Equality Impact Assessment

Contents

1. Service Affected

Library Service and Local Studies and Archives Centre

2. Relevance to equality

Libraries are highly relevant to equality. Library Services offer a range of targeted services, such as children's activities, social groups for older residents, specialist groups for people living with dementia and the visually impaired, etc. alongside universal library services.

Targeted activities for children include events aimed at different age groups such as Teenage Reading Groups, Young Knitters, Toddlertimes and Storytimes as well as specific events in school holidays such as the Summer Reading Challenge, Digifests and craft activities. Young children (Key Stage 1 users) were found to be the largest user group for all libraries except Thamesmead in the Children CIPFA PLUS survey (2017).

Library staff report that libraries are well used by groups such as the elderly and people with learning difficulties. Approximately 30% of adult users in the CIPFA PLUS (2019) survey were aged 65 and over. 28% of users in the CIPFA PLUS (2019) survey identified themselves as living with disabilities or conditions. 3% of users identified as having a learning difficulty.

According to the CIPFA PLUS survey 2019, 66% of adult users across the borough were women. This skew towards female service users was reflected at all six branches managed by the Council.

3. Potential Savings

A range of options have been put forward for savings from the operating cost of the library service. The value of the savings to be achieved will depend on which combination of options are chosen by Members as the way forward but it is anticipated to be in the region of £0.570m. This is comprised from the following list of options, which are considered in more detail in section 4 below:

- Closure of each Council run library for 1 full day or 2 half days = estimated saving of £0.150m p/a

- Proposed self-service period in each library every day = estimated saving of £0.150m p/a

- Ending evening opening at all libraries and ending Sunday opening at Central library = up to £0.050m

- Reduction or cessation of staff-run events = £TBD – dependent on other options pursued

- Changes to local studies service – by appointment only = estimated saving of £0.030m - £0.040m

- Reduction or cessation of funding provided to support Community Managed Libraries = up to £0.200m

It should be noted that the level of savings achieved will vary, depending on which options are taken forward, due to staffing inter-dependencies.

4. Policy and Service Proposal

Bexley has 12 libraries. The library service is a statutory function under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and is funded and provided by the London Borough of Bexley. Six libraries are Council managed and form the statutory element of the library service. In 2014/15 it was determined that 98.6% of all residents live within 1.5 miles of one of these Council managed libraries, providing a good level of access across the borough.

The six Council Managed Libraries are Central, Crayford, Erith, Sidcup, Thamesmead and Welling.

The six libraries operated directly by the Council provide direct access to books, audio-visual material (DVDs, books on CD), IT and information, as well as a wide range of local community events and activities. Books, audiobooks, newspapers and magazines can now also be viewed online/downloaded via the digital library. Libraries are also a service point for some Council Services including the payment of Council Tax bills, arranging bulky waste collections, etc.

The Service also provides outreach services including those to housebound readers. All libraries work with local schools to provide support to class visits at libraries and talks and presentations at schools.

The Local Studies and Archives Centre is located at Central Library, in Bexleyheath. It is responsible for the preservation and promotion of the records, history and heritage of the Borough and for providing public access to these records.

The six Community Managed Libraries are Bexley Village, Blackfen, Bostall, Northumberland Heath, Slade Green and Upper Belvedere. These libraries are not part of the statutory library provision in Bexley. The six Community Managed Libraries make up an enhanced offer with different operating models as follows:

- Bostall Library and Bexley Village Library are managed by Bostall Library Community Group and are separate from the Council's library systems

- Blackfen Library is managed by New Generation Community Trust and is separate from the Council's library systems

- North Heath, Upper Belvedere and Slade Green Libraries are managed by Eco Communities and they utilise the Council's library systems for membership and stock.

The changes that are outlined for consideration in the consultation exercise are born out of the need to make significant efficiency savings across the Council, due to substantial financial challenge across all service areas – a financial position which has been exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The changes also seek to address changing patterns of library use, including an ongoing reduction in issue of physical books, and increasing digital downloads across the service.

The development of options have been informed by a number of factors including; the needs assessment, current visitor usage data; changing patterns of customer behaviour over recent years and seeking to ensure that opening hour and self-service changes are staggered across the borough's libraries, to minimise travel time, if a resident's closest library is unstaffed in any period.

The options proposed are as follows:

- Reduction to opening times, including a closed day or two half days at each Council-run library

- Introduction of a daily period where staff are not available and customers will access library provision through self-service facilities only, at each Council-run library.

