

Committee(s)	Dated:
Culture, Heritage and Libraries Community and Children's Services	23 November 2020 11 December 2020
Subject: Barbican and Community Libraries – exemptions for service during the second lockdown	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3 and 4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	Revenue funding
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
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Summary

The regulations governing the current second national lockdown list several exemptions for English Public Libraries. These are: 'Click and Collect' services, essential computer use, schools' library services, home delivery services and digital and virtual services. All these services will be delivered by Barbican and Community Libraries (B&CL) staff at least until the lockdown is lifted.

These exemptions were made because of the proven positive impact that public libraries have on people's mental health, and on social and digital inclusion. There was also positive feedback about the support that library staff gave to local authority pandemic plans during the first lockdown and beyond. This impact is detailed in two recently published reports from the Carnegie UK Trust (*Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead*), and Libraries Connected (*Libraries in Lockdown*) (see Appendices). The key findings in the Carnegie UK Trust report are:

- Public library services had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown: more than 60% of those who engaged with public library services pointed to a range of benefits they derived from this engagement.
- Public library staff made a valuable contribution to the COVID-19 response: some of the specialist outreach services implemented by local authorities in lockdown required or mirrored the core skill set that library staff deployed day-to-day pre-COVID-19.
- Public library services and their staff could have delivered much more

but faced barriers in doing so. Some UK library services experienced the following challenges:

1. The limitations of a digital mode of delivering services
2. Factors external to the sector, such as the extent of understanding within a local authority of what the library service does and how it can contribute
3. Factors internal to the sector, including consistency and visibility of the library offer during lockdown
4. Organisational culture; effective communication and engagement with the public; preparedness and contingency planning; partnerships; and digital skills.

B&CL staff were not unduly affected by any of these limitations.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report.

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 B&CL.
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 Libraries Taskforce has redefined libraries as community hubs with trusted staff that offer safe, neutral community spaces to all customers. 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 lend 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. During the first lockdown, B&CL staff quickly established a full and varied range of virtual activities – our ‘Library without walls’ – for customers of all ages. This includes the Dragon Café in the City, virtual Rhymetimes, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) Club and craft activities for children and families, and online talks and clubs. Staff have made heavy use of social media (including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) and clubs, talks and events are held via Zoom. Our eLibrary has been heavily advertised, and use of services has soared. Staff also responded to online or emailed enquiries on any topic and provided remote IT training to assist digitally isolated customers to get online.
6. Our libraries also offered an extended, contactless home delivery service to all housebound City resident customers, including those aged 70 and older who had been advised to shield. Library staff made befriending calls to many elderly and lonely library members. Additionally, a group of trained and DBS-checked library staff phoned all shielding City residents to help assist with their food, medical and social needs.
7. Feedback from people engaging with our library services has been universally positive with a large number describing them as “a lifeline”.
8. All our libraries reopened on 20 July 2020 with extensive COVID-19 safety measures and detailed risk assessments of spaces and processes in place. All have offered a limited range of space-based services which include a full enquiries service and time-limited browsing and computer use. Our virtual services continue to be provided and are constantly refreshed.
9. Across the country, public libraries responded to lockdown in similar ways. Two recently published reports from Carnegie UK Trust and Libraries Connected detail the positive impact libraries had on both, the lives of their customers and local authority pandemic responses. These reports are attached as appendices.

Current Position

10. The regulations governing the current second lockdown were passed by parliament on 4 November 2020 and, until 2 December 2020, library buildings must close to the public. However, due to the positive impact made by public libraries during the first lockdown, there are a number of exempted services that our staff can continue to offer, including:
 - **Home delivery:** B&CL offered its home delivery service to housebound City residents throughout lockdown and will continue to do so. The service was subject to a COVID-19 risk assessment to ensure that it is carried out safely.
 - **Schools Library Service:** The Schools Library Service is operated by Barbican Children’s Library staff and provides local schools with termly project loans to support the National Curriculum. The loans are delivered and collected by the library service’s own drivers using the

section's electric van. The service has been risk assessed to ensure that it is COVID-19 safe.

- **Digital and virtual services:** As detailed in paragraphs 4 and 5 (above), our digital and virtual services have been a source of comfort, education and pleasure to many thousands of library customers. Staff will continue to expand our eLibrary and provision of virtual events, clubs and activities will continue for the foreseeable future.
- **Click and Collect:** Click and Collect services are brand new and aimed at those people who can visit the libraries on foot or by bike. The City's service is called 'Select and Collect', and is available at all three libraries from Monday 9 November 2020. Customers can consult the library catalogue online and phone or email their chosen library with the titles of the books they wish to collect. Staff will find the books, issue them to the customer's membership card and advise when they can be collected. Collection will take place from the rear of Barbican Library, opposite Shakespeare Tower, and from the main entrance at Shoe Lane and Artizan Street Libraries.
- **Essential computer use:** This service targets local people who have no IT access at home and who need to get online. Barbican Centre is closed to the public and with no separate external library entrance, it is not possible to offer this service from Barbican Library but it will operate from the socially distanced public computers at Shoe Lane and Artizan Street libraries. Customers have been advised to phone ahead and reserve a timeslot. They will not be allowed to wait inside the library for a computer to become free, and staff will clean the equipment between uses.

11. Our new services have been publicised in a number of ways:

- Information has been emailed to all library customers who have supplied an email address.
- Corporate Communications will issue a news release.
- Colleagues in Housing and Early Years will publicise via their networks and publications.
- Notification is on the library website and the catalogue. Staff are publicising via social media channels and local networks.

12. Feedback from library customers has been universally complimentary and positive. Responses to the all-customer email include:

"Many thanks for your email about the service you're offering during lockdown. Your books are helping keep me sane in these strange times, so I'm most grateful for all that you and your staff are providing."

"Thank you. This is really helpful. Thank you for finding ways to be operative despite the obstacles."

"Just to say thanks so much. What a super efficient service this morning!"

"I was so pleased to read that you are beginning a 'Select and Collect' service. I would love to take advantage."

“Thank you very much for offering this new service – really great!”

“Thank you for offering your services during this challenging time.”

“Thank you very much for offering this service!”

“I received your email about the Select and Collect services, and I would like to request some books! I'm super happy you are offering this service, it's incredibly appreciated right now to be able to borrow books to keep me company during lockdown :)”

“Many thanks for offering a ‘Click and Collect’ service; it is a tremendous idea.”

13. Library staff have once again assisted in contacting the new list of shielding residents by telephone to check their needs. It has been noted that their skill set and customer-facing experience makes them a perfect choice for this work.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications –

14. B&CL recovery plans are relevant to the following City key priorities (Corporate Plan 2018–23):
 - 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.

15. 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
 - 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

16. There are no additional financial implications arising from these exempted services.

Resource implications

17. There are no additional resource implications. The services will be delivered using existing, stock, equipment and staff.

Risk implications

18. All our services have been carefully assessed for COVID-19 safety.

Equalities implications

19. These library services comply with our public Sector Equality Duty 2010 and will have a positive impact on local customers of all ages, including children and the elderly. Home delivery services especially have a positive impact on City residents who are elderly and/or disabled.

Climate implications

20. None

Security implications

21. None

Conclusion

22. The City's lending libraries have quickly responded to the second lockdown, and the permitted exemptions for public libraries have been swiftly implemented and well-received by customers. Nationally, UK public libraries have been recognised and praised for responding to both national lockdowns with innovation and expertise.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead*, Carnegie UK Trust
- Appendix 2 – *Libraries in Lockdown*, Libraries Connected

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