City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Decision Community and Children's Services – For Information	**Dated:** 20/07/2026 08/09/2026
Subject: Barbican Library Refresh Works	**Public report:** For Decision - CHL For Information - CCS
This proposal: • **delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes**	Providing Excellent Services Vibrant Thriving Destination Flourishing Public Spaces Diverse Engaged Communities
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

Approval was granted at the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee in July for the principles recommended in this report, relating to library service provision during the refurbishment works at Barbican Library.

The works will modernise the library, improve the layout of the main library, children's library and music library, increase flexibility for users and staff, and deliver electrical upgrades needed to support increased use of personal devices for work and study.

The project is funded through Community Infrastructure Levy funding and the City Surveyor department's Cyclical Works Programme, with no additional revenue or capital spending requested. Sykes & Son Ltd have been appointed as contractor, and the detailed programme for the works is being negotiated. Works are expected to begin in October 2026 and be completed by the end of January 2027, with a final

deadline of March 2027 to meet funding and Barbican Renewal programme requirements.

Members are asked to note the principles for any temporary closure or limited service provision. Full closure would only be used where necessary for health and safety or budget reasons, and would be kept to the shortest possible period. A limited lending service, alternative provision at other City libraries, targeted mitigations for some users with protected characteristics, and engagement with library users and stakeholders will help the City of London Corporation continue to meet its statutory library duties during the refurbishment.

Delegated authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee has also been granted, to approve detailed decisions on service provision and mitigations.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the principles for possible library closure during the refurbishment works.
- Note the principles for a limited Barbican Library provision for the duration of the works.

Main Report

Background

1. Barbican and Community Libraries is the statutory provision of a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service for those who live, work and study in the City of London, as required by Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

2. Barbican Library is the biggest of the three public lending libraries in the City of London, and is one of the busiest public libraries in London. There were 305,584 visits in 2025-26, which is 2% higher than pre-pandemic visits.

3. Barbican and Community Libraries was awarded £775,812 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding in 2023 to make modernising improvements to Barbican Library.

4. 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.

5. The project was approved by Culture, Heritage and Libraries, the Resource Allocation Sub Committee (RASC) and Policy and Resources Committee in September 2023.

6. Barbican and Community Libraries are working with the Barbican Centre Renewal team to make sure the library improvements fit with the wider redesign of the Centre. Allies and Morrison developed the design with input from library staff, taking it to RIBA Stage 3, which is the level needed for planning approval. Listed building planning approval has now been granted.

7. Additional funding was granted from the City Surveyor department's Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) to increase the amount that had been ringfenced for the recarpeting of children's library and main library in 2026-27, as it was deemed more cost effective to recarpet the whole library at one time and during these refurbishment works. The total given for recarpeting is £180,000.

8. Additional CIL funding of £252,470 was granted by Policy and Resources committee in June 2026 to improve the electrical wiring capacity in the library, as surveys have shown this is currently inadequate for the increase in sockets required to meet the needs of users bringing their own devices for work and study.

Current Position

9. Sykes & Son Ltd have been appointed as the contractor to carry out the refurbishment works, including the electrical upgrades. They are experienced in working in the Barbican Centre and were the contractors who created the Bostock Room to a high quality.

10. The Renewal and library team have put together the specification for the tender to engage a library design company to supply the library specific furniture. The contractor will be appointed in August 2026, ready to work with the project team to confirm the design and furniture choices.

11. Negotiations with Sykes are currently underway to agree the programme timeline for the project, including phasing of work in different areas of the library, in order to minimise disruption of services to the public. It is anticipated that the work will begin in October 2026 and be completed by the end of January 2027.

12. The project must be completed by the end of March 2027. This is a condition of the CWP and original CIL funding, and is also needed to fit with the wider Barbican Renewal project. From January 2027, the Barbican Renewal Team will need to focus on pre-closure work, including stripping out the Conservatory and works to the Roadway and Lakeside Façade. This will also reduce the spaces that could be used for temporary library provision.

Proposal

13. Due to the complexity of this project, particularly in relation to the electrical works, it has not been possible to present a confirmed programme of the works at this

time. This will be agreed between the project team and Sykes in July/August 2026.

14. Approval was therefore sought to negotiate this agreement according to the following principles:

    - The full closure of Barbican Library will only happen if there is no other way to carry out works in respect of the health and safety of the public, staff and contractors, or if required to keep within project budget. This closure will be kept to the minimum possible timeframe, with a maximum of a month.

    - Any future decisions about library service provision during the works, including any full closure, will be approved by the Town Clerk under delegated authority, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee. This is needed because works are expected to start in early October, and there will not be enough time to take further decisions to the next committee meeting due to recess.

    - A temporary limited provision of book lending for adults and children will be offered to the public, located within a section of the library, except in circumstances that require a full library closure. Library users will also be directed to Shoe Lane Library, Artizan Street Library & Community Centre, and Guildhall Library (for computer use), which will all remain open throughout.

    - The Barbican & Community Libraries team will seek to provide other services to the public, such as Rhyme Times for babies and young children, study space and community groups within the library or other locations in or near the Barbican Centre for the duration of the works.