- Removal of evening opening at all libraries and the Sunday opening at Central library.

- Reduction of events, activities and other programmes run by staff, at the Council-run libraries.

- Changes to the delivery of the Local Studies and Archives service – with access to archives and trained staff by appointment only.

- Reduction OR ending of financial support to the Community Managed Libraries. The community groups who manage these libraries may be able to maintain this service, but there is a risk that if this is not the case these libraries may close, if an alternative community provider cannot be found.

- Do nothing option - no changes to current service provision

- Suggestions from residents and library users, received during the public consultation process, for other ways of achieving significant cost reductions and amending services to reflect changing usage patterns will also be considered.

5. Impact on equalities groups

A summary of data used to assess impact

Full details of the data and analysis can be found in the Needs Assessment.

In order to assess the impact of this proposal, the library service has access to a variety of information sources including:

- Census 2011 data

- Bexley Libraries Community Profiles (for core libraries and based on Census 2011 data within a radius of 1.5 miles of each library)

- Library Statistics from the Library Management System – this includes some demographic information that relates to use of specific libraries

- CIPFA Children's Public Library User Survey (PLUS) 2017

- CIPFA Public Library User Survey (PLUS) 2019

- CIPFA Archive Services Survey

- Reports from quarterly review meetings with community managed library groups.

- The library service activities programme

- The Needs Assessment for Bexley Library Service

The CIPFA PLUS surveys are one week snapshot surveys of usage of public library services and are carried out every four years. Information gathered in these surveys has been used to identify the characteristics of customers at each library including age, gender, disability, ethnicity and religion. The full details can be found in Appendix 2 of the Needs Assessment.

The key gap in the information available is that the library service does not specifically engage with equality groups to collect data on their use of library services. It should also be noted that the demographic information from the Census survey is from 2011 and therefore likely to be out of date. However, using the statistical and demographic information available about the borough, in conjunction with library service data and other sources of information about library service activity, it

is possible to draw together a good picture of service usage by equality groups. A detailed Needs Assessment has been drafted to take account the impact of the proposed options on local need.

Community profiles have been compiled using the Census 2011 data which show that:

- Central and Sidcup have a higher than average number of older residents.

- Both Thamesmead and Erith have higher than average numbers of residents for all 3 ages groups below the age of 11.

- Christianity is the dominant religion that residents identify with across the borough. This is most noticeable in Thamesmead.

- Erith has a Sikh population that is more than double the borough average proportion.

- Thamesmead has a higher than average proportion of larger households (5+ persons).

- Welling is the only location to have a lower than average proportion of 1 person households.

- Crayford has a higher than average proportion of economically active residents.

- Sidcup and Welling both have a higher than average proportion of households with 4 or more cars/vehicles.

- Thamesmead has the highest proportion of households that do not own a car or a van.

For further information relating to community profiles please see Section 7.2 of the Needs Assessment.

Comparison of profiles of library users with ward populations

The profile of library users in terms of their ethnicity, gender, age and faith can be compared with the ward totals for that branch using the CIPFA 2019 survey and the Census 2011 data. Details can be found in Tables 1 - 4. The CIPFA 2019 data is the most up to date information available about library users. The Census 2011 data shows information about the population of the ward in which each of the libraries is located. Both sets of data show similarities and differences between the profile of library users and the overall population. When taking into account the impact of potential changes to the service, the 2019 CIPFA survey data is of most use as it relates to those that use the library. It is also the most up to date information currently available. It should be noted that as the census data is from 2011, the more recent data from the CIPFA survey may also represent how ward populations have changed over the last 9 years.

Table 1. Ethnicity of library users compared with the ward in which the branch is located

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
Bexley average (CIPFA 2019)	72%	3%	7%	17%	1%
Bexley (Census 2011)	82%	2%	7%	9%	1%
Central Library (CIPFA 2019)	83%	3%	4%	9%	1%
Christchurch (Census 2011)	87%	2%	7%	3%	1%
Crayford Library (CIPFA 2019)	71%	4%	8%	15%	1%

Crayford (Census 2011)	88%	2%	4%	5%	0%
Erith Library (CIPFA 2019)	47%	4%	6%	40%	2%
Erith (Census 2011)	69%	3%	9%	18%	1%
Sidcup Library (CIPFA 2019)	85%	2%	8%	4%	1%
Sidcup (Census 2011)	90%	2%	5%	2%	1%
Thamesmead Library (CIPFA 2019)	47%	5%	8%	40%	0%
Thamesmead East (Census 2011)	47%	4%	7%	40%	1%
Welling Library (CIPFA 2019)	71%	4%	13%	10%	2%
Falconwood and Welling (Census 2011)	85%	2%	8%	4%	1%

