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| <p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>1 March 2021</p> |  <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p> |
| <p>Report of: Sharon Godman Divisional Director Strategy, Policy and Performance</p> | <p>Classification: Unrestricted</p> |
| <p>Scrutiny Challenge Session Report: Examining the Council's Revised Approach for Idea Stores and Library Services</p> | |

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| Originating Officer(s) | Filuck Miah Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate |
| Wards affected | All (All Wards); |

Executive Summary

This report submits the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Challenge Session which examined the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services and makes a number of recommendations for consideration.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the attached Idea Stores and Library Services Scrutiny Challenge Session Report and agree the recommendations; and
2. Agree to submit the attached report to the Mayor and Cabinet for executive response.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This paper submits the report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources for consideration by OSC.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 To take no action. This is not recommended as the scrutiny challenge session provides a number of recommendations on the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services for the council to consider and take forward.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

3.1 Tower Hamlets carried out its public consultation (Nov 2020 – Jan 2021) on the revised approach to Idea Stores and library services. This consultation considers two options:

Option 1:

To reduce hours by 54% at Watney Market Idea Store and 70% Bethnal Green and close down Cubitt Town Library and reduce some evening hours including Sundays at the remainder Idea Stores

Option 2:

To close Watney Market, Bethnal Green Library and Cubitt Town Library and keep the remaining Idea Stores operating as they are.

3.2 The consultation further sets out its case for change i.e. to make savings of £1 Million (£400k set against current MTFs and £600k new savings) and it also presents an outline of the council's five-year vision for the future of Idea Stores and library services.

3.3 OSC wanted to examine and understand how the council's proposal for change would impact on service users and residents that use the Idea Stores and library services. They also wanted to understand how the council's five-year vision will take shape and be delivered.

3.4 The Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources, Cllr Leema Qureshi decided to hold a Finance and Resource Scrutiny Challenge Session with the focus: Examining the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services

3.5 The Challenge Session was underpinned by the further core questions:

- To what extent of change will the revised approach for Idea Stores and library services impact on user groups from the community? What are the planned mitigation options and what's the evidence from users and residents?
- Based on the public engagement and residents, views what can we learn and take forward or change about the suggested proposals for the revised approach to Idea Stores and library services?
- What is the five-year vision for the future for the future of the Idea Stores and library services including future funding proposals and risk implications?

3.6 The Challenge Session was held virtually on 28 January 2021 - chaired by Councillor Leema Qureshi (Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources). The session was structured that included: Chair's overview - reason for the enquiry and session outcome, presentation from the service led by Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit supported by council officers, Scrutiny Committee discussion, Youth Council representatives provided service user feedback, Voluntary Sectors Children and Youth Forum Coordinator provided an external perspective from the voluntary sector usage.

- 3.7 The Challenge Session resulted in the development of a number of recommendations:

Recommendations on five-year vision

Recommendation 1

The council to provide more comprehensive information on its five-year vision for the future of Idea Stores and library Services and needs to include a full review of staffing levels to maintain services; to publish further detailed information on the future site use of Watney Market Idea Store and Bethnal Green Library. It needs to examine how library services can be supplemented with other Council services and further consult residents on how proposed reduction of hours will be tailored to meet local demand.

Recommendation 2

The council, to revisit its proposed plan on the Isle of Dogs library service situation, in particular to consider the merits of deprioritising Canary Wharf (as this is subject to future closure) and free up resources to sustain Cubitt Town Library Service in the interim until such time a new alternative site is opened.

Recommendations on Impact

Recommendation 3

The council, to review and bring up to date its Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for All Idea Stores and library services to help better comprehend the impact on protected characteristic groups.

Recommendation 4

To further undertake comprehensive risk assessments to help better understand the impact of change on wider determinants including delayed recovery and continuation of the pandemic, impact on footfall and local economy, increase in demand user groups, impact on children and young people's educational outcomes, level of social deprivation, poverty, social isolation, crime and antisocial behaviour and community tension/ cohesion.

Recommendation 5

The council, to review the usage of Idea Stores and library services space so that youth hubs can offer dedicated spaces for children and young people to use for their education and social connection needs.

Recommendations on Finance and Resources

Recommendation 6

The council, to investigate and publish the results into the research it's undertaken for alternative / external funding streams and to further include a review of its application of fund streams such as Public Health or New Homes Bonus (earmarked for reserves), that could be aligned to a longer consultation period for examining the future delivery model of Idea Stores and library services whilst undertaking further assessments on the geography of sites being considered along with the economic impact on people.

Recommendation 7

The council, to investigate and publish its results on how it can develop revenue streams from commercialisation of the Idea Stores and library services physical premises and its digitalisation agenda to offset some of the savings requirements and future proof the sustainability of Idea Stores and library services.

Recommendation 8

The council, to market and publicise the commercialisation opportunities of the Idea Stores and library services (using its communication channels and advertising space) and to further include engagement with different media groups such as Bangladeshi Language Media, Social Media Influencers and others to help it achieve a wider reach for business opportunities and revenue growth.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Challenge Session reviewed EqIA to ensure the consultation and focus groups met the equality duty on protected characteristics and mitigated any impact on community cohesion. The Scrutiny Committee recommended for the EqIA to be updated with more current borough profile information.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.
- 6.2 Any costs arising from the implementation of the recommendations from the Revised Approach for Idea Store and Library Service Scrutiny Challenge Session Report will need to be contained within the existing service budget or considered as part of the council's Medium Term Financial

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons.
- 7.2 Where a local authority proposes changes to the provision of library services, it has a duty to consult all persons who are likely to be affected by such changes (*Draper v Lincolnshire County Council* [2015] EWHC 2964 (Admin)).
- 7.3 As part of the council's duty to consult, the council must communicate any changes from the challenge session implemented into the proposed changes already shared with residents, people affected and/or service users.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- List any linked reports
- NONE

Appendices

- Scrutiny Challenge Session Report: Examining the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services.

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- These must be sent to Democratic Services with the report
- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

Filuck Miah - Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate