

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Cabinet

## Agenda Item 85

**Subject:** Sustainability plan for libraries

**Date of meeting:** 11 December 2025

**Report of:** Cabinet Member for Sports, Recreation & Libraries

**Lead Officer:** Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing

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**Ward(s) affected:** (All Wards);

**Key Decision:** Yes

**Reason(s) Key:** Is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions (wards).

**For general release**

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

- 1.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (Section 7) to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who live, work or study in the area. When considering how best to meet this duty, the council may recognise existing constraints, taking into account the resources available to them. The city's Libraries Strategy 2022-25 sets out the vision for libraries to be a vibrant and accessible community asset. The Brighton & Hove City Council Plan 2023 to 2027 also provides a commitment to increase use of our libraries and improve facilities and library users' experience.
- 1.2 The decision was made at the council's budget meeting in February 2025 to make savings to the library service revenue budget, likely to be achieved through a reduction in public service sites and opening hours. In accordance with guidelines from the Department, for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), a 12 week consultation was agreed by Cabinet in July and completed in October. The findings of the consultation contribute to the final recommendations below.
- 1.3 The report makes recommendations based on the following evidence: the public consultation responses in appendix 1, the analysis of the needs and use of the city's residents and libraries in appendix 1 and 2, the assessment of the equalities impact of the proposals in appendix 4, and officer knowledge and understanding of the current and future needs and priorities of the service. The proposals also reflect the objectives set out in the council plan. The final decisions in relation to the proposals will be made by Cabinet and must reflect the requirement that the council meet the statutory

obligations of the Act to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That having considered the information provided in this report and its appendices, Cabinet agrees to make the following changes to existing library provision, being satisfied that its remaining provision complies with its statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service
- 2.1.1 Cabinet agrees to reduce opening hours at Jubilee Library by 5 hours/week on Monday evenings and Sunday afternoons from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 ;
- 2.1.2 Cabinet agrees to reduce opening hours at Hove Library by 5 hours/week on Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons from 1st April 2026;
- 2.1.3 Cabinet agrees to close Hollingbury Library on 31st March 2026 and notes that officers will work with partners in exploring alternative options for future community based provision;
- 2.1.4 Cabinet agrees to continue the existing library provision in Rottingdean with a further report to be brought back to Cabinet in 12 months to review the outcome of work with community partners;
- 2.1.5 Cabinet agrees to close Westdene Library on 31st March 2026 and notes that officers will work with partners in exploring alternative options for future community based provision;
- 2.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing, working in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sport & Leisure, to take all steps necessary or incidental to the delivery of the recommendations in paras 2.1.1 to 2.1.5 inclusive.

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

### Statutory requirements & Libraries Strategy

- 3.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act, as stated in paragraph 1.1 of this report. The Brighton & Hove City Council Plan 2023 to 2027 provides a commitment to increase use of our libraries and improve facilities and library users' experience.
- 3.2 DCMS is responsible for the superintendence and promoting the improvement of libraries. It sets out that if a Local Authority wishes to make changes to the library provision, it should 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
- 3.3 The city's statutory public library service currently provides access to 13 libraries, Jubilee and Hove Libraries in the city centre and 11 community libraries. The community libraries are single staffed from one to four days per week, and most are open to the public 7 days/week when unstaffed with Libraries Extra (LE). This enables customers to access the library when unstaffed, using their library card and PIN to access the building, monitored by CCTV.
- 3.4 Online resources and the Home Delivery and Equal Access Service are available for those who choose or need to access them. Online resources include access to the e-library, with free loans of e-books, e-audio and e-newspapers. The library service provides access to a wide range of subscription sites including family history, language courses and newspaper archives. The Home Delivery Service works with volunteers to deliver books and audio books to those who are unable to visit libraries due to disability or caring responsibilities. The Equal Access Service delivers resources to residential homes around the city. Libraries Connect offers volunteer-led sessions for those who need support to access digital services and IT within libraries.
- 3.5 If the proposed changes set out in section 2 of this report are implemented, Brighton & Hove will retain 11 community libraries. Together with the resources in 3.4 above, the city-wide offer is considered to provide an appropriately comprehensive library service while delivering efficiency savings to support the mid-term sustainability of services.
- 3.6 The city's Libraries Strategy 2022-25 sets out the vision for libraries to be a vibrant and accessible community asset. The current strategy expires at the end of 2025, and a new strategy will be launched in 2026, developing the longer-term plan for libraries including post Jubilee Library PFI contract arrangements in 2029.
- 3.7 The rising cost of delivering services will present considerable financial pressures for the service in the medium term and more changes to service delivery are likely to be necessary to meet these challenges. The new strategy will need to consider these pressures and the end of the PFI contract with its associated grant, exploring how alternative models of delivery, for example community-led services, might be developed to meet the needs of residents within limited resources.
- 3.8 The new strategy will set the vision for city libraries as sustainable and embedded community resources, supporting community resilience, focusing remaining resources on targeting services to those who could most benefit. It will build on the Needs & Use Analyses developed during this change