Table 2. Gender of library users compared with the ward in which the branch is located

	Female	**Male**
Bexley average (CIPFA 2019)	66%	34%
Bexley (Census 2011)	52%	48%
Central Library (CIPFA 2019)	60%	40%
Christchurch Ward (Census 2011)	52%	48%
Crayford Library (CIPFA 2019)	65%	35%
Crayford Ward (Census 2011)	51%	49%
Erith Library (CIPFA 2019)	67%	33%
Erith Ward (Census 2011)	51%	49%
Sidcup Library (CIPFA 2019)	71%	29%
Sidcup Ward (Census 2011)	53%	47%
Thamesmead Library (CIPFA 2019)	64%	36%
Thamesmead East Ward (Census 2011)	52%	48%
Welling Library (CIPFA 2019)	72%	28%
Falconwood and Welling Ward (Census 2011)	51%	49%

Table 3. Age of library users compared with the ward in which the branch is located

	Under 25*	**26 to 44**	**45 to 64**	**65 to 74**	**75 or over**

Bexley average (CIPFA 2019)	9%	34%	28%	27%	3%
Bexley (Census 2011)	32%	26%	25%	8%	8%
Central Library (CIPFA 2019)	9%	20%	30%	36%	5%
Christchurch Ward (Census 2011)	30%	29%	26%	9%	10%
Crayford Library (CIPFA 2019)	11%	43%	25%	18%	2%
Crayford Ward (Census 2011)	33%	28%	24%	7%	7%
Erith Library (CIPFA 2019)	9%	48%	29%	12%	2%
Erith Ward (Census 2011)	35%	31%	22%	6%	6%
Sidcup Library (CIPFA 2019)	6%	28%	26%	35%	4%
Sidcup Ward (Census 2011)	30%	24%	26%	9%	11%
Thamesmead Library (CIPFA 2019)	10%	40%	31%	19%	0%
Thamesmead East Ward (Census 2011)	40%	31%	21%	4%	3%
Welling Library (CIPFA 2019)	7%	36%	24%	29%	3%
Falconwood and Welling Ward (Census 2011)	31%	26%	27%	8%	8%

*discrepancy in numbers for users aged below 25 to be expected as children complete a separate CIPFA survey, the adult survey would only address those aged 18

Table 4. Faith of library users compared with the ward in which the branch is located

	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	No religion	Other
Bexley average (CIPFA 2019)	64%	1%	3%	0%	4%	1%	25%	3%
Bexley (Census 2011)	62%	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	24%	0%
Central Library (CIPFA 2019)	70%	0%	1%	0%	2%	1%	24%	2%
Christchurch Ward (Census 2011)	61%	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	25%	0%
Crayford Library (CIPFA 2019)	57%	2%	3%	1%	5%	2%	27%	3%
Crayford Ward (Census 2011)	62%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	27%	0%
Erith Library (CIPFA 2019)	65%	1%	3%	1%	5%	0%	20%	4%

Erith Ward (Census 2011)	59%	0%	2%	0%	3%	5%	24%	1%
Sidcup Library (CIPFA 2019)	65%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	26%	2%
Sidcup Ward (Census 2011)	64%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	24%	0%
Thamesmead Library (CIPFA 2019)	63%	0%	4%	0%	5%	0%	26%	2%
Thamesmead East Ward (Census 2011)	65%	1%	1%	0%	6%	1%	20%	0%
Welling Library (CIPFA 2019)	54%	2%	6%	0%	6%	2%	27%	4%
Falconwood and Welling Ward (Census 2011)	62%	1%	2%	0%	3%	2%	24%	0%

The comparisons in Tables 1 – 4 show the following general themes:

- In most libraries a higher proportion of library users are of BAME origin than can be seen in the whole population in the ward.

- A significantly higher proportion of library users are female.

- A high proportion of library users are in the 65-74 age category and a small proportion of library users are in the 18-25 age category.

- Library users reflect similar proportions of faith groups as the wards in which they are based.

There is no specific demographic information available relating to gender reassignment, sexual orientation or marriage and civil partnership. Although there is also no direct demographic information relating to pregnancy and maternity, the CIPFA Children's PLUS survey provides a breakdown of children's ages which can be used to some extent to infer the size of this equality group.

