

Committee:	Date:
Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee – For Information	13/07/2020
Community and Children’s Services – For Information	24/07/2020
Subject: Phased reopening of lending libraries	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Information
Report author: Carol Boswarthack, Head of Barbican and Community Libraries	

Summary

In line with government instructions, the City’s three lending libraries have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic since late March 2020. Reopening libraries comes in Phase 3 of the Government’s plans – that is, from 4 July onwards. Reopening plans are subject to the approval of building risk assessments by the City Surveyor. In the case of Barbican Library, they are also dependant on the Barbican Centre having started its own phased reopening. In order to offer a contactless service, the installation of new self-service machines, which were procured prior to lockdown, is also essential. We have worked closely with all our City and non-City partners and are planning to reopen all three libraries on 20 July, with services redesigned to prioritise the safety of customers and staff, reinstating the statutory service of book lending, and allowing use of a number of socially distanced public computers for essential needs. In this first phase, libraries will look and feel very different and some services, such as group activities, will not take place in the physical spaces.

Since the libraries closed, staff have worked to create and develop a ‘Library without walls’. Many services and events have become virtual and, for the foreseeable future, the digital programme will continue.

Recommendation

Members of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee are asked to:

- Note the approach to opening all three lending libraries on 20 July 2020.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London has three lending libraries: Barbican Library; Shoe Lane Library; and Artizan Street Library and Community Centre. Together these comprise Barbican and Community Libraries (B&CL). All have been closed due to

COVID-19 since late March. The closures were made in line with the section's own Business Continuity and COVID-19 pandemic plans.

2. Public libraries are a statutory service and the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 provides for the free lending of books. In recent years, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS's) Library Taskforce has redefined libraries as community hubs that offer safe, neutral community spaces to all customers with trusted staff. As such, our lending libraries are perfectly positioned to carry out a range of services and activities that have a positive impact on many aspects of our customers' lives, including their health and wellbeing. In addition to the provision of comprehensive lending stock, modern library priorities include social inclusion and social mobility, alongside the more traditional activities of promoting reading for pleasure, supporting literacy and learning and providing access to culture. Public computers with internet access and a range of Microsoft products are standard in all UK public libraries.
3. Our libraries are well used, with around 28,000 members who borrowed 421,962 physical items of stock in 2019/20. Most of our members are City workers, many of whom are currently working from home or furloughed.
4. The City's libraries loan digital and physical stock: eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and eComics are available to download, alongside other digital services such as language learning, streaming music and video and online reference tools. The majority of these services are accessible from home.
5. Since November 2018, Barbican and Shoe Lane libraries have provided a UK Visa biometric capture service on behalf of the Home Office. This service is operated by library staff in partnership with Libraries Connected, the organisation representing the Heads of Service of all UK public libraries, and Sopra Steria, the IT company commissioned by the Home Office. Our libraries receive payment for this work.

Current Position

6. During this period of closure, library staff working from home have built a 'Library without walls'.
 - a. Staff have created a new range of virtual experiences for families to enjoy. The weekly virtual timetables for children and adults are available at Appendix 1.
 - b. Temporary online membership was agreed with our eBook aggregator in the first week of lockdown. New customers can immediately access eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines, eComics, language learning, streaming music and video and online reference materials from home.
 - c. Extra digital stock has been purchased by diverting funds from the physical stock budget. All UK library services also received a small grant of £1,000 from Arts Council England for additional eBook stocks. Digital resources that support social inclusion, good mental health, and parents who are home-schooling children have been prioritised for purchase.

- d. Feedback from library customers has been wholly positive, with the virtual activities receiving thousands of views on social media. In comparison with February 2020, downloading of eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines in May 2020 has increased by 257%, 88% and 21% respectively.
7. During lockdown, library staff have delivered a wider project for the Department of Community and Children's Services by phoning residents who are shielding and helping to assess their need for food, medicines, and so on. They have also been making 'befriending' calls to housebound library customers who previously were in receipt of a home delivery service.
8. In May, our staff phoned 353 resident library customers aged 70 and above to ask if they would be interested in receiving a contactless home delivery service while they are in lockdown: 37 households accepted this offer and, in late May, the first deliveries were made by a small team of library staff who can walk or cycle to work. This service has been very well received by residents.

Options

9. Lending libraries are eligible to open Phase 3 of the Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy – that is, from 4 July 2020.
10. Senior B&CL managers have been working with Public Health England, Libraries Connected, DCMS, the City's Health and Safety Manager, and the City Surveyor's department on a detailed recovery plan for all lending libraries, with accompanying risk assessments. Full consultation with staff has also taken place. These plans incorporate the appropriate measures needed to protect the health and safety of staff and library customers, as well as assessing the vulnerability of all frontline staff.
11. The proposed reopening date for all libraries is 20 July 2020. Barbican Library is contained within the Barbican Centre, and the library cannot reopen until the Centre has started its own phased reopening. This date has been provisionally agreed with Barbican Centre colleagues. Prior to lockdown, B&CL had procured self-service equipment for all libraries. This kit (comprising kiosks for issue and return of items with payment facilities and security gates) will be key to delivering a contactless service. Senior managers have been working with the supplier, Bibliotheca, to arrange for the new kit to be installed prior to reopening. The installation timing has slipped due to lockdown but has been renegotiated and will allow for the new self-service kit to be installed and tested in July, with staff trained in its use at all libraries prior to reopening.
12. In Phase 1, libraries will have amended opening times. Transport for London (TfL) has asked that services planning to reopen stagger their hours to avoid staff using the transport network at peak times, and to promote TfL tools (such as their digital cycling map and walking routes with times between stations) to would-be visitors.

