

Committee(s): Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Information Community and Children’s Service- For Information	Dated: 16/09/2024 11/11/2024
Subject: Barbican and Community Libraries Update 2024	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Information
Report author: Rachel Levy, Head of Barbican and Community Libraries, Department of Community and Children’s Services	

Summary

This report provides an overview of Barbican and Community Libraries since 2023. Members are asked to note the wide variety of events, activities and projects offered by the service to support both the learning and development and economic needs of people in the communities who use them.

Visits and issues have been steadily increasing in all three libraries post-pandemic, and the service is continuing to support the wider work of the sector through collaboration with other departments, other boroughs and national organisations.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the 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 Barbican and Community Libraries.
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 (DCMS) Library Taskforce has redefined libraries as community hubs with trusted staff, offering 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 30,000 members who borrowed nearly 273,000 physical items of stock in 2023/24. Most of our members are City workers, but they are also well used by local families, students and visitors to the City.
4. Barbican and Community Libraries has been increasing its e-library stock annually since the pandemic to meet demand. This includes e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines and e-comics, alongside other digital services such as language learning, streaming music and video and online reference tools. An additional e-audiobook provider, Borrowbox, was offered to City of London library users in 2023 to increase the number of titles that could be borrowed. In 2023-24, a total of 31,197 e-books and 23,289 e-audiobooks were loaned.

Current Position

All Libraries

1. In 2023-24, a total of 341,486 people visited the libraries, with 263,651 of these being at Barbican Library. This is 77% of pre-pandemic visits. So far in 2024-25, there have been 93,470 physical visits to the libraries, and it is therefore anticipated that this will increase to approximately 85% of pre-pandemic numbers.
2. The Stock Policy for Barbican and Community Libraries (Appendix 1) has recently been updated, including incorporating elements of the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals (CILIP) guidance *Managing Safe and Inclusive Library Services* (2023). The service has also just adopted a *Green Libraries Strategy* (Appendix 2), which is underpinned by CILIP's *Green Library Manifesto* and aligned with the City of London's *Climate Strategy 2020-27*.
3. The City of London has been the lead authority in a pan-London pilot project to create the *Read On by London Libraries* app, which supports and encourages people to read more often. This was funded by the British Library with Arts Council England and was developed by Novellic, a start-up company with expertise in developing apps for people who are interested in books and reading. The app was launch in July 2024 and is available for android and iOS

via Google Play and The App Store. As well as logging reading time, the app is designed to encourage people to engage more with their local, London, library through quizzes, challenges and an interactive map of all the London public libraries.

4. Barbican & Community Libraries has also been one of 16 English library services taking part in a Libraries Connected, Arts Council England (ACE) funded, e-book licensing project, which aims to increase affordability and availability of digital content to public library services. The results from this pilot are being collated currently and a full report is expected later this year.
5. A library customer survey was carried out in the summer of 2023. This showed that 97% of users are satisfied or very satisfied with the services being offered. The library teams have been working on the feedback from this survey, improving stock provision at all three libraries and developing a project to refurbish Barbican Library, which will be funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy.
6. The delivery service which takes items between the libraries has been outsourced to the City of London Corporation's contracted courier service, CitySprint. This has resulted in a more cost-effective service and all deliveries are now done by bicycle, ensuring it is carbon neutral. Barbican and Community Libraries are the only library service in the country moving items between libraries in this way.

Barbican Library

7. The construction of the Bostock Community Meeting Room is expected to take place in January-March 2025, following on from a requirement to redesign due to budget constraints. Once completed, there will be an active and varied events, activities and groups programme for the local communities and an increase in income for Barbican and Community Libraries.
8. From January to July 2024, the Music Library hosted its most successful exhibition yet *From the Caribbean to Coventry – Plotting the Rise of 2Tone*. Over 60,000 people visited the Music Library during that time, including several celebrities from the 2Tone and other related music scenes. Nearly £5,000 in income from merchandise sales was raised for the library service, plus a further £3,000 for the charity Tonic Music for Mental Health. The next Music Library exhibition, *I'm Not Okay: An Emo Retrospective*, will launch in October 2024, and is a collaboration with the Museum of Youth Culture on the subculture of 'Emo'. A call out for people to bring memorabilia for the exhibition has been picked up by The Evening Standard and BBC Radio 4.
9. The art exhibition programme in foyer of Barbican Library has been redeveloped to ensure it is more inclusive and diverse, including photography

by the writer Andrian Whittle featuring images from his travels in Bangladesh, Cuba, India and Myanmar, artwork from a North London group for young parents and a collaboration with the London College of Fashion, UAL on an exhibition called *Shifting Narratives*, which was co-created with refugees and asylum seekers across three east London boroughs.