A summary of visitor numbers, physical issues and digital downloads from 2015/16 to 2019/20 are shown in tables 5, 6 and 7.

Table 5 – Total number of physical issues for all 12 libraries and 6 core libraries from 2015/16 to 2019/20

Year	Physical Issues (all 12 libraries)	Physical issues (6 core libraries)
2015-16	815,744	653,482

2016-17	767,209	663,316
2017-18	722,703	634,661
2018-19	732,622	645,891
2019-20	729,360	648,271

Table 5 shows a decline in physical issues across all 12 libraries from 2015/16 to 2017/18, a slight increase from 2017/18 to 2018/19 and a slight decrease from 2018/19 to 2019/20. Across the six core libraries, table 1 shows a slight increase in physical issues from 2015/16 to 2016/17, a decrease from 2016/17 to 2017/18 and an increase from 2017/18 to 2019/20.

Table 6 – Number of digital downloads from 2015/16 to 2019/20

Year	Digital downloads
2015-16	11,365
2016-17	18,700
2017-18	21,531
2018-19	39,930
2019-20	68,330

Table 6 shows an increase in digital downloads each year from 2015/16 to 2019/20.

Table 7 – Total number of visits for all 12 libraries and 6 core libraries from 2015/16 to 2019/20

Year	Visitor Numbers (all 12 libraries)	Visitor Numbers (6 core libraries)
2015-16	1,086,696	789,858
2016-17	1,138,148	869,838
2017-18	1,122,953	858,356
2018-19	1,167,424	918,420
2019-20	1,147,696	931,428

Table 7 shows an increase from 2015/16 to 2016/17 in total visitor numbers at all 12 libraries, a decrease from 2016/17 to 2017/18, an increase from 2017/18 to 2018/19 and a decrease from 2018/19-2019/20. Across the 6 core libraries, the table shows an increase in total visitor numbers

from 2015/16 to 2016/17, a slight decrease from 2016/17 to 2017/18 and an increase from 2017/18 to 2018/19 and again from 2018/19 to 2019/20.

Assessment of each proposal

Proposed reductions to opening times, including a closed day or two half days at each Council managed library

Age

A reduction in opening times may make it more difficult for elderly customers to access the Library service as they may need to travel further from their home to get to the next closest library. According to CIPFA PLUS 2019, 30% of adult library users were aged 65 and over. Possible negative impact.

Young children might also be affected as their carers/parents would need to take them to the library – the increased distance could make this difficult. Possible negative impact.

Disability

It may be more difficult for customers with additional needs or disabilities (e.g. mobility issues) to access the Council managed libraries if the closest Council library is further away from their home than at present. Possible negative impact.

Sex

No anticipated impact.

Gender reassignment

No anticipated impact.

Pregnancy and maternity

Women in late pregnancy or with a new-born baby could find it harder to travel further afield to get to their nearest library. Possible negative impact.

It should be noted that a separate proposal is also being considered which might impact on the borough's Children's Centres. If both proposals are progressed, there would be a risk of a double impact on support networks for parents with young children. Potential cumulative impact.

Race

Figure 1 is based on Census 2011 data and shows the proportion of population classed as non-white across Bexley. Across the north of the borough there is a large area which is more diverse. Two council libraries, Erith and Thamesmead as well as two community libraries, Slade Green and Upper Belvedere, are located in this region. Over 50% of customers surveyed at these branches in the CIPFA PLUS 2019 survey were of BAME origin. As the north of the borough is more ethnically diverse, the changes at these four libraries will have a larger impact on BAME communities. However, the proposed changes are equitable across all libraries, unless community libraries take a bespoke approach. So whilst a higher proportion of BAME communities will be impacted in the north of the borough, due to the ethnic make-up of this part of the borough –the eight libraries in the rest of the borough, with communities predominantly classed as white, will be similarly affected by the same

changes. If the two community libraries in the north of the borough are adversely affected, due to the approach taken by their operators, in relation to the six community libraries as a whole, this would have a larger impact on BAME groups. This position will only be known at a later date.

