

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Overview & Scrutiny

## Agenda Item

**Subject:** Sustainability plan for Libraries

**Date of meeting:** 10 November 2025

**Report of:** Chair of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Contact Officer:** Name: Luke Proudfoot  
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**Ward(s) affected:** (All Wards);

**Key Decision:** No

**For general release**

### **1. Purpose of the report and policy context**

- 1.1 This Report provides an update to the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the proposals currently under consideration to change public library service provision. This is in the context of the statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all who live, work or study in the area and given the council commitment to make sustainable improvements and to deliver on the savings plan for 2025/7. The Report offers an overview of the processes followed to date as well as the responses to the recent public consultation. The consultation sought feedback on proposals including a reduction in opening hours at Jubilee and Hove Libraries and the closure of Hollingbury, Rottingdean and Westdene Libraries.
- 1.2 The Report offers the Committee the opportunity to review the process followed thus far and, if it wishes, to provide input on the proposals. Any such input will be taken into account alongside the consultation outcomes as data is analysed and recommendations for future consideration at December's Cabinet meeting are being developed.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That having considered the July Cabinet report and appendices attached as Appendix 2, People Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the detailed rationale for the decision to consult on proposals, as well as the decision to approve consultation and engagement on them which was made by Cabinet at its meeting in July 2025.
- 2.2 That Committee note the public consultation and stakeholder engagement that have been carried out, as well as the data gathered, in Summary of Consultation Responses report, Appendix 3.

- 2.3 That Committee further note the steps currently underway to analyse the consultation responses data and to take it into account when developing final proposals, including but not only the steps underway to further develop of the Needs & Use Analysis and to assess the equalities implications of the proposals.
- 2.4 That Committee note the opportunity this Report affords it to provide input on the proposals which were consulted upon, by making comment which will be taken into account in the development of the recommendations to be put to Cabinet.

### **3. Context and background information**

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider the Report of July 2025 at Appendix 2, which outlines in a detailed way the process followed up to the decision to consult on the proposals outlined in that report, as well as the methodology and rationale for selecting those proposals.
- 3.2 In February 2025 councillors agreed to reduce the Library Service budget by £210,000 over two financial years. This included looking at library closures and decreases in opening hours.
- 3.3 This work has been completed within the context of the Council Plan 2023-2027 and current Library Strategy 2022-25. In this context, the city council has committed to a change in public library provision in the city to make sustainable improvements but also to deliver on the savings plan for 2025-27 and offset increasing costs in future years.
- 3.4 The full reduction in costs associated with the changes are not reflected in the savings target of £210,000. The full reduction in costs would include the maintenance and facilities management, utilities bills and rates. These are costed to offset increasing financial pressures in both the Libraries and Premises revenue budgets.

#### **3.5 Timeline and Actions to Date**

February 2025	Full Council agreed an overall budget reduction for Library Services, to include reduction in opening hours at Jubilee and Hove Libraries and permanent closure of up to three libraries
17 July 2025	Cabinet considered a detailed report and approved officer recommendation to commence public consultation into proposed changes to library services
18 July – 10 October 2025	12 week public consultation Survey open Public meetings and drop-in sessions Meetings with community groups and stakeholders

#### **3.6 Proposed Changes, Savings and Rationale**

The service conducted the first iteration of a Needs & Use Analysis (see Appendix 2), looking at the usage statistics of each library, the measures of deprivation and needs in each area, and the geographic spread of sites across the city. These informed the proposals for changes to library services. The Needs & Use Analysis is being further developed, with a new iteration being worked on currently, incorporating understanding developed from the consultation data and feedback from communities. The specific rationale for the proposed closures and reduction in opening hours is set out in the Cabinet report for July.

- 3.7 An Equalities Impact Assessment was previously prepared with regard to the consultation process. A further, expanded, Equalities Impact Assessment is in development. This will focus on an assessment of the impact of the substantive proposals and will incorporate understanding gained from the consultation data and the new iteration of the Needs & Use Analysis.

- 3.8 These documents will inform the review of the proposals which will be presented to the December meeting of Cabinet for its decision. Both will be included in the papers for that meeting.

- 3.9 Proposals in consultation July – October 2025

**Central library reductions**

Jubilee – 2 hours Monday 5-7pm; 3 hours Sunday 2-5pm - £65,000

Hove – 2 hours Wednesday 5-7pm; 3 hours Saturday 2-5pm - £35,000

**Library closures**

Hollingbury - £15,000

Rottingdean - £25,000

Westdene - £20,000

Associated reduction in **management** and **out of hours** rotas - £50,000

**Total** - £210,000

- 3.10 Public Consultation Activities

The Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport requires a public consultation period, to engage with residents, users and non-users, for any proposals to change statutory library services. The opening hour changes and libraries closures were included in a public consultation which ran for 12 weeks from July to October 2025.