programme to continue to ensure that the Council meets its statutory obligations and serves the needs of residents.

### Savings requirements

- 3.9 Despite recent real terms increases in funding from central Government, Brighton & Hove City Council, like many other local authorities, is under financial pressure, with budget deficits forecast for the next four years. All services are asked to achieve savings targets in order to meet this financial pressure.
- 3.10 The Library Service is also experiencing financial pressures from the rising costs of providing services. The running costs of public services, including but not limited to cleaning, security and deliveries, are all rising, without additional libraries revenue budget allocated to meet this rise.
- 3.11 In this context, the city council has proposed changes in public library provision in the city to not only improve sustainability but also to deliver on the savings plan for 2025-27. Concentrating resources on fewer physical library locations and a reduction in opening hours, whilst maintaining a geographic spread across the city, will support longer-term sustainability of the wider city service, as well as safeguarding the quality of library provision.
- 3.12 In February 2025 as part of the council budget decisions councillors agreed to reduce the Library Service revenue budget by £250,000, most of which to be achieved through a reduction in public services, to include library closures and a decrease in opening hours.

### Processes followed

- 3.13 To review library services and ensure they could be delivered in a comprehensive and efficient way, delivering the agreed savings, a thorough process was required. Here is a summary of the timeline for the change process developed and followed.

February	Full Council agreed budget reduction for Library Services
March	People Overview & Scrutiny Committee
July	Cabinet agreed to commence public consultation
July – Oct	12 week public consultation
November	People Overview & Scrutiny Committee
December	Cabinet Meeting for final decision

### Process followed February – June 2025 - development of proposals

- 3.14 In the spring and early summer of 2025, council officers worked closely with the Administration to develop proposals for changes to the public library offer to meet the savings whilst maintaining a comprehensive and efficient service.
- 3.15 The Library Service presented a report to the March 2025 People Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Revenue budget reductions had been identified and

agreed at the February 2025 Budget Council. Details of the process for decision making and changes to public library provision were discussed, with questions about the timeline, Needs & Use Analysis and public consultation. The potential impact on older people and ideas for supporting them within the consultation were considered. The committee resolved to note the report. The need for further scrutiny of the proposals later in the process was identified. The second People Overview and Scrutiny Committee report was presented in November 2025.

- 3.16 In July, officers conducted the first part of a Needs & Use Analysis, looking at the usage statistics of each library, the levels of deprivation and needs in each area, the cost of delivering services, and the geographic spread of sites across the city.
- 3.17 Part one of the needs and use phase consisted predominantly of desk-based research and data analysis. Data reviewed included footfall, borrowing data (about what resources are borrowed, when and where) from library management systems, 2021 Census data, Office for National Statistics and Department for Work & Pensions data available via the Local Insight platform, and additional information provided by colleagues from across BHCC including numeric Schools Census, travel and Adult Social Care data.
- 3.18 The original proposals were identified through analysis of four key factors – need, use, geography and cost.
- 3.19 **Need:** Consideration of the needs of those who live, work, study and visit in the area. Key demographic information was collated to create a picture of existing and potential needs from library and information services. The analysis considered variation in needs relating to social outcomes from area to area.
- 3.20 It is recognised that communities are not consistent or homogenous and within community areas there will be differences in need. However, the needs of residents and accessibility of services were the key factor driving decisions for proposals for change.
- 3.21 In the original proposal, emphasis was placed on protecting services in areas of greatest need. It is recognised that libraries support literacy for children through access to free materials and events. They provide access to digital resources and support for digital inclusion for residents of all ages. They support people to live healthier lives in a range of ways, including providing access to health information, hosting healthcare events and delivering books to those who are housebound, addressing social isolation and loneliness.
- 3.22 **Use:** Consideration of current, previous and projected use of existing library provision. Usage data was collated and analysed to find trends in use and compare usage across sites. This included but was not limited to:
- Footfall by library by hour
  - Active borrowers

