hire.

- The reduction in space for hourly rental has substantially reduced use by community groups. Income used to be around £90k, now it is about £20k.<sup>58</sup>
- Room rental cannot improve during unstaffed hours, because all people attending an event must obtain self-service cards in advance. Non-library members and those not able to obtain library cards (e.g. out of borough, no proof of address) would not be able to attend such events. Organisers cannot deal with this situation. This is also a factor for commercial lettings where pin-code entry is required to access the letting area.
- How can groups rent rooms for events when there is no toilet?

### **The Service's staff have worked hard and with enthusiasm within the limits of the resources they have**

#### **Self-service opening deters users from a range of groups and is a barrier for under-16s**

The age limit for self-service opening is providing a barrier to young people using the library and there is support for younger age limits.

#### **There are too few staffed hours.**

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<sup>57</sup> FOI information

<sup>58</sup> FOI information



### Opening times of toilets are a source of complaint for users.

Staff provide essential support for library use. All libraries should be staffed by library workers equivalent at least to eight hours a day, six days a week to allow full access and trained support.

The lack of trained staff and toilet access is not only a deterrence but an actual barrier for many users. The age limit for self-service opening fails to address the underlying problems with self-service libraries.

- The loss of staff and the fact that they move between libraries more makes it harder for users to develop positive relationships that support library use for all ages. This is not a criticism of staff. It is a loss for the community.
- Some disabilities prevent use of unstaffed libraries: e.g. people prone to falls, wheelchair users unable to reach the higher shelves, people wholly dependent on immediate access to a toilet, people unable to enter and exit the automatic self-service door because of restricted mobility<sup>59</sup>
- While there is some support for younger age limits, there is also widespread concern about the safety of unstaffed libraries among many age groups.
- Younger age limits do not address the other core concerns of young people – lack of study space, children’s rooms and materials.
- Increasing use by independent young people is likely to increase friction over library space/uses in the absence of trained library staff.
- One bad experience can prevent future use; e.g. an older woman who fainted in an unstaffed library now feels it is unsafe to use the library on her own.<sup>60</sup> From this and other incidents where there has been no action taken by the CCTV operator, it is clear that live CCTV does not address residents’ concerns.
- Residents have not received a satisfactory explanation about what action took place following the porn-viewing incident during unstaffed hours in Finchley Central. The impact on young people or anyone vulnerable due to age/gender/disability of discovering an incident such as this in the absence of staff must be addressed.
- Sub-contracted security guards are not a replacement for library staff. They create resentment by the uncertainty of their role – both “policing” entry and providing “assistance” for which they are not trained. They are not accountable to the library service; for example, they do not keep a log of incidents with the public.<sup>61</sup>
- Young people in Year 11 are required to obtain proof of their year from their school to obtain a pin code. While we support the extension of staffed hours rather than a younger age limit, we also believe that this is a totally unjustified additional obstacle to use by under-16s that must be abandoned immediately.

### Users report they visit less frequently, book borrowing has fallen, visits seem to have fallen (but problems with data)

#### The technology is modern but implementation problems result in poor data

#### Self-service technology generally works but card and pin processes can be off-putting

The lack of data, which has worsened since the transformation project, must be fully explained and urgently rectified. This is particularly important because the full-scale use of unstaffed libraries in Barnet is effectively a national trial.

When the technology doesn’t work it creates intense frustration and deters users, particularly when there are no staff to provide assistance or explanation.

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<sup>59</sup> Statements and press interviews with disabled users

<sup>60</sup> Statements at CLL meeting

<sup>61</sup> FOI information on incidents involving security guards

- What does “implementation problems” mean? We note that visitor counters at Chipping Barnet, East Finchley and Hendon were removed during the “refurbishment” works in 2017 and have not been replaced. These counters are not dependent on new technology. In 2017, the Council said the removal of visitor counters was temporary and would be fixed.<sup>62</sup> After delay of over two years, we can only presume this is a deliberate attempt not to count visitors.
- At the other branches, despite the gaps in data, visitor figures can be calculated accurately, although with more difficulty, by comparing month-to-month figures. These figures cannot be ignored on the basis that they are not complete annual statistics.
- Using this method, we calculate that the figures show almost universal declines in visits since the cuts were implemented in 2016/17: Burnt Oak 30%; Childs Hill 26%; East Barnet 65%; Golders Green 64%; Mill Hill 49%; North Finchley 61%; South Friern 47%. Finchley Central is 18% down despite benefiting from more staffed hours than the others listed and has been trumpeted by the Council as an example of “investment”.
- The data that used to published openly on the Barnet Council website is now hard to find and library data for 2018-19 appears not to be published unlike earlier years.
- There does not appear to be any attempt to measure differential use between staffed and unstaffed hours, despite the recent introduction of a new computer system. The only figure we have been given is the number of people who have registered for self-service opening which is clearly not an adequate measure of their use.<sup>63</sup>
- The self-service systems do not always work. For example, card machines had to be replaced at five locations during the first year of operation.<sup>64</sup> But there is no data about the impact of this e.g. how many people have tried and failed to gain entry.<sup>65</sup>
- There have been serious delays to fixing other crucial equipment; e.g. the only printer was out of order at East Finchley for over a month.

**Media Fund (including book fund) reduced substantially and at its limit. Users feedback: better books and materials a priority.**

### **Range of Digital Offer good but needs enhancing and marketing**

Book stock and materials are very poor which seriously deters library use. Digital offer is better in theory than in practice. Some key resources such as *The Times* appear to no longer be available.

- This is a particular barrier to children’s library use, as avid readers cannot find enough stock to interest them. The reservations system is not a sufficient alternative because of the additional barriers to children’s library access and because children often rely on browsing shelves.
- An increased digital offer was supposed to mitigate the loss of staffed hours, particularly for young people. There was no examination in the Needs Assessment of how many young people have access to, or want to use, e-readers.
- Books were removed from core and partnership libraries and destroyed during the library transformation in an effort to standardise the system, but this has just added to the problem of low stock.
- Books are removed from unstaffed libraries without being properly checked out, sometimes as deliberate theft, sometimes because the systems are not working properly. This Council has not acknowledged this problem of unstaffed libraries, and the policy on replacement is unclear.
- Daily newspapers are not always available during unstaffed hours.

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<sup>62</sup> See complaint to DCMS on SBL website

<sup>63</sup> Oddly the 2018-19 figures for SSO registration equate to the borrower figures for each branch, even partnership libraries, which is clearly impossible unless all borrowers have been automatically upgraded whether they know it or not.

<sup>64</sup> DCMS response to SBL complaint

<sup>65</sup> FOI information

- It is necessary to download separate apps for different key resources, e.g. audio books, e-books, press-reader, etc, which is an obstacle to use. It is hard/impossible to search the e-catalogue without downloading the apps.
- The lack of copies of popular titles means that there are unacceptably long reservation periods.

### **Extensive programme of events for children and adults, e.g. Year of Learning**

A programme of one-off events cannot replace the loss of staffed hours and regular library activities.