20.92	to	99.28
7.5	to	20.91
3.42	to	7.49
1.85	to	3.41
0	to	1.84

Figure 1 - Proportion of population classed as non-white in Bexley (Census 2011)

Council-Managed Libraries – green circles

Community-Managed Libraries – green squares

Religion or belief

64% of customers surveyed in CIPFA PLUS 2019 identified themselves as Christians – as the predominant faith group for library users across the borough, they would be the most affected by any proposed changes. Possible negative impact

If the two community libraries in the north of the borough are adversely affected, due to the approach taken by their operators in relation to the six community libraries as a whole, this would have a larger impact on BAME groups. This position will only be known at a later date.
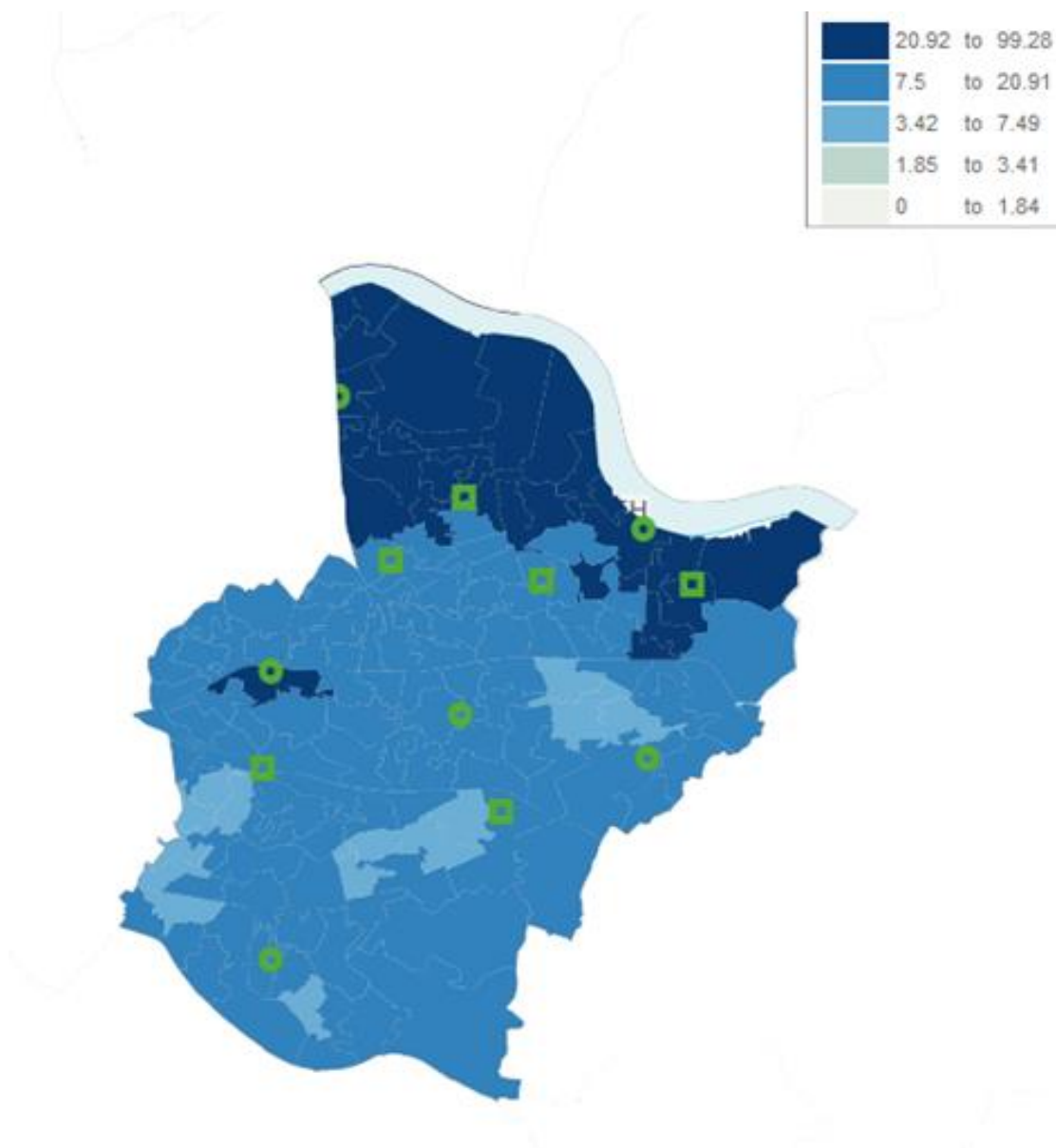
Sexual orientation

No anticipated impact.

Marriage and civil partnership

No anticipated impact.

