Executive Board - 21st January 2025

Subject:	Library Provision and Service Delivery to 2030			
Corporate	Colin Parr, Corporate Director for Communities, Environment &			
Director(s)/Director(s):	Resident Services			
, , , , , ,	Colin Wilderspin Director of Communities			
Executive Member:	Councillor Sam Lux, Executive Member for Carbon Reduction, Leisure,			
	and Culture			
Report author and	Nigel Hawkins, Head of Culture and Libraries			
contact details:				
Other colleagues who	Stephen Chartres, Performance, and Improvement Manager			
have provided input:	Janie Halsall, Business Development Manager			
	Terranum Abbas, Service Manager Libraries			
	Maria Balchin, Senior Commercial Business Partner			
	Richard Hawkes, Strategic Asset Manager			
	Beth Brown, Director of Legal and Governance			
	David Johns, Deputy Director of Public Health			
	Debra Sibley, HR Business Partner			
Subject to call-in: X	es 🗌 No			
Key Decision: ⊠Ye	es 🗌 No			
Criteria for Key Decision				
(a) Expenditure	Income Savings of £750,000 or more taking account of the overall			
impact of the decis	sion.			
and/or				
· / · ·	on communities living or working in two or more wards in the City.			
⊠Yes				
Type of expenditure:	□ Revenue □ Capital			
Total value of the decision	ion: £1.524m			
Wards affected: All				
Commissioner Conside	ration			
	red with the Commissioners' Office? Yes – 08 January 2025			
Commissioners are support	ortive of the proposals outlined to deliver the MTFP budget saving.			
	th Executive Member: 03 January 2025			
Relevant Council Plan	<u> </u>			
Clean and Connected Co				
Keeping Nottingham Wor	king <u>\times</u>			
Carbon Neutral by 2028				
Safer Nottingham				
Child-Friendly Nottingham				
Healthy and Inclusive				
Keeping Nottingham Moving				
Improve the City Centre	• = =			
Better Housing	<u> </u>			
Financial Stability				
Serving People Well				
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):				

This report sets out proposals for the strategic direction of the Library Service to 2030 taking account of the overall financial position of the Council and the need to deliver a modern and sustainable Library Service. It provides an overview of the work undertaken to date and the evidence base used to support the case for the changes being proposed.

The proposals have been developed from an updated Library Assessment and public consultation exercise, which has resulted in a refreshed vision and a set of strategic outcomes for the Service as outlined in Appendix 1 of this report. The report seeks to determine the future core statutory provision for library provision for Nottingham City, in line with requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

Does this report contain any information that is exempt from publication?

No

Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note the context, evidence, information, and findings from the library consultation set out in the Libraries Assessment Future Library Provision to 2030 Report (Appendix 1), which has led to the final recommendations for the future provision and delivery of the Library Service to 2030.
- To agree the officer recommended proposal set out in section 3 of this report in order to deliver a sustainable library service to 2030 whilst achieving the agreed MTFP budget saving for the Service of £1.524m. The savings will be allocated to the appropriate budgets where costs savings will be achieved for each affected site.
- **3.** To recognise that this level of library provision is considered to fulfil the City Council's statutory obligations. Where additional service provision can be delivered by external partners or voluntary support, this is supplementary to the City Council's statutory requirement.
- **4.** To actively work and engage with community and third sector partners to develop and deliver community activity and library provision for the city
 - 1.1 The proposal will enable the authority to provide a sustainable library service going forward to 2030, achieving the MTFP saving agreed for the service whilst providing its statutory duty of comprehensive and efficient service. The recommendation has fully considered a range of factors including cost, usage, library performance, location, and community need, as well feedback from an extensive consultation process regarding the future delivery of the service.
 - 2. Background (including outcomes of consultation)
 - 2.1 Context and Challenges Faced with reducing financial resources and evolving user habits, library services across the UK are having to redesign services and find innovative ways to reduce costs while continuing to meet the needs of citizens.
 - 2.2 **Strategic Principles** In 2021/22, the Council undertook a library needs assessment, outlining four key principles for future delivery of sustainable library service:
 - Modernising and streamlining the network.
 - Building partnerships and collaborations.
 - Adopting flexibility and adaptability.
 - Making the most of technology.
 - 2.3 **Progress and Future Savings** In January 2023, to support the principles above, the Council approved a service redesign and reduction in opening hours, rather than the closure of three libraries, which achieved savings of £233,000. However, as a result of the escalating financial challenge NCC faced to be able to set a balanced budget, a subsequent "Duties and Powers" review was conducted by the Council's Section 151 officer. This determined