- The long-term reduction in specialist children's librarians has had a negative effect on children's participation: there are fewer events, these are often charged for, and free events are delivered by the staff available rather than those specially trained to work with children with a decline in quality.
- Core library activities, such as IT classes run by Barnet Southgate college, have not been replaced at all branches. This is a fundamental loss especially given the increasing transfer to digital only services and the importance of IT skills for employment.
- Figures for well-established activities such as the Summer Reading Challenge remain very poor since the cuts.
- School visits have fallen: there is no specialist children's librarian to facilitate them and now schools are likely to be invited to visit during self-service hours when there is no staff help at all nor reliable access to a toilet.
- In relation to the Year of Learning, the spread of events was uneven across library branches, even taking into account the different tiers of library.<sup>66</sup> The criteria for the spread of charged vs free events was also unclear.
- It is unclear whether and to what extent the Year of Learning will be repeated.
- Some informal activities organised by residents, such as a scrabble group at Chipping and a computer club at East Finchley, have been forced to find alternative space due to lack of appropriate facilities and pin-code restricted access.

### **Community Participation good at partnership libraries**

We question this finding. How has community participation been measured? The visitor figures for partnership libraries (especially those that were well used before the cuts) show very steep declines in usage although they are open more than the minimum 15 hours a week demanded by the Council. They clearly do not meet residents' needs. The partnership libraries are within the statutory network of the Barnet Library Service. They must be judged by the same standards as those run by the service directly.

Libraries should be staffed by paid library workers. Such staff have the training and expertise needed as well as accountability towards the service and library users. Volunteers do not provide an equivalent service.

- There are consistent complaints about the opening hours of partnership libraries .
- Although users do not wish to criticise volunteers personally, some report that the service provided is not dependable and lacks expertise.
- There is a sense overall that the partnership libraries are no longer "real" libraries.
- The long-term sustainability of partnership libraries is questionable. The opening of Dawes Lane community centre, intended to be the future home of Mill Hill library, has been delayed because of lack of funds. The Council has recently allocated £1.54m of capital funding to develop a "hub" at Childs Hill library. Targets for rental income from the four sites are not achieved or are linked to further investment.
- Mill Hill rents out desk/computer space at £7/day, leaving at times insufficient free space for library users. This shift towards income-generation undermines the function of the public library service.

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<sup>66</sup> SBL chart showing breakdown of activities during first quarter of Year of Learning

## Evaluation of libraries transformation

- Childs Hill, East Barnet and South Friern are run by two major learning disability organisations, Barnet Inclusion and Kisharon. The main charitable purposes of these organisations is not in line with the purpose of providing a statutory library service.
- The potential conflict in priorities is reflected in the charitable reporting by these partnership organisations: there is celebration of the work of the libraries but no evidence (for example, in the annual reports) that these organisations have examined whether their libraries meet the needs of residents.
- In relation to Child's Hill library, Kisharon's website states "*The library space and garden is to be used as a backdrop for Kisharon activities and plans are in the pipeline for initiatives that will benefit the adults we support.*" This statement is indicative of this conflict.
- Although some service users with disabilities are able to gain work experience as library volunteers, disabled people report lower library use following the library cuts and introduction of partnership libraries. This must be the crucial factor in looking at whether the library service meets the needs of disabled residents (and other users) as a whole.

## Full survey – summary tables

### Introduction

We ran two online surveys, hosted by SurveyMonkey – one aimed at adult users and one at young people. The public were invited to share their feedback on the library service and the changes made; ideas for what could change, and their priorities.

We received 1,126 full survey returns. We were grateful for the impressive number of returns for what is an evaluation (as opposed to proposals for change).

It should be borne in mind that the survey was openly publicised and available to anyone to complete. As a result, the participants were self-selecting, and their views may not be representative of the people who live, work and study in the borough.

### Q1 Roughly how often have you used the library service in Barnet over the last year?

Answered: 1,126 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
At least once a week.	31.17%	351
At least once a month.	30.64%	345
At least every three months.	14.39%	162
At least once or twice a year.	8.88%	100
Not once over the last year.	11.46%	129
Don't know.	3.46%	39
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,126</b>

### Q2 Which library have you used most often?

Answered: 983 Skipped: 143

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Burnt Oak Library	2.54%	25
Childs Hill Library (Partnership Library)	2.44%	24
Chipping Barnet Library	19.43%	191
Colindale	4.58%	45
East Finchley Library	19.63%	193
Edgware Library	7.22%	71
Finchley Central Library	11.29%	111
Golders Green Library	3.76%	37
Hendon	5.19%	51
Mill Hill (Partnership Library)	1.63%	16
New Barnet (formerly East Barnet) Library (Partnership Library)	6.10%	60
North Finchley Library	6.51%	64
Osidge Library	5.29%	52
South Friern (Partnership Library)	1.73%	17
Barnet libraries' online resources	1.12%	11
None of the above	1.53%	15
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>983</b>

### Q3 Have you used another Barnet library? If yes, which other one did you use most often?

Answered: 945 Skipped: 181

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	34.92%	330
Yes - Burnt Oak Library	2.96%	28
Yes - Childs Hill Library (Partnership Library)	0.74%	7
Yes - Chipping Barnet Library	8.04%	76
Yes - Colindale	2.54%	24
Yes - East Finchley Library	4.02%	38
Yes - Edgware Library	2.86%	27
Yes - Finchley Central Library	10.79%	102
Yes - Golders Green Library	3.17%	30
Yes - Hendon	5.82%	55
Yes - Mill Hill (Partnership library)	1.80%	17
Yes - New Barnet (formerly East Barnet) Library (Partnership Library)	5.29%	50
Yes - North Finchley Library	7.72%	73
Yes - Osidge Library	4.02%	38
Yes - South Friern (Partnership Library)	1.06%	10
Yes - Barnet libraries' online resources	4.23%	40
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>945</b>



### Q4 Why have you used the library service over the last year? Tick all that apply.

Answered: 957 Skipped: 169

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Borrow a book.	82.97%	794
Borrow other materials.	11.70%	112
Read books	33.02%	316
Read a newspaper or periodical.	26.85%	257
Find out some information.	27.27%	261
Get advice.	9.61%	92
Fill in council form online.	3.13%	30
Fill in government form online.	3.66%	35
Fill in other form online.	3.97%	38
Use a free computer terminal.	19.64%	188
Use free Wi-Fi.	16.61%	159
Use a printer or photocopier	20.59%	197
Use online materials (eg eBooks, journals and periodicals).	12.23%	117
Attend a class or training course.	12.96%	124
Take part in an event, meeting or other group activity.	19.33%	185
Do some work.	19.33%	185
Have some company.	5.96%	57
Meet friends.	9.82%	94
Study or revise.	13.38%	128
Other: please specify	10.14%	97
Total Respondents: 957		