10. Following on from the successful *Library Lates* programme, Barbican and Community Libraries have continued to collaborate with the Barbican Centre on both children's and adult events. There have been a series of well attended family storytelling events in the Conservatory and the Barbican Library and the Barbican Centre are co-hosting the second *Black British Book Festival* in October 2024, a celebration of Black British literature which brings together established authors and emerging voices for a day of culture, creativity, and community.
11. The *Read to Succeed* scheme has been relaunched in Barbican Children's Library. This is a volunteer-run scheme that supports children who are learning to read. There has also been a successful *New Leaf* project, which introduced children who face additional challenges (poverty, disability or caring responsibilities) and their families to the library and the City of London's green spaces through storytelling, movement, sensory activities, eco-art and supported travelling to Barbican Library and Epping Forest/Hampstead Heath. This was a collaboration between Barbican and Community Libraries, the City of London Early Help service and the Natural Environment Learning Team.

Shoe Lane Library

12. Shoe Lane Library continues to be the home of the Dragon Café in the City, a highly successful collaboration between the City of London and the charity Mental Fight Club. It supports people who live, work or visit the City to improve their mental wellbeing through participation in arts and wellbeing activities. Attendance has been steadily increasing since the pandemic, with 90% of attendees agreeing and strongly agreeing that their mental wellbeing has improved by participating in the sessions.
13. A partnership with Kings College has extended the talks programme in the library, giving post-graduates and lecturers the opportunity to bring their expertise to a wider audience, both in person and online, and increasing the number of visitors to Shoe Lane Library. The library team also run their own very popular online *Historical Discussion Group*, which helps the staff build confidence in their presentation skills and ensures a wide range of diverse topics are explored with a local and global audience.
14. Planning permission has now been granted for the redevelopment of Hill House, which will include a new, state-of-the-art, library for the West of the

City. Plans are being finalised with the developer, Landsec, for the temporary move to One New Change, which is expected to be in the winter of 2024-25.

15. Landsec became the direct landlord for the library in 2023, when the previous landlord, Deloitte, vacated the building. Deloitte had previously only charged the minimum required amount of £8000 per annum service charge. Landsec are now, however, running a full service charge account for the library, with the cost increasing to approximately £40,000 per year. This is in line with the existing lease and has been agreed by City Surveyors and Legal to be a lower sum than the existing lease might grant the landlord. In 2023-24, this increase will be covered by a 50% underspend in the rates budget. There may be a risk of either a budget reduction in other areas in the future or an increase in budget allocation required in the future.

Artizan Street Library and Community Centre

16. Since opening in September 2023, the Makerspace at Artizan Street Library and Community Centre has been used regularly by community groups and individuals to develop their creative and digital skills using the sewing machines, sublimation printer and 3D printer. There has been an on-going collaboration with the Recycling Team from the Environment Department, who hosted the very successful International Repair Day Workshop at the library.
17. The charity Family Action have been running a weekly Food Club from the main hall of the library since September 2023. This has so far benefited 202 family members in the local area by providing them with low cost, healthy, food. 95% of members have a household income below £30,000. Membership numbers are increasing each month and Family Action are currently seeking funding to continue the provision, as well as increase the offer of other wrap-around support activities for these families.
18. There has been a strong health and fitness focus to the work at Artizan Street Library and Community Centre in 2024. The library is taking part in the *Library Ball Project*, initiated by the charity Alive and Kicking and the City of London Corporation, where local people can borrow a football from the library just as they would a book. There has also been a collaboration with the Sports Strategy team to install a new digital fun and fitness games console in the small hall. In an area with limited outdoor activity space, this will enable local children to play fun, interactive, games that encourage them to be physically active.

Proposals

19. Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

Key Data

20. 2023-24, for all three libraries:

- 341,486 visits
- 272,834 physical items loaned
- 31,197 e-books and 23,289 e-audiobooks loaned
- 97% of library users were satisfied or very satisfied with the service offer
- 87% of library event attendees stated that the library had a positive impact on their health and/or wellbeing
- 95% of parents/carers stated that library's services and activities help with their child's development (co-ordination and motor skills, speech and language)

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

21. The services provided by Barbican and Community Libraries cut across all of the Corporate Plan 2024--2029 outcomes:

Diverse Engaged Communities

Dynamic Economic Growth

Leading Sustainable Environment

Vibrant Thriving Destination

Providing Excellent Services

Flourishing Public Spaces

22. Financial implications- Increase in service charge for Shoe Lane Library from £8000 per annum to approximately £40,000 per annum

Resource implications- None

Legal implications- None

Risk implications- None

Equalities implications – None

Climate implications- None

Security implications- None

Conclusion

23. The Barbican and Community Libraries team have been working hard over the last 18 months to ensure that the library service continues to meet the

needs of each libraries' local communities. Buildings are being modernised and new events, activities and projects are being developed to ensure a fully inclusive service with the potential to attract new users.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Stock Policy

Appendix 2 – Green Libraries Strategy

Background Papers

None

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