- Number of items borrowed
  - Number of computer sessions
- 3.23 While use does not necessarily correlate with need, it was recognised that changes at the most used sites would impact on a greater number of people. This was considered when considering proposals for change.
- 3.24 Usage statistics only show part of the picture for libraries, particularly the largest and busiest, where footfall figures are a blunt measure of use and book borrowing is only part of the library's offer. It was recognised additional data was needed to understand better how customers used the spaces and services, what they valued and length and frequency of visits. This data needed to be gathered through the consultation process.
- 3.25 **Geography:** Consideration of variation in geographical spread of libraries. The spread and grouping of libraries across the city was considered. Public transport links, parking facilities and measures of car ownership were included, as well as a measure of miles between libraries. Transport links to central libraries from communities were considered, as well as those between smaller, local libraries, as data showed that customers at Jubilee Library were travelling in from other locations.
- 3.26 This included analysis of the postcodes of active borrowers and how many of them used multiple libraries. Further information was gathered on this through the consultation.
- 3.27 The availability of alternative library sites nearby was considered as part of the rationale for proposals for change.
- 3.28 **Cost:** Consideration of the cost of delivering services and savings required. The cost of delivering services was measured and included but was not limited to:
- Staff salaries – Library & Information Officers and Libraries Managers
  - Weekend pay enhancements for Jubilee & Hove
  - Cleaning
  - Security
- 3.29 Some costs were not included; the book fund was not considered for reduction as the intention would be to reallocate stock to other libraries to support changes in use.
- 3.30 In summary, the balance of different factors was considered when agreeing proposals for change. It is understood that reducing hours at the central libraries necessarily affects the greatest number of people. However, the number of staff needed for those sites is far higher, so any reduction in hours would achieve a greater saving. Community libraries have much lower running costs than central libraries, but closure of these sites impacts on less individuals. The proposals for change were developed with consideration of balancing these elements of impact.

Identifying initial proposals from the analysis of need, use, geography and cost

- 3.31 It is recognised that the community profiles for each library, reviewing use, need, geographic spread and cost, are only a summary of data reviewed and cannot reflect the nuances of individuals using those libraries. The public and stakeholder consultation phase enabled the service to hear from a wide range of customers and residents and add some of those more nuanced experiences to the data for consideration.
- 3.32 To meet the need for savings, it was agreed to concentrate resources on fewer physical library locations, supporting the longer-term sustainability of the wider city service and safeguarding the quality of library provision.
- 3.33 Various options for reductions in services were considered by senior officers and councillors and the proposals were agreed at July 2025 Cabinet to go out to consultation. Members were asked to consider 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.
- 3.34 The analysis of need, use, geography and cost identified which libraries were of highest priority for the city to maintain and promote, based on the needs of the areas they serve, giving appropriate weight and consideration to each of the elements considered. Certain libraries were identified as priorities to support those areas at most risk of disadvantage. The consideration of these factors led to the following proposals.

#### Proposals put to Cabinet in July 2025

- 3.35 It was proposed and agreed by Cabinet in July 2025 to agree to commence a public consultation on the proposals, specifically covering the following suggestions:
- Consult on a proposed closure of Hollingbury Library
  - Consult on a proposed closure of Rottingdean Library
  - Consult on a proposed closure of Westdene Library
  - Consult on proposed changes in opening hours at Hove Library
  - Consult on proposed changes in opening hours at Jubilee Library
- 3.36 These proposals were based on an analysis of the Needs & Use data and the need to make savings, as agreed at Budget Council in February 2025.
- 3.37 An Equalities Impact Assessment was prepared with regard to the consultation process.

#### Public consultation July – October 2025

- 3.38 In line with guidance from DCMS, as at paragraph 3.2, a public consultation period was completed and has influenced the development of final proposals. Council governance protocols have been followed throughout.
- 3.39 DCMS 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 closure proposals were put to a public consultation which ran for 12 weeks from 18 July to 10 October 2025.