The following hours have been selected for the benefit of our hyperlocal communities, and should allow for those who are working from home or elsewhere to include a visit to the library during the day.

The proposed opening hours are:

Barbican Library

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11am – 3:30pm

Tuesday, Thursday 11am – 7pm

Shoe Lane Library

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 11am – 4pm

Tuesday 12 noon – 6:30pm

Artizan Street Library and Community Centre

Monday 12 noon – 6:30 pm

Tuesday to Friday 11am – 4pm

13. The Phase 1 library service will look and feel very different. The current Government advice requires a “one-metre plus” distance between people. This prevents our libraries from running any group activities within the buildings, including children’s activities, talks, classes and reading groups. It also impacts on the reading and study facilities, which will not be available. The number of people who can be in our spaces will be limited as will the range of services that can be offered. For the foreseeable future, the ‘Library without walls’ online activities and home delivery to older residents will continue.
14. To allow customers who live outside of the City time to return their borrowed items without needing to make an unnecessary journey, all loans have been renewed until 31 July 2020. As many people are expected to be working from home for some time to come, we are also removing the limits on renewals so that those who are unable to visit the City without making a special journey and using public transport are not disadvantaged.
15. A number of measures will be taken to ensure customer and staff safety. These include: sanitiser stations, which customers entering the libraries will be required to use; perspex screens on all enquiry desks; antibacterial spray and paper towels available at all high-touch points; and returned items will be quarantined for 72 hours.
16. To ensure that our services are compliant with Government regulations on social distancing, we will use floor markings to provide socially distanced queues, both outside the main entrances and within the buildings. A member of staff will be stationed at the main entrances during opening hours. Their duties will include: triaging the queue (for example, taking returned items from people); informing people of what they can do in the library space; controlling the number of people in the spaces; and assisting with a new ‘Select and Collect’ service, which will allow customers to email the libraries with their book selections in advance of their visits. These selections will be issued to them by staff and bagged up for

collection on an agreed day. The children's library will also offer pre-selected 'lucky dip' bags of stock suitable for different age groups.

17. The Visa biometric service will not be reintroduced at this stage. Sopra Steria has informed us that, to clear the backlog caused by the COVID-19 lockdown, they will be reclaiming the equipment in our libraries for use in a high-density setting. Currently, the intention is to return the equipment to libraries in time, and compensation is being negotiated via Libraries Connected.

18. Most staff will work shorter shifts. This will allow for travel at off-peak times, alleviate pressure on staff spaces, and allow them to continue to work from home on the ongoing virtual projects.

Proposals

19. Members of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee are asked to note – in principle – a phased approach of reopening the B&CL from 20 July 2020.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

20. B&CL recovery plans are relevant to the following City key priorities (Corporate Plan 2015–2019):

- To provide modern, efficient and high-quality local services, including policing, within the Square Mile for workers, residents and visitors
- To provide valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure, to London and the nation.

21. It is also relevant to the following Department of Community and Children's Services strategic aims:

- Priority Potential: People of all ages can achieve their ambitions through education, training and lifelong learning
- Priority Independence, Involvement and Choice: People of all ages can live independently, play a role in their communities and exercise choice over their services
- Priority Community: People of all ages feel part of, engaged with and able to shape their community

22. The vision of B&CL is to help individuals and communities live their best lives by supporting:

- reading and literacy
- health and wellbeing
- social mobility
- social interaction
- culture and creativity.

Financial Implications

23. All costs for social distancing and other mitigations required to enable reopening may be met from local risk budget allocations for 2020/21, and have been accounted for within the recent (5 June 2020) forecasting exercise undertaken by budget holders in collaboration with the Chamberlain.
24. It should be noted that, until City workers and other visitors return and confidence is restored, revenues for all lending libraries will be significantly reduced, and it is unlikely that the above costs will be offset.

Conclusion

25. The City's lending libraries have produced comprehensive recovery plans for a proposed reopening on 20 July 2020, which ensure the safety of customers and staff and allow for the restoration of the statutory services and the provision of essential public computer use for our hyperlocal communities. In Phase 1, opening hours and space-based services will be limited, but the virtual service will continue to be developed.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – 'Library without walls' virtual timetables for adults and children

Carol Boswarthack

Head of Barbican and Community Libraries

T: 020 7332 1123

E: carol.boswarthack@cityoflondon.gov.uk