


Cabinet 30 June 2021	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Ann Sutcliffe, Corporate Director Place	Classification: Unrestricted
Action plan in response to scrutiny challenge session on examining the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services	

Lead Member	Councillor Sabina Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Culture, Arts and Brexit
Originating Officer(s)	Teresa Heaney Interim Director Customer Programme
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
Forward Plan Notice Published	1 April 2021
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

Executive Summary

This report submits the Executive response to the scrutiny challenge session recommendations which examined the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services.

As part of developing a revised approach, we undertook a consultation with the public on the future of our Idea Store and Library Service (following Cabinet approval to do this on 28th October 2020).

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 residents broadly agreed with the principle of this, the consultation process

gave us valuable additional insight into how much residents value Idea Stores. The Scrutiny sessions was an important part of this as it enabled us to hear from key groups directly.

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.

As a result, our proposals changed significantly, all sites will now remain open although there are some changes to opening hours and, in the case of Idea Watney Market, the size of the Idea Store.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the report (Appendix 1) of the scrutiny challenge session on examining the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services; and
2. Agree the action plan (Appendix 2) in response to the scrutiny recommendations.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To provide a formal response to the OSC report and an action plan to cover any recommendations, or elements thereof, not already included in the report that was taken to Cabinet on the 3 March 2021.
- 1.2 The attached report is the Executive's response to the scrutiny recommendations arising from the scrutiny challenge session's examination of the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services.
- 1.3 In practice, the challenge session formed part of the consultation process that fed into the final report on the revised approach to Idea Stores and library services taken to Cabinet on 3 March 2021

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The alternative option would have been to delay the cabinet report until after the formal report from OSC had been received. This was not acceptable as it would have delayed the timing of any savings agreed in the final report.
- 2.2 The option to delay engaging with OSC was dismissed as this would have reduced the potential for the session to influence design and decisions.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The scrutiny challenge session commissioned by the Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources looked at examining the proposals (council's revised approach to Idea Stores and library services) put forward as part of the public consultation.
- 3.2 The session's scope included examining the extent of change and impact on services user groups as a result of the proposed changes to the Idea Stores and library services and the service's mitigations options.
- 3.3 The scrutiny committee wanted to understand the insights for the public engagement and how the five-year vision on the future of Idea Stores and library services will be delivered.
- 3.4 As well as the service presentation on the topic, the session also heard from the Youth Council members giving a service user view and from the voluntary sectors children and young people's forum coordinator providing an external perspective on the subject.
- 3.5 Holding the challenge session as part of the public consultation added considerable value and enabled the service to hear from groups they may not otherwise have heard from. However, the timing was not ideal as the scrutiny challenge session coincided with the last day of the public consultation. This meant that the formal report by which OSC feedback and the process to agree an action planned happened after the revised proposals were due to go to Cabinet. OSC were supportive and provided draft feedback in time to influence the shape and content of the paper.
- 3.6 In hearing from the different stakeholders at the session, the scrutiny committee made eight recommendations to take forward within the challenge report under three areas: five-year vision, impact, finance and resources. The challenge session report with recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.

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. This needs to include a full review of staffing levels to maintain services and 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 by 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 for the Isle of Dogs library service and consider the merits of deprioritising Canary Wharf (as this is subject to future

closure) to 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 (EqIA) for all Idea Stores and library services to help comprehend the impact on protected characteristic groups.

Recommendation 4:

To further undertake comprehensive risk assessments to help 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 use of Idea Stores and library service's spaces so that youth hubs can offer dedicated spaces for children and young people to use for their education and social connection needs.

Recommendation 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. This must include a review of its application of funding 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 results of how it can develop revenue streams from commercialisation of the Idea Stores and library service's 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 of the Idea Stores and library services (using its communication channels and advertising space) and to include engagement with different media groups including Bangladeshi Language Media, Social Media Influencers and others to help it achieve a wider reach for business opportunities and revenue growth.

- 3.6 Cabinet agreed a revised approach to delivery of Idea Store and Library services at its meeting on 3rd March 2021. This has taken into consideration some of the issues raised by scrutiny as well as feedback from residents as

part of the consultation process. This report now provides the formal Executive response to the scrutiny recommendations as required by the Council's constitution.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The scrutiny recommendation three requests the council to review and bring up to date its EqIA for all Idea Stores and library services to help understand the impact on protected characteristic groups.
- 4.2 As part of the follow up for the post consultation report on the revised approach to Ideas Stores and library services that went to Cabinet on 03.03.2021, the service undertook an extensive EqIA to address the concerns and mitigate the impact on protected characteristic groups.

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.
- 5.2 No other statutory implications.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The implementation of the Action Plan will need to be contained within the approved budget.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council has the legal power to undertake the activities detailed in the attached Service Action Plan
- 7.2 There are no other direct legal implications arising from this report
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Scrutiny Challenge Session Report: Examining the council's revised approach to Idea Stores and Library Services.
- Appendix 2 - Service Action Plan

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A