

Committee(s): Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Information	Dated: 19-01-2026
Subject: Barbican and Community Libraries Update January 2026	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes - Diverse Engaged Communities - Dynamic Economic Growth - Vibrant Thriving Destination 	
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay- Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	
Report author: Rachel Levy- Head of Barbican and Community Libraries	

Summary

This report provides an overview of the main activities, programmes, changes and pressures for Barbican and Community Libraries currently. Members are asked to note the challenges for Barbican Library and Shoe Lane Library in respect to the redevelopment and repair of the buildings they are currently located in. Also highlighted in the report is the agreement of the Children's Partnership Board to progress a proposal that Artizan Street Library and Community Centre becomes a key site for Best Start Family Hub services.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

All Libraries

1. There are currently over 20,000 active members of Barbican & Community Libraries. This has steadily been increasing since the pandemic recovery in 2022-23. Nearly 232,827 physical items have been borrowed from the three sites, Barbican Library, Shoe Lane Library and Artizan Street Library and Community Centre (ASLCC), in 2025-26 so far and there have been over 350,000 ebook, eaudiobook, music and video downloads or streams from our e-library services.
2. There is a full programme of events, activities and projects for children, families and adults in all three libraries. These align with the Corporate Strategy outcomes through creating community spaces that are vibrant and welcoming, support residents and workers mental health and life-long learning and provide information and partnership working to support the Corporation's other services.
3. The City of London has been the lead authority in a pan-London pilot project to create the *ReadOn by London Libraries* app, which supports and encourages people to read more often. This was funded by the British Library LibraryOn project 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. In July 2025, the Secretary of State for Education announced that 2026 will be The National Year of Reading (NYR). NYR is a campaign to address the steep decline in reading amongst children, young people and adults. It is a Department for Education initiative, in collaboration with the National Literacy Trust, The Reading Agency and Booktrust as their delivery partners of the campaign. The key message for the year is '**go all in**', leaning into reading as a powerful way to increase enjoyment of the things people are already interested in and passionate about.

Barbican Library

5. Barbican Library is an integral part of the Barbican Centre and was part of the original design. It is a standalone service within the building, separate to the functioning of the Arts Centre, and comes under the purview of City Surveyors for cyclical and major works. It is therefore not part of the Barbican Renewal programme. The Barbican Library team works closely with the Barbican Centre team on joint projects and operational functioning.
6. There have been 228,297 visitors to the library in 2025-26 so far, which is a 5% increase from this time last year. The library runs a popular music exhibition programme, hosts community artists and provides Best Start for Life (previous Children's Centre) services for the under fives and their families, as well as supporting children's reading through the Read to Succeed volunteer programme and the Summer Reading Challenge. It hosts several book groups for adults, IT skills sessions in partnership with Adult Education and Age UK, and a talks and workshops programme.
7. In 2023, The Barbican Association and the Department of Community and Children's Services were awarded £449,550 from the Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund to construct a community meeting room in Barbican Library- now known as The Bostock Room. The room will benefit the local community and library users through increased community activities, as well as providing a new income stream for the library service.
8. In 2024, there were delays to the construction of the room due to issues with the original architect and the original design for out of hours access, which was deemed unaffordable. A solution to this was found by the designers working on the Barbican Library Refresh project, so construction was able to commence in August 2025.
9. Barbican and Community Libraries was awarded £775,812 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to make modernising improvements to Barbican Library. The aim of the improvements is to create a space that is more flexible, more welcoming and works better for customers and staff. This will be done through reducing the redundant areas of staff desk space and redesigning the layout of the main library, children's library and music library.
10. The refurbishment project is being supported by the Barbican Renewal Team, who have provided a design team and project management resource, in order to ensure the outcome is in keeping with the rest of the Barbican Centre's renewal programme.

Shoe Lane Library

11. Shoe Lane Library is the City of London's only physical space in the west of the City and, in addition to traditional library services, it provides: an extensive programme of Best Start for Life activities for children under 5 and their families and other activities for older children, including the Summer Reading Challenge, which are greatly valued by parents and families and heavily used; free WiFi, PCs and work/study space for customers in the West of the City; free IT support for people who are at risk of digital exclusion; the Dragon Café in the City in partnership with the small, local, charity Mental Fight Club – a major and extremely successful programme that supports good mental wellbeing; a popular talks programme for adults both in person and online; a polling station for Castle Baynard and ward motes; cool spaces for people wishing to stay safe in the heatwaves and a warm space in the winter for people who maybe struggling with their fuel bills.
12. Shoe Lane Library is located in the basement of Hill House, an office building owned and managed by the property developer Landsec. Planning permission to redevelop Hill House was granted in 2024, with specific requirements regarding the library stipulated in the Section 106 agreement. For the duration of the redevelopment, Shoe Lane Library will be temporarily located at One New Change, a site also owned and managed by Landsec.