Proposed introduction of a daily period where staff are not available and customers will access library provision through self-service facilities, at each Council-run library.

Age

Elderly customers are likely to be less technologically abled. Lack of staff assistance and an increased reliance on self-service technology may make accessing the service more difficult for these customers compared to other groups. Likely negative impact.

While very young users (Key Stage 1) may also have difficulty operating self-service technology, the impact is likely to be less noticeable as they would be accompanied by a carer/parent who could help them use these facilities. Unlike elderly customers, young users would not be visiting the library by themselves – the impact would depend on the technological skills of the person they visit with. Possible/unlikely negative impact.

Disability

For customers with disabilities that may require staff assistance, the introduction of a daily period without staff available may make the service less accessible. CIPFA 2019 found that 28% of adult library users identified themselves as having a disability/additional need. Likely negative impact.

Sex

No anticipated impact.

Gender reassignment

No anticipated impact.

Pregnancy and maternity

No anticipated impact.

Race

Council-run libraries span the borough and include areas of the borough with the highest percentage BAME residents (at Thamesmead and Erith). A differential impact could occur - BAME communities could arguably be impacted by the introduction of self-service periods to a greater extent. Possible negative impact.

Religion or belief

No anticipated impact.

Sexual orientation

No anticipated impact.

Marriage and civil partnership

No anticipated impact.

Proposed reduction of events, activities and other programmes, at the Council-run

Age

All libraries currently have regular activities that are aimed at and mainly attended by older residents e.g. Coffee and Conversation, Knit and Knatter, etc. If there was no staff support for these events, relying on volunteers or external funding may lead to loss of these events for residents, for a temporary period at least. Likely negative impact.

However, providing and promoting additional volunteering opportunities in libraries to support events and activities, would enable a greater number of older or retired residents to volunteer their time and services, thereby increasing their social inclusion, health and wellbeing and allowing them to take a more active role in the community. Possible positive impact.

All libraries offer regular events and activities for young children e.g. Toddlertime, Storytime, Stay and Play, etc. The activities for babies and toddlers in libraries act as a support network for new parents. A reduction in these events may lead to loss of these events if suitable volunteers are not found to run them. Possible negative impact.

The Summer Reading Challenge is an annual event aimed at children, this is already mainly staffed by volunteers at all libraries so it is hoped that there would be minimal impact. Organisation of the event and coordination of volunteers is managed by back office staff. While there is a potential risk that this is negatively impacted by reduction of staff time on events, this could also be an opportunity for volunteers to gain skills and experience in planning and management skills (enhance employability skills for volunteers also seeking employment). Possible negative or positive impact.

Disability

Bexley libraries offer some events and activities targeted at customers with additional needs or disabilities e.g. visually impaired reading group, support/coffee mornings for people living with dementia and their carers, bag book sessions for adults with learning disabilities, etc. Any reduction in these events, if suitable volunteers or external partners could not be found, would lead to loss of these events. Likely negative impact.

Sex

No data is held on the gender of people attending regular events and activities in branches but 66% of library users are female so it is likely that any reduction in the events and activities programme will have a greater impact on women. Likely negative impact.

Gender reassignment

No anticipated impact.

Pregnancy and maternity

All libraries offer regular events and activities for young children e.g. Toddlertime, Storytime, Stay and Play, etc. These activities for babies and toddlers in libraries act as a support network for new

parents. A reduction in these events may lead to loss of these events if suitable volunteers or new approaches for running them are not found. Possible negative impact.

Race

Any reduction in events and activities in branches with higher proportion of BAME communities could have a differential impact on these communities. Possible negative impact.

Religion or belief

No anticipated impact.

Sexual orientation

No anticipated impact.

Marriage and civil partnership

No anticipated impact.

Proposed changes to the delivery of the Local Studies and Archives service – with access to trained staff by appointment.

Age

No data exists for the age of visitors to the LSAC but it is felt that the Centre is predominantly used by older residents for researching their family or local history. The proposed changes will therefore predominantly affect older customers but professional assistance and access to archival material will be retained through an appointment system, thus reducing impact. Possible negative impact.

Some externally funded projects are run by the LSAC with local schools, and visits by schools to the Centre do take place. Any reduction in staffing capacity may limit the number of school visits or collaborative projects that can take place. Possible negative impact.

Disability

No anticipated impact.

Sex

No data is held on the gender of people attending regular events and activities in branches but 66% of library users are female so it is likely that any reduction in the events and activities programme will have a greater impact on women. Likely negative impact.