- 3.40 This consultation process included a survey, public meetings and drop-in sessions, email correspondence, and meetings with local community groups and stakeholders.
- 3.41 The consultation was well responded to by a wide range of library users, visitors to the city, and other stakeholders. Nearly 2,000 people engaged with the survey, and hundreds of people attended online and face-to-face public meetings. Views were shared on the value of libraries within the city and how they meet a wide range of community needs.
- 3.42 Officers and Councillors met with key community stakeholders, including Rottingdean Parish Council and Rottingdean Heritage, Westdene School and Old Boat Community Centre. At these meetings more detail was heard about the potential impact of proposed changes and alternative options for savings and service delivery were discussed in detail. These stakeholders and the local Save Our Library groups shared documents including letters directly to the Administration and petitions, stating their objections to the proposals.
- 3.43 All of the responses received during the consultation period are included in the Summary of Consultation Responses Report, appendix 1. The full responses from the consultation have been made available to Cabinet Members to support decision making. The information gathered through the consultation was used to develop the second part of the Needs & Use Analysis and to test the rationale for the proposals.
- 3.44 The data gathered through the survey further informed the development of the full Equality Impact Assessment and potential mitigations, appendix 4.
- 3.45 Further details on the public consultation can be found in section 5 below.

#### Alternative options

- 3.46 During the public consultation, residents were asked to contribute ideas for alternative ways to meet the savings and/or deliver library services. Suggestions ranged from minor changes to operational delivery through to fundamental redesigning of whole service delivery.
- 3.47 Those suggestions were reviewed by officers and developed as outlined in section 4 below. It is the recommendation of officers that, if the recommendations proposed in this report are formally approved by Cabinet today, then some of the alternative provision ideas raised through the consultation are explored further. These alternatives would not fully replace the council run services but could offset some of the impacts of reductions for residents in the affected areas.
- 3.48 During October to December 2025, council officers have continued to analyse the data from the Needs and Use Analysis and the public

consultation, to further review and refine the proposals for changes to the Library Service recommended in this report.

- 3.49 The second part of the Needs & Use Analysis was prepared, informed by the public consultation.
- 3.50 The People Overview & Scrutiny Committee met on Monday 10 November 2025 to review the consultation processes and responses from the public consultation into proposed changes to Library Services. Deputations from residents and responses from the committee were heard. The Committee made the following recommendations:
- recommends that Cabinet do not proceed with the libraries closure plan at this time. (referring to all proposals for closure of services – opening hours reductions as well as whole site closures).
  - recommends that if Cabinet chooses to proceed with library closures, the library buildings are mothballed until the refreshed Libraries Strategy determines the future use of city libraries.

#### Overview of final recommendations and supporting rationale

- 3.51 During the consultation process further reflection took place, considering the key factors and what the final proposals should look like. This is detailed below for each of the libraries affected by proposals. To support the consideration of these final proposals, an Equality Impact Assessment has been developed, identifying the impacts of the proposals and potential mitigations, see appendix 4.

#### Jubilee Library

- 3.52 **Original rationale** Jubilee Library is by far the biggest and busiest library in the city, with over 850,000 visits and around 180,000 items borrowed per year. A reduction in opening hours would impact a large number of residents and customers. However, with the proposed reductions, the opening hours for Jubilee Library remain good and provide a range of options, including evenings and weekends, retaining a 7 day/week service.
- 3.53 In the original Part One Needs & Use Analysis (appendix 2) the footfall at different times of the day and days of the week was considered and contributed to the rationale for proposals. Hourly footfall at Jubilee peaks on weekday mornings, remains steady throughout the day but drops off gradually between 5pm and 7pm. 1% of Jubilee's weekly visits happen during these hours. Sunday mornings 11am-12pm at Jubilee are almost three times as busy on average as 4-5pm. Sunday 2-5pm accounts for 4% of the week's visitors here. At Jubilee, a reduction of two hours on a Monday evening (5-7pm) and three hours on a Sunday afternoon (2-5pm) would have the least impact in terms of footfall as these are the quietest times.
- 3.54 Savings can be achieved through a reduction in staffed hours, particularly at weekends. Most customers at Jubilee do not live close to the library but visit when travelling into the centre, often for work, leisure or studying. 80% of

survey respondents said they use other libraries as well as Jubilee. Those customers would retain access to other libraries at some of the times proposed for reduction at Jubilee. Although the Needs & Use Analysis showed changes would impact customers, with a range of needs, on balance, the savings achievable make this a viable proposal.