This included:

- A survey with 2711 responses. Most of these were completed on Your Voice (the council's on-line consultation platform), with 1% completed on paper copies. (Survey questions at Appendix 2)
- The [libraries.consultation@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:libraries.consultation@brighton-hove.gov.uk) inbox was used to collect more detailed feedback from groups and individuals in addition to the survey and 164 responses were received via this route.
- Posters, flyers and stickers were distributed and displayed at libraries and council buildings to promote the survey and meetings.
- Social media updates and press releases promoting the survey and meetings throughout the consultation period.

- 2 online and in 7 in-person public meetings and drop-in sessions. The lowest attendance was at the second online meeting (1 person) and at Hollingbury drop-in session (3 people). The highest attendance was at Rottingdean and Westdene public meetings, with over 100 attendees.
- Emails were sent to 122 community groups, library and BHCC stakeholders, as well as all local schools, encouraging engagement with the consultation process.
- Councillors and officers met with key stakeholders, including Hollingbury Old Boat Community Centre management, Rottingdean Parish Council, Heritage Society and Save Our Library groups and Westdene School.

### 3.11 Timeline for Next Steps

October – November 2025	Officers review and analyse data from consultation Prepare papers for Scrutiny Committee
Monday 10 November 2025	Special meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
November 2025	Officers review and finalise proposals to be presented as recommendations, considering updated Needs & Use Analysis and full Equality Impact Assessment, and with regard to any input from Scrutiny Committee Prepare papers for Cabinet
Thursday 11 December 2025	Final proposals put to Cabinet on changes to library provision. Cabinet decision
January – March 2026	Staff consultation to reduce staffing in affected libraries
April 2026	Any potential changes to public library provision implemented

## 4. Analysis of consultation responses and consideration of alternative options

### 4.1 Analysis of public consultation responses

A detailed breakdown of the consultation findings is available in the Summary of Consultation Responses document, Appendix 3. This includes but is not limited to: demographic data; which libraries respondents use; at what times and days; what they use libraries for; whether they can use alternative options; and any ideas for alternative proposals.

### 4.2 Themes

Some key themes have been identified through the analysis of responses, including but not limited to the following:

- Most respondents did not agree with proposals to reduce opening hours or close libraries
- Opposition to reduction in library budgets
- Concerns over impact on children and literacy
- Schools' use of public library resources and access to books
- Loss of study spaces for secondary, further and higher education students
- Loss of a vital community resource
- Loss of free community spaces, "third spaces", "warm spaces"
- Contact with staff and other residents
- Digital and financial exclusion

- Difficulty travelling to alternatives, particularly for families, elderly and disabled
- There was particularly strong response to keep Rottingdean and Westdene libraries open
- There was also particularly strong response to retain late nights and weekends at Jubilee and Hove Libraries

#### 4.3 Feedback by library

Some details from the responses related to specific libraries, more detail in the Summary of Consultation Responses at appendix 3.

Hollingbury - 10% survey respondents had used this library in the last 12 months

- 0 emails received
- Meetings were held with Old Boat Community Centre management
- Key themes: Impact on low-income families, digital exclusion and financial implications of public transport to alternative library options

Hove - 38% survey respondents had used this library in the last 12 months

- 3 emails received
- Group responses from book groups and writers' groups received by email
- Key themes: Impact on families, students and full-time workers

Jubilee - 71% survey respondents had used this library in the last 12 months

- 3 emails received
- Engagement with Network of International Women and Storytree groups (for refugees and vulnerable migrants)
- Key themes: Concern for vulnerable groups with emphasis on Jubilee Library as a 'safe space'; impact on families, students and full-time workers

Rottingdean - 21% survey respondents had used this library in the last 12 months

- 80 emails received
- Organisational/group responses received from Rottingdean Parish Council, Rottingdean Heritage, Save Our Library group, Rottingdean News and St Margaret's Primary School
- meetings with Rottingdean Parish Council, Rottingdean Heritage, Save Our Library group and local MP
- Key themes: Impact on children at neighbouring schools; impact on older people, particularly those digitally excluded or living with disabilities; lack of alternative community spaces in area

Westdene - 16% survey respondents had used this library in the last 12 months

- 37 emails received
- Group response received from Westdene Primary School, including letters from over 100 children
- Meetings with Westdene Primary School
- Key themes: Impact on children at adjoining school; impact on older people and those living with disabilities, with barriers to using public transport; lack of alternative community spaces in area

#### 4.4 Ideas and Alternative Options

A range of ideas and alternative options for making savings or delivering services were sought and suggested during the consultation. Those ideas will be actively explored and, where appropriate, may be developed for future consideration by Cabinet.

Some of the key themes most frequently suggested:

- Reduce savings targets for libraries and reallocate to other council services
- Increase use of volunteers or community-run models
- Seek alternative funding (sponsorship, donations, crowdfunding, charging and membership)
- Reduce or alter hours at larger libraries to maintain smaller branches and protect evenings and weekends
- Expand/alter library services (digital support and e-resources, mobile libraries, extending Libraries Extra hours at community libraries and consider at central libraries)
- Improve publicity and outreach to increase usage

### **5. Community engagement and consultation**

- 5.1 Please see point 3.4 for a full account of the engagement and consultation completed to date.