Gender reassignment

No anticipated impact.

Pregnancy and maternity

No anticipated impact.

Race

No anticipated impact.

Religion or belief

No anticipated impact.

Sexual orientation

No anticipated impact.

Marriage and civil partnership

No anticipated impact.

Proposed reduction or ending of financial support to the Community Managed Libraries.

The community groups who manage these libraries may be able to maintain this service, but there is a risk that this is not the case and that these libraries would then close, if an alternative community provider cannot be found.

Age

The current provider may need to reduce the existing offer (opening hours or services provided) or close the library entirely if new sources of funding are not found. Likely negative impact.

If the current provider is unable to continue, a new provider may amend the existing offer (amended hours, range of facilities or services offered) which may be beneficial or detrimental to residents. Possible positive or negative impact.

If an alternative community provider is not found and the library is closed, this could mean elderly residents may need to travel further to reach their closest library. Likely negative impact.

Disability

If the Council reduced or ended their support to the Community Managed Libraries, this might cause a reduction in access to large print and audio material for customers (some community libraries currently share the same library system as Council libraries). Possible negative impact.

If the current provider is unable to continue, a new provider may amend the existing offer (amended hours, range of facilities or services offered) which may be beneficial or detrimental to residents with disabilities. Possible positive or negative impact.

If no alternative community provider is found and the library is closed, this could mean residents with additional needs/disabilities may need to travel further to reach their closest library. Possible negative impact.

Sex

No anticipated impact.

Gender reassignment

No anticipated impact.

Pregnancy and maternity

Activities for babies and toddlers in libraries can act as a support network for new parents. It is possible that the existing, or a new community provider might offer an enhanced range of such activities. It is also possible that these activities may be reduced by the existing or a new community provider. Possible positive or negative impact.

If no new community provider is found and the library is closed, parents would need to travel further to another library to access these activities. Likely negative impact.

It should be noted that a separate proposal is also being considered which could have an impact on children's centres. If both proposals are progressed, there would be a risk of a double impact on support networks for parents with young children. Potential cumulative impact.

Race

If the Council reduced or ended their support to the Community Managed Libraries, this might cause a reduction in access to materials in other languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, etc. (some community libraries currently share the same library system as Council libraries so their customers can request stock from these libraries). There may be reduced supply of stock in ethnic languages. CIPFA 2019 found that 28% of adult library users were from ethnic minorities. Possible negative impact.

Religion or belief

No anticipated impact.

Sexual orientation

No anticipated impact.

Marriage and civil partnership

No anticipated impact.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Following government announcements on the COVID-19 pandemic, all Council libraries closed from 20 March 2020. Individual branches gradually reopened in late July 2020.

As the only service available during this period of closure, borrowing of eResources increased significantly during this quarter, expanding at a much higher rate than it had done previously.

Table 4. Comparison of issues of eResources during the April-June period in 2019 and 2020.

eResource	April 2019	May 2019	June 2019	Total	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Total	% diff
eBooks	1,317	1,370	1,220	**3,907**	3,276	4,213	4,233	**11,722**	**200.0**
eAudiobooks	596	646	656	**1,898**	1,470	1,325	1,011	**3,806**	**100.5**
eMagazines	2,390	2,634	2,110	**7,134**	3,237	2,890	3,085	**9,212**	**29.1**
eComics	75	36	43	**154**	219	110	28	**357**	**131.8**

eNewspapers (PressReader)	0	0	0	**0**	9,243	11,575	12,552	**33,370**

Table 4 illustrates that while the libraries were closed (no lending alternatives available), items also available to borrow in the digital library (books, audiobooks and comics) all had at least a 100% increase in the number of issues compared to the same period last year.

While libraries have since reopened with a limited service, the extent of the impact of COVID-19 is not yet clear. While use of digital resources may decrease again as users return to visiting libraries, it is equally possible that the risk of COVID-19 continues to act as a deterrent and customers will choose to continue to use digital services and self-service options to avoid excessive contact and to continue to observe social distancing. If this is the case, this would help to minimise the impact of some of the proposals as customers would be using alternate options not affected by these proposals e.g. the digital library which is not affected by amended opening hours or self-service only periods.