- 3.55 **Additional considerations** Through the consultation and in the public meetings, customers expressed how much the library was valued as a free, safe public space and community hub for all ages, including children, students, disabled people, and those facing social isolation or financial hardship.
- 3.56 There was particular emphasis on the importance of Sunday afternoons for families, and the importance of weekday evenings for students and across these hours for those seeking a warm, safe and free space, particularly older people and those who are disabled. Across the range of protected characteristics including those from Black and other racially minoritised backgrounds, and LGBTQ residents, was a concern that any reduction in the service would impact on the importance of the library for health and well-being, social contact, and community connection. There is also a concern that a reduced service can lead to increased digital exclusion, but it is considered that the relatively small reduction in overall hours would not be likely to have a proportionately significant impact on this issue. The specific impact on each protected characteristic group and ways to mitigate that impact is examined in the EIA appendix 4. The recommendation would maintain a comprehensive service, which can meet the needs of residents, including those who use the library to study outside of traditional school and college hours and those who work full time and wish to use services at evenings and weekends.
- 3.57 It was recognised that a reduction in opening hours at Jubilee could impact the service's ability to offer Libraries Extra as an option in community libraries, as this currently relies on library staff phone support from Jubilee. Alternative options or delivery of this service element are being explored and it will be retained as part of the key mitigations for reductions in hours at the central libraries; some customers who previously accessed Jubilee on a Monday evening or Sunday afternoon could still access library buildings through Libraries Extra at community libraries.
- 3.58 There were some suggestions for alternative ways to reduce costs, including introducing Libraries Extra at Jubilee, see paragraph 4.26.
- 3.59 However, there were no suggestions which would offset the savings which could be made from a reduction in hours at Jubilee Library and the rationale stands for this original proposal to be progressed.

#### Hove Library

- 3.60 **Original rationale** Hove is the second largest and busiest library in the city with around 159,000 visitors and over 90,000 items borrowed per year. A

reduction in opening hours at this library would impact a proportionally large number of residents and customers.

- 3.61 In the original Needs & Use Analysis, footfall across hours and days of the week were considered in the rationale for proposed changes. Hourly footfall at Hove peaks on weekday mornings, remains steady throughout the day but drops off gradually, with 5pm to 7pm accounting for 2% of the branch's weekly visits. Wednesdays 6-7pm currently sees an average of 29 people visiting and a reduction of two hours here (5-7pm) would have the least impact in the week. Saturdays 10-11am are twice as busy on average as 4-5pm. 2-5pm accounts for 6% of Hove's weekly visits, and a reduction in these hours would have less impact on the library's footfall than at other times.
- 3.62 The retention of services 6 days/week and access to Jubilee Library on Sundays and some evenings provides a range of options for customers coming into the centre of the city. Access to community libraries during evenings and weekends through Libraries Extra mitigates some of the impact of the changes proposed on those not able to use the libraries during standard weekday opening hours.
- 3.63 While the two central libraries have clear evidence of meeting the needs of a diverse range of customers and have high numbers of visitors, savings made in these locations are higher than those achievable through community library closures.
- 3.64 **Additional considerations** Respondents to the consultation said they use multiple libraries and only 6% exclusively use Hove. Many said that closing at 5pm or earlier would make the library inaccessible to anyone working standard hours, and that Saturday afternoons are prime time for families. Similarly to Jubilee, most customers would be able to use alternative libraries if the hours were to be reduced at Hove. It was clear from the consultation that older people and disabled people in particular value the accessibility of the library, and that it is a warm safe place for them to use. There is real concern among them about increased isolation as a result of these changes. Across all groups of respondents, including those from Black and other racially minoritised backgrounds, and LGBTQ residents, some described libraries as important for mental health, social contact, and community connection. The detailed exploration of these issues and the proposed mitigation are in the EIA at appendix 4.
- 3.65 The introduction of Libraries Extra unstaffed access or volunteer managed services at Hove was suggested; these options are not currently practicable as an alternative to reductions in hours. Opening later in the mornings and retaining a late closure was also suggested. Mornings are the busiest time of the day for the library and Council Help Desk; a change to start times would impact more people than the reduction in evening hours. The recommendation for Hove Library opening hours reductions remains the same as the original proposal.