that an overprovision above statutory minimum existed for the library service, and further savings of £1.524 were identified and agreed as part of the MTFP 2024-2027. This overprovision was further emphasised through a recently commissioned LGFutures report, which compared Nottingham City Council service delivery costs with its nearest "family" of authorities. Summarised in section 2.18. of Appendix 1, this showed that Library provision for the City was at a 14% variance, based on the budgeted cost comparison set for 2024/25 base budget accounts.

- 2.4 Robust Process for Change To ensure statutory compliance, mitigate risks, and align with the Council's improvement plan, the library service needs to demonstrate that these significant changes to the service will continue to deliver its statutory duty of providing a comprehensive service for all those who live, work, or study in the area and that we have adequately followed an evidence-based process.
- 2.5 **Proposals for Public Consultation** Following the Council's budget consultation in December 2023 January 2024, a more detailed library budget proposal was developed for public consultation. The proposals were:
 - Reducing libraries from 15 to 11 by closing Aspley, Basford, Bilborough and Radford-Lenton
 - Reducing weekly opening hours by 240.5 hours
 - Designing a staff restructure to deliver the revised service.
 - Decrease expenditure from the book fund.
 - · Efficiencies across IT and overheads.
- 2.6 **Options Considered** The proposals developed considered a range of criteria including:
 - Usage and Performance
 - Building Costs and Maintenance
 - Needs of Neighbourhoods
 - · Accessibility and Nearness to other Facilities
 - Financial Performance and Value for Money

Several other options including volunteer-run libraries, self-serve technology and external service providers were evaluated against budget targets, community needs and statutory requirements. Details of these are in Section 3 of the Future Library Provision Assessment Report (Appendix 1)

- 2.7 **Equality Considerations** In development of the proposals and throughout the consultation, we have been mindful of equalities considerations that must continue to shape and inform the future delivery model. An equality impact assessment of the consultation facilitated the prioritisation of inclusive engagement. Emerging issues from the consultation and, wherever possible, mitigations, are set out in the equality impact assessment of the final recommendations (Appendix 2)
- 2.8 **Outcomes** The proposed changes, if agreed, will save £1.524m and establish a sustainable library service through to 2030, with flexibility to enable service developments should future financial conditions allow.
- 2.9 **Consultation Overview -** The consultation on proposed library changes ran from 28th May to 19th August 2024. Throughout this period, it was emphasised that no decisions had been made as we invited citizens' input to shape future services. Efforts were focused on engaging a broad audience across

Nottingham and encouraging innovative solutions for a sustainable library model. A detailed summary of findings is set out in section 4 of Appendix 1.

2.10 Engagement Activities

- Surveys: 5,378 responses, including 4,360 online, 624 paper surveys and 394 from children and young people.
- Public Events: Five events, including community drop-ins with over one hundred attendees in total.
- Online Platforms: A dedicated webpage (Shape the Vision) received 7000+ visits; social media and engage Nottingham hub amplified outreach.
- Direct Outreach: Emails to 31,000 library users, 19,162 newsletter subscribers, schools, staff networks, and 132 stakeholders, including Arts Council England and UNESCO City of Literature.
- Workshops: Two staff engagement sessions and a stakeholder workshop.
- Community Feedback: 517 comments sheets from Friends of Meadows Library.

