

Cabinet 03 March 2021	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director Place	Classification: Unrestricted
Addendum to Revised approach to Idea Stores & Library Service	

Lead Member	Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit
Originating Officer(s)	Teresa Heaney, Interim Divisional Director Customer Programme
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Forward Plan Notice Published	25 January 2021
Reason for Key Decision	Impact on Wards
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Priority Three: Outcome 9 – People say we are open and transparent putting residents at the heart of everything we do Outcome 11 – People say we continuously seek innovation and strive for excellence to embed a culture of sustainable improvement

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Consider the option in this addendum alongside the cabinet report and the results of the public consultation and other feedback received.

Background:

Following the proposal presented at the Cabinet Meeting on 28th October 2020 we undertook a consultation with the public on the future of our Idea Store and Library Service.

The original proposals contained within the October 2020 report were developed out of our continuing commitment to deliver a rich and robust service across the borough whilst also achieving a saving. Our approach was to ensure that longer opening hours and a broad service offer continued at our four main sites (which offer a good

geographical spread across the borough) and that any service reductions should be made at our least visited sites and/or where there was another site within a relatively short distance.

Whilst this principle is still sound and based on providing a balanced service (i.e. that we should focus on our four main sites), we adapted our proposal based on feedback received to ensure that:

1. Cubitt Town Library (CTL) is not closed at this time but is opened with reduced hours until such time as both sites on the Isle of Dogs (IS Canary Wharf is currently the main site) can be replaced by a new, more centrally located Idea Store.
2. The reduction in hours at Bethnal Green Library (BGL), and to a lesser extent at IS Watney Market, is smaller, and that hours are concentrated into 'whole days' so that we can meet the needs of those who use the venues at different times of the day (particularly that they would be open for study in the after school period).

The existing cabinet paper presented two options:

1. The main proposal which delivered the full £1.6m saving and enabled CTL to open two days a week, BGL to open three days a week and ISWM to open 4 days a week including a Saturday.
2. An alternative option which only delivered £1.5m savings but which allowed CTL and BGL to open on Saturdays in addition to the above, which would result in a £100k shortfall on the proposal.

The process of public consultation and engagement gave us valuable additional insight into how much residents value Idea Stores.

In particular, there was real concern about the impact of the proposals on children and young people, and a definite concern that the impact of Covid on the economy, jobs, young people, and the community as a whole will mean that Idea Stores will be more necessary than ever going forward.

New Option:

Given on-going concerns about the impact of reduced capacity particularly on young people the Mayor and Lead Cabinet Member have asked for an additional option to be developed for discussion at the cabinet meeting on the 3rd March 2021.

This new option would retain five days opening at Cubitt Town Library, Bethnal Green Library and Watney Market Idea Store including Saturdays and a late night at the Libraries. **It must be noted that this option creates a budget pressure on the organisation of £365k.**

The new option below has been developed out of heightened concerns for the borough's young people given the impact of the pandemic on education and

employment opportunities. We therefore would intend to review the situation and whether further changes are needed after an 18 month period.⁷⁸

Site(s)	New Option	Change
IS Whitechapel IS Bow IS Canary Wharf IS Chrisp St	Keep these sites open 7 days a week but <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the level of staffing in the evening Reduce Sunday opening from 6 hours to 4 	
Cubitt Town Library (CTL)	Reduce opening hours at CTL so that it is open 10am till 6pm on three days a week (eg Mon – Wed) 10am till 8pm one day a week (eg Thu) and 9:00am till 5:00pm on Saturdays (42 Hours)	
Bethnal Green Library (BGL)	Reduce opening hours at BGL so that it is open 10am till 6pm on three days a week (eg Mon – Wed) 10am till 8pm one day a week (eg Thu) and 9:00am till 5:00pm on Saturdays (42 Hours)	
IS Watney Market (ISWM)	Reduce the size of ISWM from three floors to one and open it 10am till 6pm on four days a week (eg Mon – Thu) 9:00am till 5:00pm on Saturdays (40 Hours)	
Staff Impact	Reduction of Circa 25 FTE (22 if vacancies removed)	
Saving	Deliver a total of £1.235m by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> making the changes above reshaping the service to take advantage of the uptake of self-service by residents 	
Future Change	This option would be subject to a review that would start in October 2022 which would engage with residents and look make recommendations on whether further changes may be needed.	

COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

This report recommends changes that would achieve an existing savings target totalling £1m already approved in the medium-term financial strategy (please refer to the table below). Depending on the option chosen, this would demonstrate either full achievement of a further £0.6m Local Presence and Idea Store Asset Strategy saving proposed for 2021-22, or partial achievement which would leave a budget pressure of £0.1m or £0.365m which would need to be addressed. This would

initially need to be funded through use of reserves until a further review is undertaken and then any ongoing budget change would need to be reflected in the next refresh of the MTFS.

MTFS Savings Tracker 2020-23				20/21	21/22
Reference	Approved	Title	Original Scope of previous savings pro-formas	Savings target £'000	Savings target £'000
SAV/ RES 10 / 18-19	2018-19	Additional Local Presence Efficiencies	Further local presence and customer access improvements - (1) continue to develop/drive/encourage take up of digital services to further reduce demand for phone an face-to-face contact, thus enabling further staffing reductions (2) investigate options for including Clean & Green call handling within new refuse & recycling contract (3) consider moving to digital-only access for appropriate service areas	300	-
SAV / ALL 001 / 19-20	2019-20	Phase 2 Local Presence - putting Digital First	<p>The increased use of digital services will be targeted to reduce staffing and transaction costs further whilst making services easier to access for residents. Digital services across the council will be designed to achieve specific cost reductions and these will be allocated on a service by service basis as the baseline costs are confirmed.</p> <p>This second phase of the Local Presence Review will ensure we don't duplicate services, we make the most efficient use of resources and that the way we deliver services keeps pace with what our residents want. This Review will consider options to rationalise staff, buildings and services in each of the localities.</p>	-	700