## Hollingbury

- 3.66 **Original rationale** The number of customers using this location is the lowest in the city; closure of this library will impact the least number of people. Hollingbury averages 7,000 visitors a year and 1,000 issues. The Patcham & Hollingbury ward contains two libraries, with Patcham and Hollingbury (Old Boat Corner) branches less than 2 miles apart. Footfall is considerably higher at Patcham (and consistently so) and management costs associated with Hollingbury's site are much higher than average; these contributed to the rationale for the proposal to close this library.
- 3.67 The original Needs & Use Analysis suggested that at ward level residents live at relatively low risk of deprivation. Ward residents are at a lower risk of digital exclusion than the city's average and 84% of residents own a car.
- 3.68 However, at a more granular level there are pockets of higher deprivation that should be acknowledged close to the centre in which the library is situated. This is detailed in the EIA given at Appendix 4.
- 3.69 Residents currently using Hollingbury Library would still be able to access statutory library services at other community libraries, including those close by in Coldean (2 miles), Moulsecocomb (3 miles) and Patcham (1 mile). The Old Boat Community Centre, where the library is based, remains a key community resource. In addition, the e-library provides access to many online resources and, for those unable to travel, the Home Delivery Service enables the service to meet the needs of residents and offset the impact of the proposed closure.
- 3.70 **Additional considerations** Although only 10% of respondents to the consultation use Hollingbury Library, it was clear that the impact on families and those with a low income was of concern. Some respondents said that they and their families would have no other way to access books if the library closed, due to the expense of bus travel to alternatives and the terrain between them making walking with children challenging. This would also be an issue for some elderly and disabled users. The impact of proposed changes on a range of people with protected characteristics is further explored in the EIA, appendix 4. Only 1% of the respondents indicated that Hollingbury was the only library they use. There are bus services available from the area to Patcham where the nearest alternative library is located.
- 3.71 Officers will continue to work closely with the Community Centre to explore how the council can support users of the centre who have the greatest needs, for example through donations of books and support for digital inclusion. There are particular concerns about the impact on those who rely on IT provision at the library if they are unable to get to an alternative library.
- 3.72 The development of the Moulsecocomb hub, 3 miles from Hollingbury, will provide a new library in 2027-28, improving accessibility and delivery of modern library services to the area, continuing to meet the statutory need to provide a comprehensive and efficient service to residents.

## Rottingdean

- 3.73 The recommendation to close Rottingdean has been removed from the proposals for Cabinet.
- 3.74 **Original rationale** Rottingdean receives around 30,000 visits a year, and 12,000 items are borrowed. This level of use was in the mid-range when compared to other city libraries, with footfall higher than most other community libraries.
- 3.75 When the original Needs & Use Analysis was used as the rationale for proposals, the needs and geography of this area were considered. Rottingdean & West Saltdean is one of the least deprived wards in the city and is home to two community libraries, with Saltdean and Rottingdean branches less than 2 miles apart and well connected by bus. Changes to services at this library would impact a moderate number of individuals, but with low measures of deprivation and high car ownership, it was considered lower priority compared to others in the east of the city, including Whitehawk and Woodingdean.
- 3.76 The original rationale did acknowledge that the population of Rottingdean & West Saltdean is older than the city's average, with both the lowest percentage of 0-16s and the highest percentage of over 65s living in the ward. Nearly a third of the ward residents are over 65 but are the least likely in the city to be in receipt of Pension Credit.
- 3.77 Rottingdean Library was identified as a low priority library and recommended for closure partly due to its geographic position. In the east of the city there are three libraries situated close to each other in Saltdean (1 mile) and Woodingdean (3 miles). Both of the alternative libraries have bus links from Rottingdean, and are modern, accessible buildings with parking on site. These were agreed to be reasonable alternatives for residents to access library services, with the additional options of using central libraries and online services.
- 3.78 **Additional considerations** During the consultation there were more responses regarding Rottingdean than any other library and over 200 people attended the public meetings. Residents expressed concerns that closure would disproportionately impact those unable to travel to alternatives, such as the elderly, disabled, and families with young children. This ward has the highest number of older people in the city (31% of residents are over 65) and, according to the consultation responses, one of the highest proportions of disabled users among all branches. These customers value access to a community space within walking distance of their homes. Therefore, whilst there are regular bus services to other library locations, travel to alternative options could be more challenging for those residents in terms of accessibility and cost.
- 3.79 Many survey responses said that closure would increase isolation, reduce independence, and negatively affect mental health and wellbeing.