2.11 **Key Findings**

- Demographics: 66% of respondents were female, 29% male; 16% identified as disabled; 20% were from ethnic backgrounds other than white British. The age group with the highest engagement was 35-44 (22%)
- Library Use: 75% visit libraries monthly, with Central Library the most popular. Borrowing books, printing, and studying were the top uses. Access: 46% walk to their preferred library.
- 2.12 Community Concerns The majority of people were against closures and the reduction in opening hours with many expressing concerns about the levels of disadvantage and deprivation existing in communities where libraries were proposed for closure. They were especially concerned about the impact closures would have on children and young people, older adults, and people with disabilities. They highlighted the proposed changes would make it harder to visit a library and a vital community resource would be lost. Many expressed concern that working people would struggle to be able to visit a library if the proposed opening times initially consulted upon were implemented.

3. Recommendation for Library Provision to 2030

- 3.1 **Library Provision to 2030 -** The recommendations outlined below were designed with a view to achieving a modern, sustainable, relevant, universal library service that addresses financial pressures by coordinating with other neighbourhood services and forging stronger partnerships. The proposals move away from a 'one size fits all' model, instead tailoring services to community need and enhancing digital access while optimising the roles of staff, volunteers, and resources. This approach aligns with broader council transformation efforts to embed community-focused delivery.
- 3.2 **Emerging Principles –** Responding to the findings, concern and issues raised from the consulation the key principles that have shaped the final recommendations have included:

- Exploring community/voluntary sector management to prevent closure of buildings, including the possibility of maintaining limited library provision and community access,
- Tailoring opening hours to community needs, ensuring Saturday opening at all libraries and later evening closures on an area basis,
- Expanding volunteer involvement to support service,
- Strengthening partnerships with organisations, community groups and educational institutions for innovative delivery models,
- Leveraging technology and digital tools to adapt to services evolving demands,
- Maximising funding opportunities and income streams to enhance sustainability.
- 3.3 Retain 12 Libraries from the City's current 15 Libraries This will result in a statutory library network of twelve including the re-opening of Sherwood and the retention of Radford-Lenton. These retained libraries account for 93% of all annual visits and 90% of all book issues. This will also give 77% of Nottingham households access to a library within a 20-minute walk, retaining a good geographical spread (was 83% with all fifteen open) and strong public transport links to alternative provision. The remaining library network demonstrates the Council's continued commitment to providing high-quality, sustainable library services. Core hours will be professionally staffed with the use of volunteers to extend opening hours where support is available. Funding will continue to be sought to further modernise and improve these facilities to ensure they remain vibrant, accessible community hubs.
- 3.4 Three Library Sites with Community Delivery Potential To ensure financial sustainability while maintaining service reach, three libraries will no longer form part of the statutory provision. (Aspley, Basford and Bilborough.) The potential for community-led delivery is being explored as an alternative for these buildings, encouraging local partnerships to offer tailored services and programs. This approach supports community empowerment while reducing operational costs. As of 16 December 2024, the Council has received expressions of interest from three community organisations for operating the sites of Aspley, Basford and Bilborough for community use. These are currently being assessed.
- 3.5 **Repurposing a Library Site as a Stock Hub -** One library site (Radford-Lenton) will be repurposed into a centralised stock hub. This move will:
 - Enable the release of the Woodfield Industries site, generating a capital receipt through its sale.
 - Maintain a scaled-down library statutory service at the re-purposed site to ensure continuity of access for the local community.

This change optimises resource utilisation while maintaining core library functions.

- 3.6 Adjustment to Opening Hours Core library opening hours across the network will be reduced by 206 hours per week in total based on usage data and consultation feedback. This targeted approach ensures alignment with user needs whilst optimising staffing and energy costs. The recruitment and organisation of volunteers to extend beyond core hours will also be explored across each community library, depending on local interest in each case.
- 3.7 **Reduction in Staffing and Operating Costs -** A revised staffing model will be implemented, reflecting the changes in service delivery and opening hours.

Additionally, IT systems and operating expenses will be streamlined to support efficient service management.

3.8 **Reduction in the Book Fund -** The budget for new library materials will be reduced. However, a focus will remain on protecting our 'children and young people' book stock. We will also seek to grow our digital eBook service.