6. Supporting evidence about why a change is required

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), local government had to adapt to significant reductions in funding due to discretionary cuts in government spending by three consecutive governments from 2010. During the pandemic, the Council has delivered an entirely new range of services from scratch and at pace as directed by the Government to support our staff, businesses and residents. This, in addition to a significant impact on the income streams upon which the Council relies, has come at a cost to our finances. This savings proposal is part of the package of proposals that will help the Council to reduce spending and to balance its budget by driving out efficiencies, making savings and transformational changes and by adapting our services and how we provide them in order to protect customer facing front line services to the most vulnerable and those services most important to residents.

The options being consulted on draw upon changing usage patterns across Bexley's libraries over recent years – particularly in relation to increasing digital usage and reductions in physical book issues.

The proposed options for changes to library provision will be subject to a full public consultation in keeping with the DCMS advice on changes to statutory library services. This consultation is expected to be carried out over a three month period, from September to mid December 2020.

7. Possible mitigating actions

Proposed reductions to opening times, including a closed day or two half days at each Council managed library

- A footfall study was undertaken in 2019 to identify visiting trends to all libraries. When considering reductions to opening times, this study would be taken into account to try to align closures with periods that are least/less busy at each library – to minimise the number of residents affected.

- To maintain access to services, we will aim to ensure (where possible) that if one library is closed, the next nearest library will remain open.

- Saturday closures will be kept to a minimum to ensure people who are working during the week, so are not able to visit during the week, still have access to the service.

- Any whole day closures will be spread across the week between the libraries, to minimise impact.

- Clear communications would signpost all changes to timetables etc., and promote how each library may be accessed (public transport routes, parking options, etc.).

- Promotion of Home Library service as an alternative for customers unable to get to their next closest library (NB eligibility criteria apply).

- Promotion and development of the digital offer as an alternative which is accessible 24/7 for all customers provided they can access the internet. Since the introduction of eResources in 2010, use of these items has steadily increased. During the lockdown period between April and June 2020, use of eBooks tripled compared to the same period last year and eAudiobook downloads doubled. This shows that some customers are able and willing to continue to borrow items even when they are unable to physically visit a library.

- Offer training/workshops/instructions to show customers how to access the digital offer and to assist customers who do not currently use this service.

- Responses to the consultation from the BAME community will be analysed carefully when finalising proposals to ensure that feedback from this equality group is taken into account

Proposed introduction of a daily period where staff are not available and customers would access library provision through self-service facilities, at each Council-run library.

- See mitigation actions for changes to opening hours above.

- Clear signage and instructions to be available close to self-service facilities to instruct customers how to use these facilities.

- Clear communications notifying customers when this will be introduced and when the daily periods will be at each library so that customers are able to take this into account before they visit.

- For Council services offered at the library, promote alternative methods to access these services e.g. via the Council website.

- Prior to introducing this change, communicate this change in good time and have staff available to show customers how to use self-service facilities.

- Use of trained volunteers to be considered – to provide assistance to customers during self-service periods.

- Responses to the consultation from the BAME community will be analysed carefully when finalising proposals to ensure that feedback from this equality group is taken into account.

Proposed reduction of events, activities and other programmes, at the Council-run libraries.

- The Library service will work with the Council's Communities Team and the voluntary sector to promote the voluntary offer at libraries to ensure that a varied programme of events and activities can be maintained.
- Support and training will be given to all volunteers to ensure that they are able to offer the same level of service as staff when running activities, etc., which will help to minimise the impact on customers.

Proposed changes to the delivery of the Local Studies and Archives service – with access to trained staff by appointment.

- Clear communications to advise customers of this change and how they can book appointments.

- A variety of methods will be offered for booking appointments (email and phone number) to make sure it is accessible for all.

- An increasing proportion of archive records have been digitised and are available to view online. Targeted promotion to make customers aware of this and a drive to digitise more records would mitigate the impact of this proposal as it would allow customers access without the need to take an appointment. The effect of this is limited though as not all records may be suitable for digitisation.

Proposed reduction or ending of financial support to the Community Managed Libraries.

The community groups who manage these libraries may be able to maintain this service, but there is a risk that this is not the case and that these libraries would then close, of an alternative community provider cannot be found.

- Provide advice and guidance to existing community groups on possible new funding schemes they could apply for, to replace the Council grant funding.

- Work with the Council's Communities Team to help the current providers find additional volunteers to staff the community libraries.

- Work with the Council's Communities Team to look for new community groups to take over the management of the libraries if the existing providers are not able to continue. In the north of the borough this would specifically target groups that contain a high proportion of BAME residents.

Officer Drafting – Paul Fisher – Date 16.09.20

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