    - The needs of library users will continue to inform decision making, including those library users with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, as evidenced by the commitment to minimise any full closure and the on-going provision of service throughout the refurbishment works.

    - These mitigations will help to ensure that the City of London Corporation still fulfils its duties in regard to the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 during the refurbishment of Barbican Library.

15. Information about the refurbishment will be shared with library users and other stakeholders in August/September 2026, both by email and in person. This will include the proposed new layouts in Appendix 1 and details of the works and limited library service. Feedback will be gathered and used to shape any temporary service, helping to reduce the impact on library users, especially those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

16. An additional benefit to the refurbishment taking place at this time is the learning the Barbican and Community Library team will gain for the full closure of the library for a year- June 2028 to June 2029- during the main Barbican Renewal works.

Key Data

17.

- Barbican Library had an average of 25,465 visits a month in 2025-26
- The refurbishment works are expected to take 3-4 months
- Total budget for the project is £1,388,282.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications –

- Providing Excellent Services/Flourishing Public Spaces- the refurbishment project will improve the customers' experience of the library, with improved facilities.
- Vibrant Thriving Destination- the increased flexibility of the spaces will allow a wider range of activities to take place within the library.
- Diverse Engaged Communities- Feedback from a variety of library users will inform any decisions on temporary provision and influence final choices in the new design; provision will be made within the new layout to increase areas for different groups of users, including young adults who have insufficient space in the library currently.

Financial implications- Funding has been sourced from Community Infrastructure Levy and the Cyclical Works Programme to ensure there is no pressure on the library service's budget. Consideration has been taken at every step to ensure that the budget is maximised for the outcomes to be achieved for library users.

Resource implications – The Barbican Library team will support the refurbishment by packing and unpacking stock and staffing any temporary service provision.

There may be periods when more staff are available than are needed for this work. If this happens, staff will be encouraged to use any remaining annual leave or may be deployed to support one of the other two libraries.

There is also a risk that Renewal team members supporting the project may be required to move onto other projects towards the end of the refurbishment. This could place additional pressure on the Barbican and Community Libraries management team.

Legal implications – Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires Library Authorities (the City of London Corporation is a designated Library Authority) to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, including those who live, work or study in the area.

Failure to comply with Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 could be challenged by way of an application for judicial review. To mitigate this risk, good public law decision making principles should prevail including acting within legal powers, acting in a

procedurally fair fashion and taking rational and proportionate decisions based on the evidence.

Risk implications- Contingency funds have been built into the budget for this project and, due to the additional funding from CWP and CIL, there is confidence within the team that this project will not go over budget.

There is risk in the project going over the estimated timeframe, which would have implications due to the CWP budget and the CIL funding needing to be spent by the end of the current financial year. Reasonable contingency will be built into the programme to account for site discoveries and other potential delays, whilst still keeping to the deadline of March 2027.

There is a risk that the City of London Corporation will not be providing a 'comprehensive' library service for the duration of the works, as required by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, given that Barbican Library is the busiest and most resourced library in the City. Temporary library offers and service provision at other libraries will help to mitigate this risk.

Equalities implications – The Public Sector Equality Duty 2010 The requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other unlawful conduct prohibited by the act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic
- foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic

The relevant protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

There are risks within this project that some of these groups may be more adversely affected by closure or limited services. To mitigate these risks, the following steps are being taken:

- Alternative space will be scoped for:
  - under fives provision, such as Rhyme Times
  -young people who have exams following the Christmas holidays and may need space to study
  - community groups which support older people who might be isolated.
- Any limited stock provision will take into account the diverse needs and interests of library users, reflecting the community demographics.

- Physical accessibility will be taken into account for any reduced service offer.

In the event of a full library closure, City residents who are unable to travel to one of the other City of London libraries will be offered access to the libraries' Home Delivery service, If practical to do so, the library service will also register with Good Things Foundation's National Digital Inclusion Network in order to give out devices and data to those affected by the loss of digital access, if they are unable to visit other libraries in the City.

Additionally, the service will be seeking feedback from library users on the effects on their use of the library whilst the refurbishment takes place. This feedback will also be used to shape reasonable mitigations.

Climate implications - All the contractors comply with the City of London's responsible procurement practices.

Security implications - N/A

Conclusion

18. The Barbican Library refresh works provide an important opportunity to improve the library environment, make better use of the available space, and ensure the building can better meet the needs of residents, workers, students and visitors. The planned improvements will support a more flexible, welcoming and effective library service, while also aligning with the wider Barbican Renewal programme.

19. Although the works will cause some disruption, the proposed principles are designed to keep any full closure to a minimum, provide a limited library offer wherever possible, and direct users to alternative City library services. Engagement with library users and other stakeholders will help shape temporary arrangements and ensure that the needs of those most affected, including users with protected characteristics, are considered throughout.

20. Members are therefore asked to note the recommended principles and delegated authority arrangements. This will ensure that detailed decisions on service provision and mitigations can be made promptly as the works programme is finalised.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Stage 3 Design

Background Papers

- Barbican Library Refresh Project - CHL 18/9/23

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