4. Other options considered in making recommendations.

4.1 In reaching the recommendations, a range of alternative options were considered, none of which were ultimately taken forward. These are laid out in detail in section 3 of Appendix 1

4.2 Option 1 Maintain Current Library Network Recommendations

- Benefits: No immediate changes to access
- Impacts: Fails to meet budget savings, requires costly maintenance, does not support a modern, agile service and align to Best Value and the Duties and Powers review previously undertaken.

4.3 **Option 2 Consultation Proposal**

- Benefits: Achieves budget savings, retains a core network, meets statutory duties, eliminates some maintenance liabilities. Allows for potential community asset transfer.
- Impacts: Does not respond to concerns raised by citizens and stakeholders from the consultation in relation to operational hours and the longer-term potential to build back.

4.4 Option 3 Further Reduced Network

- Benefits: Achieves savings through reduction of buildings without reducing opening hours for the remaining library network, retains a modern efficient network of quality facilities and with skilled staff. Enables capital receipts from asset sales.
- Impacts: Reduces household access to libraries (below 70% of households would be withing a 20 min walk of a library), risks not meeting residents needs, statutory duty and legal challenges.
 Diminishes Nottingham's standing of library points per 1,000 population compared to all other core cities.

4.5 Option 4 Community/ Volunteer Run Libraries

- Benefits: Engages citizens and reduces staff costs.
- Impacts: Low resident interest in managing libraries, long setup times, unresolved liability issues and limited cost savings.

4.6 Option 5 Outsource to a Third-Party Provider

- Benefits: Potential for cost efficiencies through economies of scale and opportunity to transfer risks and liabilities of buildings and service delivery.
- Impacts: Required detailed appraisal and procurement work, unlikely to meet savings targets on time, involves staff transfers (TUPE).

5. Consideration of Risk

5.1 **Statutory Duty -** Using evidence to inform proposals and consulting with the community are two important ways to help meet the obligation set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. They will be considered carefully by

Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) if a complaint is made about our provision.

- 5.2 **Transparency -** The publication of and consultation on the proposals, ensures transparency of the process, management of messages to the public and to encourage participation in the consultation.
- 5.3 Staffing Impact of the implementation of the proposed changes may lead to disruption in staffing as contracts change, and colleagues may opt to leave the service. In development of the revised opening hours, staff contracts have been considered and the library management team will work with HR to mitigate impacts. Vacancies have been held across the service to try and reduce compulsory redundancies where possible.
- 5.4 Volunteers Experience from other authorities has shown it takes time to recruit and train enough volunteers to support the service over and above the core hours budgeted. In addition, to ensure consistency and reliability. the use of volunteers to extend hours needs to be carefully managed and resourced. Short-term disruption is likely to be experienced while the necessary mechanisms and support can be put in place.
- 5.5 **Alternative Community Provision -** Work is underway to develop alternative community resource/library offers in the three buildings proposed to be removed from the statutory service. It is currently plausible for all three buildings to remain open with limited library provision and community access. If formal agreements were not reached around such alternative delivery by 31st March 2025, however, these buildings may have to be closed/disposed of.

6. Commissioner comments

6.1 Commissioners are supportive of the proposals outlined to deliver the MTFP budget saving.

7. Finance colleague comments (including implications and value for money/VAT)

7.1 The MTFP includes the following budget reductions to be achieved in respect of the Library Service:

		2024/25	2025/26	Total
	Details	£	£	£
2023/24 MTFP decision	RS58 - Integration of leisure, library & community assets into a new learning, development & wellbeing service. Balance to be achieved		150,000	150,000
2024/25 MTFP decision	Undertake an assessment of the Library Service provision whilst maintaining a comprehensive and efficient service offer	1,143,000	381,000	1,524,000
	totals per financial year	1,143,000	531,000	1,674,000

7.2 In July 2023, when the 2024/25 budget reductions were considered (Duties and Powers review), the library service budgets included premises related costs such as business rates, reactive repairs, and cleaning resources. These costs were factored into the estimated budget reduction calculations of

approx. £62k. During 2024/25, these budgets have been centralised and are managed as part of the Corporate Landlord function. If there is a transfer or sale of any former library site, this would achieve a cost reduction under Corporate Landlord, and so the premises related budget reductions will need to be reallocated to avoid an unfunded pressure in the library service.