Artizan Street Library and Community Centre

13. The library section of Artizan Street Library and Community Centre (ASLCC) was refurbished in 2023 with funding from DCMS/Arts Council England funding. This included the creation of a Makerspace with digital creative equipment for the local community to use. There have been over 100 inductions for people to use this equipment so far in 2025-26.
14. The charity Family Action have been running a weekly Food Club from the main hall of the library since September 2023. This benefits 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 have been increasing each month.
15. In September 2025, the Children's Centre services were brought back in-house from the Aldgate School to the Department of Community and Children's Services and rebranded as 'Best Start for Life'. These services are now delivered from a variety of different locations throughout the City, including all three libraries. An agreement was made with the Early Years team, who oversee this service, to increase the amount of activity for the under 5s and their families at ASLCC as part of this change. This includes

regular Health Visitor sessions and more stay-and-play sessions delivered by the Best Start for Life team.

Current Position

All Libraries

National Year of Reading

16. A cross-library working party has been created, led by the libraries' Development Team. This group is working on a programme of activity to take place across the year, using The Reading Agency's Key Moments to help shape the offer. Discussions are currently being had with the Literacy Trust, a lead partner in the NYR, and KPMG, a key sponsor, around potential activity in the City, including support for the service's Read to Succeed programme, which uses volunteers to help primary-aged children to improve their reading skills. A one-off contribution of £1000 to support the NYR programme in the City has also been allocated by Bibliotheca, the supplier of the library service's self-service equipment, as part of their social value commitment.
17. The City of London, on behalf of London Libraries, has also successfully secured additional funding from the British Library LibraryOn grant to redevelop the app for the NYR with additional improves to the reader engagement tools. With the support of Libraries Connected- the national organisation that supports, promotes and represents public libraries- the app is going to be rolled out as a national offer with authorities from across the country already having expressed an interest in buying into the service.

Room Hire Charges

18. With the creation of the Bostock Room and the move of Shoe Lane Library to One New Change, which will include two meeting rooms in the new space, the Barbican & Community Libraries team have undertaken a review of the hourly rate hour charges for hire of the library rooms. A comparative study was undertaken with provision across the City of London and surrounding boroughs. The following fees will now apply from 2nd February 2026:

Bostock Room @ Barbican Library

Corporate/Business	Charity/Community benefit/City of London/Resident private use	Resident for residents
75	40	20

Artizan and Shoe Lane Meeting and Community Rooms

Corporate/Business	Charity/Community benefit/City of London/Resident private use	Resident for resident
50	25	15

19. On reviewing the hire charges in the libraries, it has been agreed by the Barbican and Community Libraries team to offer a discounted rate for resident use. This is in line with the Golden Lane Community Centre and the Portsoken Community Centre policies.
20. Existing hirers at ASLCC will have a transition period of two months before they are required to pay the new fees, as there have been no changes since the library opened in 2012. Resident use of the community rooms for residents will continue to be free at ASLCC until the Middlesex Street residents have a separate community space on the podium, which is being provided as part of the Eastern Hub project.

Digital Inclusion IT Support

21. As part of a project to redevelop the service's digital inclusion provision, Barbican and Community Libraries has now been set up as a 'Learn My Way' Hub. 'Learn My Way' is a learning platform provided by the Good Things Foundation that is specially designed to support people new to using computers, tablets, smartphones and the internet to develop skills and confidence online. Through this project, there has also been an increase in staff trained to support people with their IT skills learning, and over 50 people have been supported in 2025-26 so far by the team.

Anti-social behaviour

22. In the guidance document 'Creating Safer Libraries', Libraries Connected acknowledge that there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour in public libraries since the pandemic. City of London libraries have traditionally had very low levels of anti-social behaviour, but there has been a noticeable increase in these events in the last two years at all three libraries, including acts of vandalism and verbal abuse. In response to this, the Barbican and Community Libraries management team are working on a training programme for all staff and are building working relationships with the City's Community Safety team.

Barbican Library

The Bostock Room

23. The construction of the Bostock Community Meeting Room will be completed by the 31st January. The room will be open for bookings from 2nd February 2026. The Barbican Association and other resident groups will be invited to give their AGM dates as a priority.