## Evaluation of libraries transformation

### Q5 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following:

Answered: 992 Skipped: 134

	VERY SATISFIED	FAIRLY SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	FAIRLY DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Range of books and materials.	13.19% 129	39.57% 387	13.80% 135	19.02% 186	10.94% 107	3.48% 34	978
Information available.	11.10% 104	32.55% 305	24.55% 230	11.63% 109	8.96% 84	11.21% 105	937
Quality of service by staff.	35.70% 347	29.32% 285	12.96% 126	7.20% 70	7.82% 76	7.00% 68	972
Availability of staff.	9.04% 88	13.36% 130	13.16% 128	21.27% 207	39.88% 388	3.29% 32	973
Opening hours.	14.14% 137	23.01% 223	13.21% 128	16.51% 160	31.68% 307	1.44% 14	969
Computer terminals.	6.71% 63	15.02% 141	24.28% 228	8.41% 79	6.82% 64	38.76% 364	939
Printers and photocopiers.	7.42% 70	14.74% 139	23.12% 218	5.20% 49	5.20% 49	44.33% 418	943
Advice on using computers.	7.37% 69	8.01% 75	21.79% 204	5.13% 48	7.16% 67	50.53% 473	936
Free Wi-Fi.	13.17% 123	17.88% 167	21.09% 197	2.25% 21	4.18% 39	41.43% 387	934

## Evaluation of libraries transformation

### Q6 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following:

Answered: 977 Skipped: 149

	VERY SATISFIED	FAIRLY SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	FAIRLY DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Online materials in general (eg eBooks, journals and periodicals).	7.26% 69	17.47% 166	24.42% 232	6.00% 57	4.00% 38	40.84% 388	950
Events and group activities.	8.66% 82	16.90% 160	22.28% 211	8.55% 81	8.24% 78	35.37% 335	947
Space available.	12.18% 116	25.74% 245	17.75% 169	16.28% 155	17.86% 170	10.19% 97	952
Community rooms.	6.06% 54	13.13% 117	20.43% 182	9.09% 81	13.47% 120	37.82% 337	891
The décor and appearance.	13.28% 127	33.26% 318	30.13% 288	10.88% 104	7.85% 75	4.60% 44	956
Furniture and tables.	11.96% 114	34.10% 325	29.28% 279	10.49% 100	8.29% 79	5.88% 56	953
Toilets.	7.35% 70	19.73% 188	15.11% 144	11.75% 112	20.36% 194	25.71% 245	953
Tidiness and cleanliness.	18.60% 178	42.01% 402	22.05% 211	8.36% 80	4.08% 39	4.91% 47	957
Atmosphere and behaviour.	17.88% 172	33.78% 325	21.83% 210	12.27% 118	9.77% 94	4.47% 43	962

### Q7 Are you aware of the free online resources that the library service pays for (eg eBooks, family history, journals)?

Answered: 997 Skipped: 129

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	53.56%	534
No	46.44%	463
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>997</b>

### Q8 How satisfied are you with the online resources available in Barnet libraries:

Answered: 510 Skipped: 616

	VERY SATISFIED	FAIRLY SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	FAIRLY DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
eBooks and eAudiobooks.	12.20% 61	25.20% 126	26.20% 131	7.40% 37	4.20% 21	24.80% 124	500
Online dictionaries and encyclopaedias.	8.87% 44	17.94% 89	29.44% 146	1.41% 7	3.02% 15	39.31% 195	496
Family history (available in libraries only).	6.87% 34	9.70% 48	26.67% 132	2.02% 10	3.43% 17	51.31% 254	495
Life skills, eg digital skills courses.	5.63% 28	8.05% 40	26.16% 130	3.22% 16	5.23% 26	51.71% 257	497
Online newspapers and magazines.	13.51% 67	18.15% 90	24.40% 121	2.22% 11	4.44% 22	37.30% 185	496
Research and academic articles (some available in libraries only).	5.21% 26	8.42% 42	24.25% 121	5.41% 27	6.61% 33	50.10% 250	499
Ease of use of online resources.	11.47% 57	21.73% 108	29.78% 148	7.85% 39	5.84% 29	23.34% 116	497

### Q9 Do you visit a library more or less often since the changes were introduced over the last three years?

Answered: 975 Skipped: 151

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Much more often	8.72%	85
Slightly more often	8.51%	83
Neither more or less often	21.44%	209
Slightly less often	16.62%	162
Much less often	39.79%	388
Haven't visited a library in last three years	2.05%	20
Not sure	2.87%	28
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>975</b>

**Q10 What are your priorities for improvement that would encourage you to use the library more often?  
Please tick up to 5 priorities for improvement:**

Answered: 968 Skipped: 158

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Range of books and materials.	60.64%	587
Information.	12.50%	121
Quality of service by staff.	18.60%	180
Availability of staff.	68.39%	662
Opening hours.	54.55%	528
Computer facilities.	10.64%	103
Advice on using computers.	5.27%	51
Free Wi-Fi.	7.85%	76
Online materials (eg eBooks, journals and periodicals).	10.54%	102
Events and activities.	27.58%	267
Space available.	18.39%	178
The décor and appearance.	6.20%	60
Furniture and tables.	6.61%	64
Toilets.	24.07%	233
Tidiness and cleanliness.	6.30%	61
Atmosphere and behaviour.	15.81%	153
Food and drink to buy.	7.75%	75
Other: please specify.	14.15%	137
Total Respondents: 968		

### Q11 Do you know the opening hours of the library you use most often (both when staff are on duty and when they're not)?

Answered: 957 Skipped: 169

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	52.77%	505
No	27.27%	261
Not sure	19.96%	191
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>957</b>

### Q12 Do you know when staff are on duty in the library you use most often?

Answered: 956 Skipped: 170

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	46.55%	445
No	34.83%	333
Not sure	18.62%	178
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>956</b>

### Q13 How often do you need to talk to library staff?

Answered: 958 Skipped: 168

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Every visit.	22.13%	212
Once every two or three visits.	22.34%	214
Sometimes.	48.54%	465
Never.	4.38%	42
Don't know.	2.61%	25
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>958</b>

### Q14 Have you used the library when staff are not on duty?

Answered: 959 Skipped: 167

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	69.03%	662
No	30.97%	297
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>959</b>

### Q15 If yes, how satisfied were you with:

Answered: 646 Skipped: 480

	VERY SATISFIED	FAIRLY SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	FAIRLY DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	DON'T KNOW	TOTAL
Information about library opening hours.	21.16% 135	29.15% 186	21.00% 134	14.58% 93	13.01% 83	1.10% 7	638
Information about self-service opening.	20.35% 129	28.55% 181	22.24% 141	13.88% 88	13.72% 87	1.26% 8	634
Applying for self-service opening.	18.40% 115	24.64% 154	18.88% 118	15.36% 96	17.60% 110	5.12% 32	625
Getting into the library.	19.53% 124	24.88% 158	10.71% 68	21.10% 134	22.99% 146	0.79% 5	635
Atmosphere and behaviour.	16.53% 104	24.48% 154	21.78% 137	20.19% 127	15.74% 99	1.27% 8	629
The services available.	9.70% 61	21.14% 133	23.53% 148	20.35% 128	21.30% 134	3.97% 25	629
Sense of safety and security.	13.70% 87	21.42% 136	17.64% 112	18.11% 115	27.72% 176	1.42% 9	635
The ease of use and reliability of equipment.	10.70% 67	19.17% 120	22.36% 140	21.88% 137	17.73% 111	8.15% 51	626
The fact that toilets may be closed.	1.41% 9	2.35% 15	11.46% 73	18.05% 115	51.49% 328	15.23% 97	637