- 3.80 Rottingdean has a moderate level of usage which is considerably higher than that of Hollingbury or Westdene, therefore closure could impact a greater number of people. Rottingdean was identified as a location which could benefit from a community-led provision and variations on this were suggested during the consultation. This option could retain some access to book stock and meet the local need for a community space, using volunteers to maintain the offer. However, it was made clear during the consultation that residents could not resource this option within the timescales necessary to make the saving.
- 3.81 It is proposed that the library in Rottingdean is retained while options for alternative community-based provision are explored with partners. If alternatives are identified, a detailed review in line with guidance from DCMS would be conducted and could include further public consultation and equality impact assessment. A further report would be brought to Cabinet in around 12 months' time on any proposed changes.
- 3.82 The savings which could be achieved through closure of the library are relatively moderate and, on balance, the retention of the service while alternative options for community involvement are explored can be maintained whilst still achieving the majority of the overall saving for the Library Service.
- 3.83 The removal of the proposed closure for 2026-27 will reduce the savings achievable against the Library Service revenue budget by £40k and will provide additional financial pressure in subsequent years as the running costs of the location continue to rise without associated increase in revenue budget. Alternative savings will need to be made from elsewhere in the council revenue budget to offset the savings not made in Library Services through retention of this location.

### Westdene

- 3.84 **Original rationale** The number of customers registered at this library is the second lowest in the city so closure would impact a relatively small number of residents. Westdene receives around 10,000 visits annually; its footfall is consistently lower than other community branches, currently forming 0.8% of the service's total visits. 6,000 items are borrowed annually; four times as much children's fiction as adult fiction is borrowed from this branch.
- 3.85 The original Needs & Use Analysis highlighted that the area has low measures of deprivation compared to the city average. Residents of Westdene & Hove Park ward are the most likely in the city to own a car and have qualifications. They are the least likely in the city to be digitally excluded, economically inactive or in receipt of benefits. It is the lowest scoring (least deprived) ward in Brighton & Hove with an IMD ranking of 28,634 and has the lowest number of economically inactive residents. The ward has the lowest crime rate in the city and children here are the least likely (by a significant majority) to be in receipt of free school meals.

- 3.86 The library is close to neighbouring Patcham Library and library data shows that those in the postcode sectors to the south of the ward already use neighbouring Hove and Hangleton branches.
- 3.87 For residents who are customers of Westdene there are alternative options within a short distance by car and bus links to the city centre. It is recognised that not all current customers would want or would be able to use public transport or car to travel to another library. However, the option of travelling to an alternative at Patcham (2 miles), Hangleton (3 miles) or one of the central libraries remains. In addition, the e-library provides access to many online resources and, for those unable to travel, the Home Delivery Service enables the service to meet the needs of residents and offset the impact of the proposed closure.
- 3.88 **Additional considerations** Many of the responses to the consultation reflected the value the school places on the library; it is adjacent to the school and there are regular class visits to supplement the school's library provision. While it is not the responsibility of the Local Authority Library Service to provide libraries for schools, it is recognised that closure would impact the school and pupils. Other responses to the consultation cited the difficulties particularly for elderly and disabled people accessing alternative libraries, indicating that there is no direct bus route to the nearest alternative library in Patcham and that it could be a difficult journey on foot. There is also limited allocated parking provision there. The various impacts on those with protected characteristics are further explored together with mitigations in the EIA attached as Appendix 4.
- 3.89 The recommendation to close Westdene Library remains a viable option to achieve savings whilst impacting a relatively small number of residents, with a range of options to offset that impact.
- 3.90 Officers will continue to work closely with the school to explore how Brighton & Hove and the Library Service can support pupils to access books and study space. There are options to explore which could provide an improved school library offer, with donations of books and furniture. For other residents, officers could also explore the option of community collections in the area.

#### Conclusion on final proposals

- 3.91 The revised and final proposals continue to support the rationale of protecting services in areas of greatest need. The data gathered through the extended Needs & Use Analysis and using the data from the public consultation, continues to support the original proposals for the closure of Westdene and Hollingbury Libraries and the reduction in hours at Hove and Jubilee.
- 3.92 According to the Libraries Basic Dataset 2023 from Arts Council England, Brighton & Hove City Council currently offers more library provision per resident than average across the country. Consideration was given to the travel times and convenience of library location; currently there are clusters,

particularly in the east and north of the city, with multiple libraries within 3 miles of each other. Were the proposal to reduce the city's libraries from thirteen to eleven to be taken forward, the city would still have more libraries per resident than the national average with a reasonable geographic spread.