- 7.3 The 2023/24 outstanding MTFP decision (reference RS58) as shown in the table above, is not expected to be achieved as originally proposed. Alternative proposals within other areas of the Directorate are being considered to meet this pressure, otherwise there will be an unfunded budgeted pressure of £0.150m.
- 7.4 The recommendations in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.8 outline the various measures which are estimated to achieve the £1.524m total budget reduction in the MTFP.
- 7.5 Paragraph 3.4 outlines the potential for community led delivery as an alternative use for the affected sites. The savings will only be met if the community organisations become responsible to premises related costs, as this will then lead to a reduction in costs incurred by the Council. Failure to be able to transfer these costs will result in the Council remaining liable and so creates an unfunded budget pressure.
- 7.6 Due to the lead in time to complete a compliant consultation process, there has been slippage in achieving all the £1.143m of the 2024/25 phased saving. The latest budget monitoring and forecast shows estimated delayed achievement of savings £0.404m. This pressure is being mitigated by one-off savings within the 2024/25 directorate budgets and is included in the monthly corporate reports.
- 7.7 Repurposing of library sites as outlined in paragraph 3.5 is affordable and included as an approved commitment within the capital programme under the Central Library Project (ref 124664). Completion of this work is necessary to release the Woodfield Industries site to generate a capital receipt along with adaptation works to other sites to maximise building usage and partnership working to release the budgeted MTFP savings. The Woodfield Industries sale will contribute towards the repayment of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) funding received from the Government to fund revenue costs for services. Asset rationalisation is also a significant part of the Council's Improvement Plan 2024 and Budget Strategy.

Comments provided by Maria Balchin Senior Commercial Business Partner 18 December 2024

8. Legal colleague comments

- 8.1 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, local councils in England have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all people working, living, or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it.
- 8.2 In providing this service, councils must, among other things, have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service

and lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.

- 8.3 At a national level, the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport has a statutory duty to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities.
- 8.4 When drawing up and delivering library strategies and plans Councils should consider the range of legal obligations placed on them by the Equality Act, including the Public Sector Equality Duty, Best Value Duty 2011 guidance, Localism Act 2011, Human Rights Act 1998.
- 8.5 As set out in the Government's 'Strategic planning of library services: longerterm, evidence-based sustainable planning toolkit' if the Secretary of State
 investigates a complaint about a library service not meeting its legal
 obligations, he or she will expect that library authority to demonstrate that, in
 drawing up its strategy, it had:
 consulted with local communities alongside assessing their needs; and
 considered a range of options (including alternative financing, governance
 delivery models) to sustain library service provision in its area undertaken a
 rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of its proposals
 (Equality Impact Assessment).
- 8.6 There are numerous examples where proposals to change library services have been challenged by way of Judicial Review. The grounds vary but frequently this been due to inadequate consultation and/or flawed decision-making processes.
- 8.7 The risk of Judicial Review can be mitigated by following the Gunning" Principles:
 - do not make any decisions or predetermine any options before consultation.
 - be open and honest from the onset.
 - allow sufficient time (up to 12 weeks depending on the magnitude of the changes being proposed) to engage widely, promote, allow people to give their views and ideas without being leading about the reasoning.
 - provide multiple ways for citizens to respond to the consultation, online, postal, email, letter, one to one, focus groups.
 - allow enough time to carefully consider and analyse the results of the consultation and respond to them if necessary; and
 - if the consultation is undertaken in two parts, ensure there is analysis of results which is carefully considered before the commencement of phase two.
- 8.8 In summary, the legislation does not specify the number of libraries to be provided in any area and challenges made to the Secretary of State over closures in other cities have confirmed that the meaning of 'comprehensive and efficient' is to be interpreted in the context of availability of resources, it does not necessarily mean that every resident must live close to a library. A review of library services with a view to making major changes to its library services can be achieved in a legally compliant way. Decisions must be based on a robust strategic review which includes a comprehensive needs assessment that must be accompanied by an extensive and inclusive

consultation. A failure to do this opens the Council up to the risk of challenge by way of judicial review.