### Q16 What are the main changes that would encourage you to use the library more during self-service opening hours? Tick up to four changes:

Answered: 939 Skipped: 187

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Better information about self-service opening.	19.28%	181
Easier to apply for self-service opening.	14.91%	140
Easier to get into the library.	31.52%	296
Better atmosphere and behaviour.	17.04%	160
Better sense of safety and security.	33.12%	311
Easier and more reliable equipment.	15.44%	145
Toilets that are open more often.	35.68%	335
Nothing would encourage me to use self-service opening.	22.90%	215
Other (please specify):	23.43%	220
Total Respondents: 939		

### Q17 Are you a parent or guardian of a young person aged 16-18 or in year 11?

Answered: 938 Skipped: 188

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	15.35%	144
No	84.65%	794
TOTAL		938

### Q18 Have you allowed them to use self-service opening (ie when no staff are on duty)?

Answered: 143 Skipped: 983

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	34.27%	49
No	65.73%	94
TOTAL		143

### Q19 How confident are you about them being in a library when no staff are on duty?

Answered: 47 Skipped: 1,079

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very confident.	19.15%	9
Fairly confident.	25.53%	12
Neither confident nor unconfident.	14.89%	7
Fairly unconfident.	21.28%	10
Very unconfident.	14.89%	7
Don't know.	4.26%	2
TOTAL		47

### Q20 Are you a parent or guardian of a child under 16 years old?

Answered: 933 Skipped: 193

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	39.44%	368
No	60.56%	565
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>933</b>

### Q21 From what age might you allow your under 16-year-old child to visit a library on their own when no staff are on duty?

Answered: 365 Skipped: 761

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Age 11 and under.	6.03%	22
Age 12 or older.	19.18%	70
Age 13 or older.	10.14%	37
Age 14 or older.	12.88%	47
Age 15 or older.	7.95%	29
Age 16 or older.	14.52%	53
I would not allow them at all.	29.32%	107
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>365</b>

### Q22 Do you do any voluntary work in the borough or elsewhere?

Answered: 917 Skipped: 209

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	44.06%	404
No	54.20%	497
Don't know	1.74%	16
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>917</b>

### Q23 If you were invited to volunteer regularly in a library, would you be interested?

Answered: 922 Skipped: 204

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very interested.	4.99%	46
Fairly interested.	15.73%	145
Neither interested nor uninterested.	23.21%	214
Fairly uninterested.	19.31%	178
Very uninterested.	36.77%	339
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>922</b>

### Q24 What is your age group?

Answered: 913 Skipped: 213

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
11 and under	0.00%	0
12-14	0.11%	1
15-17	0.11%	1
18-24	0.77%	7
25-34	7.12%	65
35-44	23.22%	212
45-54	18.95%	173
55-64	18.18%	166
65-74	15.33%	140
75 and over	9.20%	84
Prefer not to say	7.01%	64
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>913</b>

## Q25 What is your gender?

Answered: 915 Skipped: 211

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	23.93%	219
Female	67.65%	619
Prefer not to say	7.98%	73
Other (please specify)	0.44%	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>915</b>

## Q26 What is your ethnic origin?

Answered: 912 Skipped: 214

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Asian or Asian British	2.96%	27
Bangladeshi	0.22%	2
Chinese	0.66%	6
Indian	1.75%	16
Pakistani	0.55%	5
Black or Black British	1.54%	14
African	0.33%	3
Caribbean	0.44%	4
White and Asian	2.08%	19
White and Black African	0.55%	5
White and Black Caribbean	0.44%	4
White British	56.80%	518
Greek/Greek Cypriot	1.10%	10
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.00%	0
Irish	2.96%	27
Turkish/Turkish Cypriot	0.33%	3
Arab	0.44%	4
Prefer not to say	15.57%	142
Other (please specify)	11.29%	103
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>912</b>

### Q27 What is your faith?

Answered: 906 Skipped: 220

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agnostic	5.63%	51
Atheist	9.60%	87
Baha'i	0.11%	1
Buddhist	0.44%	4
Christian	22.41%	203
Hindu	2.10%	19
Humanist	0.99%	9
Jain	0.11%	1
Jewish	15.89%	144
Muslim	1.55%	14
Sikh	0.11%	1
No religion	16.45%	149
Prefer not to say	23.29%	211
Other religion/belief (please specify below)	1.32%	12
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>906</b>

### Q28 Do you consider that you have a disability? Please select the definition(s) from the list below that best describes your disability/disabilities.

Answered: 905 Skipped: 221

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Don't know/not sure.	0.88%	8
Prefer not to say.	8.07%	73
Yes - Hearing (such as deaf, partially deaf or hard of hearing)	4.53%	41
Yes - Speech (such as impairments that can cause communication problems)	0.55%	5
Yes - Mobility (such as wheelchair user, artificial lower limb(s), walking aids, rheumatism or arthritis)	4.09%	37
Yes - Severe Disfigurement	0.11%	1
Yes - Learning Difficulties (such as dyslexia)	1.55%	14
Yes - Mental Illness (substantial and lasting more than a year, such as severe depression or psychoses)	1.77%	16
Yes - Physical Co-ordination (such as manual dexterity, muscular control, cerebral palsy)	0.44%	4
Other disability (please specify below)	2.10%	19
Total Respondents: 905		

### Q29 What is your employment status?

Answered: 911 Skipped: 215

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Employed - full time	28.32%	258
Employed - part time	23.49%	214
Unemployed - currently seeking work	2.63%	24
Unemployed - not currently seeking work	2.20%	20
Retired	25.69%	234
Currently in full-time or part-time education	1.65%	15
Prefer not to say	8.67%	79
Not sure	0.66%	6
Other (please specify)	6.70%	61
TOTAL		911



## Evaluation of libraries transformation

### Q30 What are the first letters of your home postcode?

Answered: 915 Skipped: 211

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
EN4	8.42%	77
EN5	17.49%	160
HA7	0.00%	0
HA8	5.79%	53
N10	1.09%	10
N11	2.30%	21
N12	6.01%	55
N14	0.77%	7
N2	19.67%	180
N20	4.37%	40
N3	8.85%	81
N6	0.33%	3
NW11	4.26%	39
NW2	2.19%	20
NW3	0.22%	2
NW4	4.59%	42
NW7	3.06%	28
NW9	3.39%	31
WD6	0.22%	2
I don't live in Barnet	1.42%	13
Prefer not to say	5.57%	51
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>915</b>

## Evaluation of libraries transformation

### Q31 Have the changes made to the library service over the last two to three years had a positive or negative impact on you?

Answered: 830 Skipped: 296

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very positive.	5.06%	42
Fairly positive.	7.47%	62
Neither positive nor negative.	16.39%	136
Fairly negative.	29.40%	244
Very negative.	38.31%	318
Don't know.	3.37%	28
TOTAL		830

## List of interviewees

We are very grateful to the many organisations and interviewees who have helped us and taken the time to share their thoughts in conversations with us.