### **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1 Dependent on the outcome of the Cabinet decision in December 2025, changes will be required to reduce the Libraries revenue budget.
- 6.2 The net General Fund budget for the Libraries Service in 2025/26 is £4.3m, whilst the gross budget after allowing for income is £6.3m. The employee staffing element of the budget is approximately £2.6m.
- 6.3 To achieve the saving of £210,000, a reduction of 5 FTE is necessary from the Library & Information Officer and Libraries Managers teams. Around 60 libraries staff could be affected by changes to their rotas and will be consulted after the Cabinet decision in December. Vacancies have been held in the teams affected to minimise the risk of redundancy.
- 6.4 Savings include a reduction in running costs of the libraries proposed for closure. Changes to contracts may impact the extent and timing of savings achievable in 2026-27.

Name of finance officer consulted: David Ellis Date consulted (28/10/25):

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1 As a library authority, the Council has a statutory duty (pursuant to section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964) to “to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.”
- 7.2 Committee is referred to the detailed legal implications to the July 2025 Cabinet Report, appendix 2, which gave rise to a decision to consult on the proposals outlined in that Report. Those legal implications outlined in a detailed way the elements that the Council is required by law and statutory guidance to take into account. Those include the Gunning principles as well as the guidance from the Department of Culture Media and Sport: “Libraries as a Statutory Service”. When considering its statutory service and in particular when it wishes to make changes to library provision, the council must be able to demonstrate:
- plans to consult with local communities alongside an assessment of their needs (including any projections of need)
  - consideration of a range of options (including alternative financing, governance or delivery models) to sustain library service provision in their area
  - a rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of their proposals
- 7.3 This report outlines the process followed thus far in relation to proposals to change the library service provision in Brighton & Hove, including the recent consultation and engagement process. It provides a summary of the consultation data collected during that process and outlines how that data will be analyzed and taken into account – alongside up to date assessments of the equalities implications and a current needs and use analysis - as proposals for service provision changes are further developed by officers before they are presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.
- 7.4 Scrutiny Committee will wish to consider the consultation and engagement process followed with potentially affected persons. It may have questions about the process followed thus far and may if it wishes consider the consultation data appended to this report. However it will appreciate that it is for Cabinet to consider whether the consultation responses have been conscientiously considered before making any decision on proposed provision changes, having first considered up to date equalities impact assessment and a revised Needs and Use Analysis, both of which take into account the impacts identified during the consultation and engagement process.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson      Date consulted 22/10/25

## **8. Equalities implications**

- 8.1 The original Needs & Use Analysis (Provided within Appendix 2) was developed to inform the initial proposals for changes to the Library Service. This is a live document which will be used for this and future change management decisions, including the development of the new Library Service Strategy in 2026. With feedback from Scrutiny Committee and analysis of the consultation data, it will be further developed and presented as part of the report to December Cabinet.
- 8.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed, to monitor and support mitigation of impact of the public consultation into proposed changes to Library Services; this was presented at July Cabinet (Appendix 2). An additional Equalities Impact Assessment is being prepared for the December Cabinet meeting and will address the impact of proposed changes, taking into account feedback from the public consultation.
- 8.3 It is recognised that any reduction in public library services will impact some residents and risks reducing access to and use of services. A range of mitigations have been identified to potentially offset the impact of reductions in public library services. These include but are not limited to:
- Libraries Extra enables customers to access libraries when they are unstaffed, contributing to the accessibility of services in the city.
  - A full range of online services, with free access to e-books and e-audio, are available 24/7.
  - The Home Delivery Service delivers library resources direct to the homes of those who cannot come to a library due to disability or caring responsibilities.

## **9. Sustainability implications**

- 9.1 Please see Appendix 2 for the July Cabinet paper for travel implications as identified in the original Needs & Use Analysis. Changes to public library opening hours and closures could impact on how residents travel to access library services.
- 9.2 The next iteration of the Needs & Use Analysis is in the process of being updated with data from the consultation. Impact from changes in travel patterns will be acknowledged and mitigations identified in the Equalities Impact Assessment, documents to be completed and shared for December Cabinet.
- 9.3 BHCC is exploring ways to make best use of resources, including buildings and utilities costs. The proposals include a reduction in the number of library

sites and opening hours, which could contribute to a reduction in utilities usage for the service.

## **10. Health and Wellbeing Implications:**

- 10.1 There is potential for impact on the wellbeing of residents affected as identified in the Equalities Impact Assessment, documents to be completed and shared for December Cabinet.
- 10.2 There is potential impact on staff affected by staff consultation and reduction in posts, with the possibility of redundancies. A separate staff Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed for those changes and a formal consultation process followed.

## **11. Conclusion**

- 11.1 This report and its appendices outline the process which has been followed thus far in relation to proposals for changes to the city's library services. Members of Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the recommendations in this report, having first made such enquiry they wish to make, including of the relevant Cabinet member and portfolio holder.

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **1. Appendices**

- 1. Cabinet Member presentation for the Scrutiny Committee meeting
- 2. Cabinet papers July 2025, including Equality Impact Assessment, Engagement Plan and Needs & Use appendices
- 3. Summary of Consultation Responses Report