8.9 To ensure compliance with this duty, the Library Service has conducted an extensive public consultation exercise and data analysis work in order to understand the current offer.

Comments provided by Beth Brown, Head of Legal and Governance, 11 December 2024

9. Strategic Assets and Property Colleague Comments

- 9.1 Where the proposals identify community libraries for closure depending on the outcomes from the consultation, this presents a number of immediate and longer-term considerations that need to be addressed before a final disposal strategy can be formed.
- 9.2 The immediate consideration needs to be towards decommissioning and holding the building(s) vacant. Ongoing holdings costs would include void rates, standing utility charges (if power needs to remain), security costs and reactive repairs resulting from vandalism.
- 9.3 Disposal of the site(s) can be considered on a long or short-term basis. The vacant buildings could be re-let if an appropriate user is found. There is also the option to sell the vacant building or undertake demolition to sell as development site.
- 9.4 The future use of the buildings or site(s) is dependent on a number of considerations, e.g. permitted uses for the buildings/sites and legal due diligence. At this stage it is not possible to include specific details on rental and capital values.
- 9.5 Any proposals that would involve vacant buildings being offered to the private sector to run a library facility would be unlikely to be exempt from procurement rules as "land deals", therefore a fully compliant procurement process would be required. Furthermore, to achieve a neutral subsidy, it is important to select individuals/organisations that have the appropriate financial backing to underwrite the full repairing obligations, notwithstanding that existing building may have significant maintenance backlog. It is also important to note that individuals/organisations have the appropriate management experience to take on such obligations.
- 9.6 The proposals set out in this report covers the repurposing of Radford & Lenton Library to be used as a store facility. This does raise some potential issues regarding access to this site. Corporate Landlord and the Libraries Service will work to address these concerns. However, should suitable access to the facility not be identified then alternative storage provision will be sought from elsewhere in the Council's library estate. The revenue savings proposed will be unaltered as a result of this.

Comments provided by Richard Hawkes, Interim Strategic Asset Manager,30 December 2024

10. Public Health Colleague Comments

Public Health current investment supports 9.3% of the overall budget. As the financial contribution from public health remains the same in this proposal, the proportion of the overall libraries budget funded via the Ring-Fenced Public Health Grant (RFPHG) will increase to 16.6%.

The primary purpose of RFPHG investment is to improve public health outcomes beyond the statutory duties of the local authority. RFPHG investment should be aligned to local needs and offer best value. To satisfy these criteria and maintain the current RFPHG funding, Culture and Libraries are committed to continuing to work with Public Health to outline how the proposed libraries offer will continue to support population health outcomes.

Comments provided by: David Johns, Deputy Director of Public Health, 03 January 2025

11. HR Colleague Comments

- 11.1 Where library proposals result in a deletion of posts, employee should be consulted with in line with the Restructuring Principles and Redundancy Guidelines. Anyone at risk of redundancy should also be referred to redeployment as per the redeployment policy.
- 11.2 Management will also need to consider whether employees will experience any costs in re-locating and determine whether any disturbance allowances are payable under the proposal.
- 11.3 Consultation should take place with the affected employees as a change to opening hours is being recommended. Where proposed changes to working hours will affect more than twenty employees, collective consultation must take place through the relevant trade unions.

Comments provided by Debra Sibley, HR Consultant, 10 December 2024

12.	Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)		
12.1	Has the equality impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?		
	No An EIA is not required because: (Please explain why an EIA is not necessary)		
	Yes		
13.	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)		
13.1	Has the data protection impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?		
	No Signature No		

- 14. List of background papers relied upon in writing this report (not including published documents or confidential or exempt information)
- 14.1 Appendix 1: Future Library Provision and Delivery to 2030 Assessment Report
- 14.2 **LG Futures Finance Intelligence Toolkit 2024/25 –** Financial Benchmarking Unit Cost Report for Nottingham
- 15. Published documents referred to in this report.
- 15.1 The Next Chapter: Library Needs Assessment January 2022