**Table Av.1: list of interviewees**

Organisation	Interviewee name
Age UK Barnet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Howard Chapman</li> </ul>
Barnet Multi-Faith Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Esmond Rosen</li> </ul>
Bracknell Forest Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fiona Atkinson</li> </ul>
Colindale Primary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lisa Dray</li> </ul>
Community Barnet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Julie Pal</li> </ul>
GMB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mark James</li> </ul>
Inclusion Barnet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Caroline Collier</li> </ul>
Jewish Volunteering Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rachel Ucko</li> </ul>
Kisharon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hadassa Kessler</li> <li>Neha Dhakar</li> </ul>
Local school headteachers meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Various school headteachers</li> </ul>
NW7 Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chris Wong</li> </ul>
Queen Elizabeth Girl's School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Louise Aldridge</li> </ul>
Save Barnet Libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emily Burnham and colleagues</li> </ul>
The Pavilion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rachel Phillips</li> <li>Kim Price</li> </ul>
UNISON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hugh Jordan</li> </ul>
Unitas Youth Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tony Lewis</li> </ul>
Young Barnet Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Janet Matthewson</li> </ul>

## Equalities Impact Assessment



**Evaluation of libraries transformation  
Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

**Barnet Council**

**Activist Group**

**February 2020**

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## Introduction

1. This Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken by Activist Group in support of its review of the Library Service transformation programme implemented by Barnet Council over the past three years. It should therefore be read in conjunction with Activist's main report which includes our main findings and recommendations. The background, and the approach taken by Activist, is explained in these introductory paragraphs.

### Earlier EIA for Barnet Libraries transformation programme

2. As part of their decision-making process in 2015 Barnet Council carried out an extensive EIA exploring and identifying mitigations for the equalities impacts of the changes proposed, and since implemented.
3. Since then the Library Service has continued to actively monitor and follow-up on the actions and mitigations identified. For example, in Autumn 2018 an update was provided to DCMS as part of their review of the changes made to the Library Service and the Libraries Management team considered a further update in April 2019.
4. We have not repeated all the details of the Council's previous EIAs or the considerable range of mitigations that have already been planned or implemented. Instead, **this EIA by Activist has focused on identifying any new or ongoing *principal* impacts and proposed mitigations to address these.** We have also, for the sake of clarity and focus, not repeated the detail of our findings and the data in our main report, instead cross-referencing to the relevant chapter in that report.
5. Activist has taken note of, and concur with, the following guidance notes from Barnet Council's EIA template:
  - EIAs make services better for everyone and support value for money by getting services right first time.
  - EIAs enable us to consider all the information about a service, policy or strategy from an equalities perspective and then create an action plan to get the best outcomes for service users and staff. They analyse how all our work as a council might impact differently on different groups protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010. They help us make good decisions and evidence how we have reached them.
6. An EIA needs to be started as a project is launched in order to identify and consider possible differential impacts on people and their lives, inform project planning and, where appropriate, identify mitigating actions. A full EIA must be completed before any decisions are made or policy agreed so that the EIA informs that decision or policy. It is also a live document; you should review and update it along with your project plan throughout.



## Approach taken by Activist and the scope of this EIA

7. This is an *advisory* EIA undertaken by Activist as part of our wider review of Barnet Council's library transformation programme. Our approach has therefore been:
- To reflect Barnet's agreed approach to an EIA and enable the outcomes to be related to any further equalities review work within the Council, Activist has as far as possible followed the Council's own guidance and approach.
  - To follow the outline of the Barnet Council EIA template (as revised 2019), making adaptations where necessary. For example, reflecting the fact that this is not a decision-making EIA we have not included the following sections:
    - 1 = Responsibility
    - 8 = Outcomes of the Equalities Impact Assessment
    - 9 = Sign-off and approval
8. In Section 3 of the table below, Supporting Evidence, for 'What do people tell you?' we have drawn on the consultation we have undertaken during this review, which has included interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups, and a public survey. The engagement process is summarised in chapter 1 of our report and the results are set out in chapters 3 to 6 of that report.
9. To avoid unnecessarily repeating ground covered in the lengthy EIAs undertaken by the Council in 2015, and subsequent reviews, we have defined the scope of this EIA as being:
- An EIA in support of Activist's independent evaluation of the impact of the changes to the library service since 2016.
  - A fresh assessment of *the impact of the changes that have been implemented*. In other words, it is not a new assessment of the Council's original proposals which were the subject of the 2015 EIA.
  - Focused in particular on the protected characteristics identified in our brief for the evaluation<sup>67</sup>.
  - Concentrated (in light of what the data and the people have told us) on the impact on protected groups that have not already been fully mitigated by the Council.
  - Limited to the data, evidence and feedback that it has been possible for us to assemble within the limits of the resources made available for our work.
  - An aid to decision-making by the Council when considering the findings and recommendations in our main report.

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<sup>67</sup> The characteristics listed in our brief for the evaluation were: "children and young people, particularly those in full time education and aged between 10 and 15 years of age, older adults and disabled people".

10. Before deciding on the action proposed by the Council in response to Activist's recommendations, we would advise the Council to undertake its own further EIA which can, of course, draw on the findings in Activist's EIA (i.e. this document).

# 1. Responsibility for the EIA

As indicated in the introduction, this does not constitute an EIA undertaken by Barnet Council officers, but is an advisory EIA undertaken by Activist as part of our wider review of Barnet Council’s library transformation programme. Before deciding on the action proposed by the Council in response to Activist’s recommendations, we would advise the Council to undertake its own further EIA which can, of course, draw on the findings in this document.

# 2. Description of proposal

Is this a: (Please tick all that apply)	
New policy / strategy / function / procedure / service <input type="checkbox"/>	Review of policy / strategy / function / procedure / service <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Budget saving <input type="checkbox"/> If budget saving, please specify value below:	Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please specify below:

**The proposal which is being assessed**

Following approval by the Council on 4 April 2016 the Library Service embarked on a significant programme of transformation involving changes to the way the service is organised, delivered and accessed, and staffed. Full details of these proposals can be found in the report of that date titled “Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee - Barnet’s Future Library Service”.

This report included as Appendix D a full EIA undertaken by officers of the council, which not only summarised the proposals but also identified the impact these might have on each of the equality strands, actions already taken to mitigate this, and further mitigating actions proposed.