24. Barbican Centre Renewal

At the Policy and Resources Committee in December 2025, permission was granted to close the Barbican Centre for one year, from June 2028-June 2029, in order to carry out major works for the Renewal project on time and on budget. For safety reasons, this will require Barbican Library to be closed for the duration as well. The Barbican and Community Libraries team are now working with the Renewal team to find a suitable and financially viable location for a temporary library for this period. By necessity, this will be a reduced service from the current offer. A review will be undertaken to ensure that the most popular and essential materials and services are available. These will be additionally supported by the offers at Shoe Lane Library and Artizan Street Library and Community Centre.

Barbican Library Refresh

25. The completed stage 3 architectural design for the refurbishment of the main public areas of the library, including the music and children's sections, was submitted for Listed Building Consent in December 2025. Once consent has been received, a tender process will be undertaken for the supply of furniture and fittings, some of which will be bespoke to be in keeping within the original design of the Centre. The team are still working towards completion of the refurbishment by the end of 2026.

Library of Things

26. In November 2025, the Corporation's Circular Economy & Biodiversity (CEB) Team were awarded £88,469 of CIL Neighbourhood Fund to provide City residents and City workers with a Library of Things to provide access to shared tools, promote the circular/sharing economy, encourage reuse and repair, and promote skills and knowledge sharing. The bid was done in conjunction with residents from the Golden Lane estate and the Library of Things will be located in Barbican Library. The library team are working closely with the CEB team to ensure that installation goes smoothly, with a proposed launch in late spring 2026. The team are also reviewing potential programming with relevant partners to complement the offer.

Shoe Lane Library

Temporary Move to One New Change

27. Landsec have requested a delay to the temporary move of Shoe Lane Library to One New Change, due to internal changes. An update on this is expected in early spring 2026. Once the library moves to One New Change, Landsec have 5 years within which to complete the new library at Hill House, as stipulated in the Section 106 agreement.

Dragon Café in the City

28. The Dragon Café in the City, a collaboration between Barbican and Community Libraries and the charity Mental Health Club, has been successfully supporting people's mental wellbeing in the City of London since 2018. In February 2025, it was agreed by RASC to award Mental Fight Club £195,971 over 5 years to expand its capacity from 25 to potentially 40 attendees per activity and diversify its funding base as it relocates with Shoe Lane Library to the new larger space at One New Change, with the provision of 22 creative wellbeing events in the City of London each year to support and improve the mental health and wellbeing of City residents and workers.

Artizan Street Library and Community Centre

Family Hub Services at ASLCC

29. The Department of Community and Children's Services is leading a 'Families in the City' programme in response to national government reform around a move to 'family help' services and Best Start Family Hubs for children and young people aged 0-19 years or up to 25 years for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The first phase of the programme created a virtual Best Start Family Hub offer accessible through the Family Information Service and physical services are delivered in libraries and other community spaces. Phase 2 of the programme is considering the potential for a physical Best Start Family Hub within the City, and the City's Children's Partnership Board, which brings together senior leaders – including the City Corporation, Health, Public Health and the City of London Police – agreed that proposals to develop Artizan Street Library and Community Centre as a key site for Best Start Family Hub services could be progressed. Complementary services would still be provided from other locations across the City for easy of access.

30. ASLCC already provides a strong offer for children, young people and families and its location, in the Portsoken ward which is amongst the top 20%

in the country for levels of deprivation, aligns with national requirements. The physical space at ASLCC also provides an opportunity to explore the co-location of services, particularly when the Estate team, currently based in the building, moves out towards the end of 2026.

31. Should the inclusion of a Best Start Family Hub at ASLCC go ahead, it will still remain a universal library offer for all ages. Staff will receive some additional training to help them triage Family Hub enquiries and support the programme, and there will be funding to cover the use of the space for Family Hub activity.

Family Action Food Club

32. In February 2025, additional funding for the Food Club based in ASLCC was agreed at RASC, enabling the provision to be expanded to welcome self-referrals and to increase to two sessions per week, with a focus on including City workers suffering from in-work poverty.

Proposals

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

Key Data

34. To date in 2025-26, for all three libraries:

- 307,477 visits
- 232,827 physical items loaned
- 38,068 e-books and 26,680 e-audiobooks loaned
- 95% of library event participants stated that they value the library's services and activities
- 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

35. 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

Financial implications- None
Resource implications- None
Legal implications- None
Risk implications- None
Equalities implications – None
Climate implications- None
Security implications- None

Conclusion

36. Barbican and Community Libraries has several major building and service related projects that will be on-going throughout this year and beyond. The libraries are being well used and these changes to them are likely to increase footfall, issues, customer satisfaction and positive outcomes for people in our communities in the long term.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Rachel Levy
Head of Barbican and Community Libraries

T: 020 7332 1123
E: rachel.levy@cityoflondon.gov.uk