The original proposals for the Service were as follows<sup>68</sup>:

<sup>68</sup> As set out in the EIA undertaken in 2015 and approved as Appendix D to the report “Referral from Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee - Barnet’s Future Library Service”

*“To deliver the vision for a future library service in Barnet, taking into consideration the feedback from residents through the latest consultation, it is proposed to maintain a network of 14 libraries as well as the digital and home and library services. The Council will also continue to provide a financial grant to the community libraries at Friern Barnet and Garden Suburb.*

*The proposed future model will deliver savings of £2.277m by 2019/20, contributing towards the Council’s £98.4m budget gap. The savings are made up of a £1.731m reduction in the libraries revenue budget and £0.546m increase in income through improved use of the library estate.*

*This section outlines the proposed future model for library services in Barnet.*

#### *Summary of the proposals:*

- To deliver the vision for a future library service in Barnet, taking into consideration the feedback from residents through the consultation, it is proposed to maintain a network of 14 libraries as well as the retain the digital, and home and library service
- The library offer will be based on 4 localities:
  - West: Grahame Park, Golders Green, Hendon, Childs Hill
  - East: Chipping Barnet, Osidge, East Barnet
  - North: Edgware, Burnt Oak, Mill Hill
  - Central: Church End, East Finchley, North Finchley, South Friern
- Libraries will be categorised as Core, Core Plus and Partnership. Each locality will have a Core Plus library and one or two Core libraries, with each having a service offer specific to their categorisation..
- Core libraries will provide access to core range of book stock, including items in highest demand, with a focus on children and older adults as well as access to community space for hire. Core libraries will be located in key residential areas and will be based at Burnt Oak, East Finchley, Golders Green, Hendon, North Finchley and Osidge.
- Core Plus libraries will provide access to an extended range of stock as well as greater space for study and community use and more extensive hours. Core Plus libraries will be those with the highest footfall, located in town centres and in the highest population areas or areas of high deprivation. These sites will be situated near retail or transport hubs. Core Plus libraries will be based at Chipping Barnet, Church End, Grahame Park and Edgware.
- Partnership Libraries will be developed jointly with local communities and remain part of the library network, with the Council providing stock and management support. Partnership libraries will be located in Childs Hill, East Barnet, Mill Hill and South Friern.
- In total Barnet’s libraries are currently 634.5 hours per week, increasing to 904 opening hours per week. The library will operate three different types of sessions as part of opening hours. These are:

- Sessions staffed by members of the library service, supported by volunteers.
- Facilitated sessions where the library is open through the use of new technology supported by volunteers.
- Sessions where the library is open through the use of technology unstaffed.
- Investing in new technology will allow libraries to both open longer as well as provide information digitally 24 hours a day. The use of technology which allows libraries to be opened unstaffed, will be implemented at all Core and Core Plus libraries. Alternative arrangements will be put into place at Burnt Oak where the library is co-located with the Council's Customer Service Centre.
- The new model will harness the capacity and support of local communities in Barnet to expand the volunteer offer at libraries and working together with community and voluntary groups to develop partnership libraries. Volunteers will play a key role to develop facilitated opening hours with the use of new technology, such as the Open+™ system used in the Edgware pilot.
- The majority of the library buildings will in future be managed as part of the Council's corporate asset strategy, overseen by the Council's Asset, Regeneration and Growth Committee. The Library service will be a 'user' of the building and have a defined footprint within the building. This will allow the Council to ensure it maximises income from the library buildings whilst continuing to support the library service.
- The Council will continue to seek to maximise income through use of library space, amending current fees and charges and exploring new revenue streams such as sponsorship and advertising and developing friends of / supports groups.
- The library service will continue to offer:
  - A mobile library service
  - The Home Library Service, which provides access to books and information for people whose mobility is restricted due to age, disability or illness
  - The Local Studies and Archives Service, which offers access to local historical materials alongside online resources
  - E-books, E-audio and other online resources and learning materials
  - The Schools Library Resource Service, which provides professional advice and support to school libraries as well as loans to support the National Curriculum
  - And The Early Years' service, which provides activities in libraries for under-5s and their parents and helps administer the national Bookstart scheme"

The transformation programme has since been implemented largely as proposed above with some exceptions that we shall note in the table that follows. As indicated in our introduction we have defined the scope of this EIA as being:

1. An EIA in support of Activist's independent evaluation of the impact of the changes to the library service since 2016.
2. A fresh assessment of the impact of those changes and of the effect of the mitigating actions taken by the Council in response to its EIA in 2015.
3. Focused in particular on the protected characteristics identified in our brief for the evaluation.
4. Limited to the data, evidence and feedback that it has been possible for us to assemble within the limits of the resources made available for our work.
5. An aid to decision-making by the Council when considering the findings and recommendations in our main report.

### **The key stakeholders who may be affected by the policy or proposal**

As public library services are universally open to all, and specifically to all who live, work or study in the borough (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 all those who wish may at any time wish to access any aspect of the service are by definition stakeholders.

In our brief we were asked to focus particularly on the impact of the library transformation programme on three groups:

- Children and young people
- Older people
- People with disabilities

This EIA therefore addresses the impact on these groups. As a result, we have not included in this EIA, the limited feedback specifically addressing the needs and impacts on the following groups: gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, unemployed and people from areas of high deprivation. However, where specific issues or feedback did emerge from our consultation, these are included in our main report.

As explained in the introduction to the main report, the survey was open and so the participants were self-selecting. As a result, the results cannot be assumed to be representative of the views of the general population, particularly when considering smaller sub-sets of the survey's respondents. We have treated the survey results as providing general indications which we have then tested further in focus groups and interviews and against our own findings and observations.

While summarising in this EIA what people have told us, our findings on the degree of impact also reflect the *differential impact* on each group.

**The decision-making route being taken (e.g. business planning, committee) and date of decision**

As indicated above this is not a formal Barnet Council EIA and as such will not require any decisions to be made at this stage. Activist's wider report on the Evaluation of the Library Transformation, to which this EIA will form an appendix, will however be considered by the Community Leadership and Libraries Committee at its meeting on 5 March 2020 and will include any recommendations that may have arisen from this EIA. Before agreeing on actions in response to Activist's recommendations, the Council should consider updating its own EIA.



### 3. Supporting evidence

What existing data informs your assessment of the impact of the proposal on protected groups of service users?

Identify the main sources of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, that supports your analysis. Please note: the protected groups we are most focused on are shown in italics.

Protected group	What does the data tell you?	What do people tell you?
<p><i>Age: older people</i></p>	<p>Barnet's JSNA states that by broad age band Barnet has a similar population profile to Outer London but when compared to the United Kingdom, Barnet and Outer London have a lower proportion of people in the 65 and over category. The 2018 figure for residents aged 65 and over was estimated at 56,400. The number of people in this category is predicted to increase by 33% between 2018 and 2030 compared with only a 4% increase for working age adults (aged 16-64).</p> <p>A substantial majority in the 85+ age group are living in their own homes in the community, against a background of limiting long term illness and possible social isolation.</p> <p>From our survey data we know that many in the over-65 age group visit a library frequently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least once a week. 34%</li> <li>• At least once a month. 33%</li> <li>• At least every 3 months 17%</li> <li>• At least once-twice a year 8%</li> <li>• Not once over the last year 6%</li> </ul>	<p>In chapters 3 to 6 of Activist's main report, we have included a section 'what people have told us'. In general, older people reported very similar concerns to other service users. There were some variations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older people are less satisfied with the range of books available: 45% compared with 56% for under 65s responding to our survey.</li> <li>• Older people tend to less aware of, and make less use of, online materials and eBooks.</li> <li>• Older people are no less familiar or comfortable using technology than any other groups.</li> <li>• Use of the Home Library Service is comparatively high.</li> <li>• Our survey indicates that people over 65 are only slightly more likely to be dissatisfied with the availability of staff (64% compared with 61% for under 65s) and 68% said more availability of staff would encourage them to use the library more.</li> <li>• However, survey respondents in this age group are more likely to know when staff are on duty at the library they use most often (57% compared with 43% for under 65s).</li> <li>• Older people don't in general appear to experience any more problems getting into the library than anyone else. All</li> </ul>

Protected group	What does the data tell you?	What do people tell you?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't know 2%</li> </ul> <p>Barnet already has a notably high number of Home Delivery Library Service users in the CIPFA Comparator Group (see our main report at Section 5).</p>	<p>groups expressed dissatisfaction to some extent (e.g. overall respondents 44%; over 65s 43%; disabled 51%).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our focused interviews and public meetings suggested that there were older people who make use of the extended hours made possible by SSO; are happy to use it; and have no difficulty gaining access. We found they were more likely to be, in principle, opposed to SSO.</li> <li>Older people appeared to be slightly less dissatisfied with toilets.</li> <li>Older people were more dissatisfied than satisfied with safety and security when using a library during SSO, but no more so than under 65s.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Age: children and young people</b></p>	<p>Barnet's JSNA states that by broad age band Barnet has a similar population profile to Outer London but when compared to the United Kingdom, Barnet and Outer London have a higher proportion of people within the 0-15 category. The 2018 figure for residents aged 0-19 was estimated at 98,800. The number of people aged 0-19 is predicted to decrease by 2% between 2018 and 2030.</p> <p>Educational attainment is high (3rd highest in CIPFA Comparator Group). 8% of Barnet's primary school population have English as an additional language and there are 177 languages other than English spoken as the first language by primary school pupils.</p> <p>There is also a higher than average % of school age pupils with CAHMS support needs that may potentially continue into their adult life.</p>	<p>Further details of what young people told us are shown in the 'what people have told us' sections of the main Activist report. It should be noted that the response rates to the survey for young people was much lower than other groups, so the results should be treated with caution. Our focus groups with young people and feedback from parents, youth workers and educationalists have fleshed out our findings. Some highlights are provided here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people are generally unhappy about availability of information on SSO, the process for applying to use it, and the age restriction.</li> <li>Young people are less likely to know when staff are on duty at the library they use most often.</li> <li>A visit to the local library is often a parent/carer and child experience, particularly at pre-school age and activities at</li> </ul>

Protected group	What does the data tell you?	What do people tell you?
	<p>This data suggests that educational standards and attainment may overall be high but with significant specific needs for a % of the population. in the borough attended Pupil Referral Units (n=85), for pupils who cannot attend mainstream From the JSNA: In Barnet, the estimated prevalence of mental disorders in CYP aged 5-16 is 8.3% (based on 2015 figures), which is the 6th lowest of all the London local authorities and lower than both London overall (9.3%) and England (9.2%).</p> <p>Our Young Peoples survey indicates that young people use the library:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least once a week. 20%</li> <li>• At least once a month. 31%</li> <li>• At least every 3 months 13%</li> <li>• At least 1-2 a year 15%</li> <li>• Not once over the last year 9%</li> <li>• Don't know 13%</li> </ul>	<p>the library will similarly be of importance. We were told that the reduction in staffed opening hours has had a negative effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older children and younger people will increasingly have homework information needs as well as study space, particularly during pre-exam periods.</li> <li>• The need for study space away from the home is higher for children of families experiencing deprivation or housing difficulties.</li> <li>• Young people were particularly unhappy about the lack of access to toilets during SSO, possibly reflecting the fact that they spend longer in the library when they use it to study.</li> </ul>
<b>Disability</b>	<p>Barnet's JSNA states that in 2018, there are an estimated 6,100 adults in the borough aged under 65 with learning disability and 1,176 older people (aged 65+) giving a total of 7,276 adults for Barnet. As of 2018, there are an estimated 23,735 adults in Barnet with either a moderate or serious physical disability and based on projections from PANSI, this figure may increase to 28,907 by 2035, a rise of 22%.</p>	<p>In chapters 3 to 6 of Activist's main report, we have included a section 'what people have told us'. In general, people with disabilities reported similar concerns to other service users. There were some variations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with disabilities appear to prefer to visit a library when staff are on duty.</li> <li>• Our survey indicates that people with disabilities have a higher level of dissatisfaction with availability of staff (71%</li> </ul>

Protected group	What does the data tell you?	What do people tell you?
		<p>compared with 61% for those who said they did not have a disability.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with disabilities feel less confident using self-service technology to access the library and carry out transactions without any staff present. Our survey shows a higher dissatisfaction amongst disabled people with the ease of use and reliability of SSO equipment (49% compared with 38% for those who said they did not have a disability).</li> <li>• People with disabilities are particularly concerned about access to toilets during SSO. Our survey indicates that a high percentage of people with disabilities are dissatisfied with the fact that toilets may be closed (80% compared with 68% for those who said they did not have a disability).</li> <li>• A number of people with disabilities reported particular concerns or incidents that had impacts on them that related to their particular disability. A sample is highlighted in the report.</li> </ul>

## 4. Assessing impact

What does the evidence tell you about the impact your proposal may have on groups with protected characteristics?

Protected characteristics	For each protected characteristic, explain in detail what the evidence is suggesting and the impact of your proposal (if any). Is there an impact on service delivery? Is there an impact on customer satisfaction?	Positive impact	Minor negative impact	Major negative impact	No impact
<b>Age: older people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnet’s JSNA states that by broad age band Barnet has a similar population profile to Outer London but, when compared to the United Kingdom, Barnet and Outer London have a lower proportion of people in the 65 and over category. The number of people in this category is, however, predicted to increase by 33% between 2018 and 2030. There will also be an increasing number of people in the 85+ age range including many needing more support to live independently:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This will increase demand for the Home and Mobile Library Service, therefore Barnet’s decision to retain this service will have been of benefit.</li> <li>○ Distance from a static library may be particularly important for this category, therefore Barnet’s decision not to close any library will have been of benefit.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• This group tend to prefer to visit a library when there are staff on duty although they also appear to be better informed about staffed opening hours. This group, particularly those at the upper end of the age range, is more likely to experience social isolation and a reduction in staffed hours may have had a negative impact.</li> <li>• This group had mixed feelings about SSO. Some were opposed in principle and were discouraged by a range of factors; others welcomed the longer opening hours and were confident in using the technology.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Protected characteristics	For each protected characteristic, explain in detail what the evidence is suggesting and the impact of your proposal (if any). Is there an impact on service delivery? Is there an impact on customer satisfaction?	Positive impact	Minor negative impact	Major negative impact	No impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to toilets in libraries is of greater importance to this group, hence keeping toilets closed during some SSO hours may have had a negative impact.</li> <li>• This group make have a greater tendency to visit the library to borrow books or use other print media and to be less satisfied with the range on offer.</li> <li>• Overall, this group appears not to have experienced a higher degree of impact than other groups and the degree of impact on them varies.</li> </ul>				
<b>Age: Children and young people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This group makes high use of libraries. Under 5s will benefit from the ongoing provision of a programme of activities, but the reduction in opening hours introduces a greater degree of inconvenience to parents and carers who want to take their children to the library.</li> <li>• A key impact has been upon older children in the age below which unaccompanied access is currently allowed (16 or 15 if in Year 11 and with authorisation from parent/carer and school). Study space in libraries is important to this group and the evidence indicates that the reduction in study space as well as the age restriction on unaccompanied use of the library during SSO has had a significant negative impact.</li> <li>• Conversely, young people whose age qualifies them for access will have benefited from the increased hours due to SSO but this will not benefit those whose parents or guardians have not allowed them to use SSO.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Protected characteristics	For each protected characteristic, explain in detail what the evidence is suggesting and the impact of your proposal (if any). Is there an impact on service delivery? Is there an impact on customer satisfaction?	Positive impact	Minor negative impact	Major negative impact	No impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to toilets in libraries is of greater importance to this group, hence keeping toilets closed during some SSO hours may have had a negative impact.</li> <li>• Overall, although there have been positive impacts for some in this group, the reductions in staffed opening hours and SSO have a greater negative impact on young people who fall below the age threshold for being able to use SSO. We consider the impact to be major on young people.</li> </ul>				
<b>Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, the experience of people with disabilities has been similar to other groups. There are specific aspects of the changes which appear to have a particular impact on their experience.</li> <li>• A key requirement for this group is access and whilst the library premises had already provided good physical access the introduction of additional technology to enter during SSO may have impacted negatively on this group, together with the reduction in space, which is viewed more negatively than by other groups.</li> <li>• This group has a strong preference to visit a library when there are staff on duty, reflecting a need for support in a variety of ways including assistance using library technology inside the library, assistance to find information, or help reaching materials placed on higher shelves, and have therefore have been adversely impacted by the reduction in staffed hours.</li> <li>• Access to toilets in libraries is of greater importance to this group, hence keeping toilets closed during some SSO hours has been experienced as having a negative impact for many users in this group.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Protected characteristics	For each protected characteristic, explain in detail what the evidence is suggesting and the impact of your proposal (if any). Is there an impact on service delivery? Is there an impact on customer satisfaction?	Positive impact	Minor negative impact	Major negative impact	No impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While the overall experience of people with disabilities may be similar to those of other groups, we were informed of experiences and concerns that indicate significant impacts on particular forms of disability. We consider the impact to be major on a proportion of people with disabilities and minor for others.</li> </ul>				

## 5. Cumulative impact

Considering what else is happening within the council and Barnet could your proposal contribute to a cumulative impact on groups with protected characteristics?

Yes          No  

If you clicked the Yes box, which groups with protected characteristics could be affected and what is the potential impact? Include details in the space below:

Given that our evidence suggests a negative impact on many older people and people with disabilities there may have been a cumulative negative impact on older people, particularly in the upper age range, with a disability. Given that the data also suggests an increasingly ageing population the cumulative impact needs to be considered carefully and addressed.

Younger people from disadvantaged backgrounds are perceived to be negatively impacted if they need access to study space or IT equipment.

Due to the low return rates for people from a number of ethnic groups, there may be cumulative impacts that have not been detected.

## 6. Actions to mitigate or remove negative impact

Only complete this chapter if your proposals may have a negative impact on groups with protected characteristics. These need to be included in the relevant service plan for mainstreaming and performance management purposes.

NOTE: Given the comprehensive nature of the 2015 EIA and that the service has continued to monitor, review and update the mitigations it identified, the focus here will be only on those areas of impact that have not yet been adequately addressed or for which further actions are required. The mitigations proposed here summarise the recommendations in the main body of the Activist report.

<b>Group affected</b> <i>(our principal areas of focus are shown in italics)</i>	<b>Potential negative impact</b>	<b>Mitigation measures</b> <i>If you are unable to identify measures to mitigate impact, please state so and provide a brief explanation.</i>	<b>Monitoring</b> <i>How will you assess whether these measures are successfully mitigating the impact?</i>	<b>Deadline date</b>	<b>Lead officer</b> <i>Where not already in place to be identified by service.</i>
<b>Age: older people</b>	Reluctance on the part of some older users to use libraries when there are no staff on duty.  Increased sense of social isolation.	Increase staffed opening hours.  Deploy volunteers in a Meet and Greet role at libraries for a number of hours a week.  Target older people to become volunteers.  A renewed Here to Help initiative to register more people as users of SSO.	Analysis of data on the use of libraries by this age group if data can be matched effectively.  Customer satisfaction surveys.  Feedback from library and security staff and from volunteers during volunteer supported sessions.	To be decided by the Council following its consideration of our recommendations.	N/A

<b>Group affected</b> <i>(our principal areas of focus are shown in italics)</i>	<b>Potential negative impact</b>	<b>Mitigation measures</b> <i>If you are unable to identify measures to mitigate impact, please state so and provide a brief explanation.</i>	<b>Monitoring</b> <i>How will you assess whether these measures are successfully mitigating the impact?</i>	<b>Deadline date</b>	<b>Lead officer</b> <i>Where not already in place to be identified by service.</i>
	Low awareness and take-up of online resources and eBooks.	Maintain media fund at current levels.  Better promotion of the Online Library.	Analysis of trends in use by this age group if data can be matched effectively.  Customer satisfaction surveys.	To be decided by the Council following its consideration of our recommendations.	N/A
<b><i>Age: children and young people</i></b>	Young people excluded from using libraries during SSO hours.	Pilot reduction of the age of unaccompanied access.  Increase staffed opening hours.	Analysis of data on the use of libraries by this age group if data can be matched effectively.  Customer satisfaction surveys.	To be decided by the Council following its consideration of our recommendations.	N/A
	Insufficient study space.	Consider opportunities for increasing the footprint of libraries as opportunities present themselves.	Analysis of data on the use of libraries by this age group if data can be matched effectively.  Customer satisfaction surveys.	To be decided by the Council following its consideration of our recommendations.	N/A

<b>Group affected</b> <i>(our principal areas of focus are shown in italics)</i>	<b>Potential negative impact</b>	<b>Mitigation measures</b> <i>If you are unable to identify measures to mitigate impact, please state so and provide a brief explanation.</i>	<b>Monitoring</b> <i>How will you assess whether these measures are successfully mitigating the impact?</i>	<b>Deadline date</b>	<b>Lead officer</b> <i>Where not already in place to be identified by service.</i>
<b><i>Disability</i></b>	People with disabilities reluctant to use libraries due to their preference for staff presence to support access to building, facilities and materials.	Increase staffed opening hours. Deploy volunteers in a Meet and Greet role at libraries for a number of hours a week. Target people with disabilities to become volunteers. A renewed Here to Help initiative to register more people as users of SSO Consider opportunities for increasing the footprint of libraries as opportunities present themselves.	Analysis of data on the use of libraries by this group if data can be matched effectively. Customer satisfaction surveys.	To be decided by the Council following its consideration of our recommendations.	N/A