- 3.93 Whilst it is recognised that any proposals to reduce services will affect some residents, most people will be able to access a comprehensive library service at the 11 remaining libraries, online and through the Home Delivery Service. Customers may need to alter their current usage habits and some will need to travel further, but the range of provision is still reasonably accessible.
- 3.94 If Cabinet approves the recommendations put to it in this report, officers will complete a staff consultation for library colleagues affected by any changes to rotas and sites. It is the intention of officers that any libraries agreed for closure will be decommissioned, with associated reductions in staffing, by April 2026.

#### **4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options**

##### Analysis of proposals

- 4.1 Any changes to public library provision will impact some residents. The consultation responses have made clear that the services provided in libraries are valued by their communities, and most respondents did not agree with the proposals to reduce opening hours or close libraries. However, in order to make the necessary savings and ensure an efficient service for the medium term, it was agreed at Budget Council that there is a need to reduce public-facing services.
- 4.2 Each financial year, budgets are reviewed, and options considered for offsetting increasing costs and meeting savings targets. In recent years the Library Service has taken action to reduce spending and make savings through closure of Mile Oak Library, reduction in staffed days at community libraries, deletion of vacant posts, restructure and reduction of the management team, closing the Booklover shop and moving other council services, including the Council Help Desk and Adult Skills, into libraries. Reducing opening hours and closing libraries is a difficult decision for the Council and only considered in response to an extremely challenging financial situation.
- 4.3 Officers acknowledge the impact that could be felt in communities affected by changes and are working on identifying actions to minimise this impact. There will be more work required to ensure the service is running as efficiently as possible into the longer term, and this will continue through the development of the next Library Service Strategy and through the council process of regular budget setting and review.

### Analysis of alternative suggestions

- 4.4 A range of ideas for alternative ways to make the necessary savings and/or deliver services were suggested through the consultation period. Some of the most frequently suggested are examined below; a full list of suggestions is included in the consultation data summary, appendix 1 . Additionally, suggestions were gathered through meetings with local stakeholders; these included providing support for local schools to access library resources and to retain digital inclusion support in communities.
- 4.5 Some ideas have necessarily been discounted as not practicable, for example because they would not achieve the savings in the time allocated, or they require an expansion of services without allocated resource.
- 4.6 As per the recommendations at paragraph 2.1, if Cabinet were to agree to close libraries, it is recommended the Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sport & Leisure, is given delegated authority to work with communities and colleagues to develop any practicable ideas.

### Summary of alternative suggestions

#### Seek alternative funding (sponsorships, charging and membership)

- 4.7 During the public consultation meetings there was much discussion of the way public services and particularly libraries are funded. The Library Service is maintained through the Council's revenue budget. As a core statutory service, the funding needs to be permanent and reliable, to maintain the efficiency and sustainability of the service. Alternatives, such as sponsorship or donations, would not provide a sustainable or reliable income to maintain services.
- 4.8 Brighton & Hove already operates a donation system; the Libraries Legacy Fund helps provide a variety of cultural and creative events and activities in the city, such as children's author events for the Summer Reading Challenge. This adds value to the core offer maintained through the revenue budget.
- 4.9 In accordance with the Act, the Council has to provide a comprehensive and efficient service to all residents and those working, studying or visiting the city. This service needs to be free and accessible; fees for services and membership charges can be a barrier to access and are not a feasible option for offsetting the need for savings and there are statutory limitations on what can be charged for.

Reduce or alter hours at larger libraries to maintain smaller branches and protect evenings and weekends. Move closure hours to morning, not weekends or evenings. Flex the reduction in hours around needs across the year e.g. study times.

- 4.10 A range of alternative options were suggested for changes to opening hours, particularly at the two central libraries, Jubilee and Hove. Footfall numbers show that mornings in these libraries are busier than afternoons and evenings; therefore a reduction in morning hours to offset maintaining evening hours, would impact a greater number of people. Both central libraries contain the Council Help Desks, which are open 10am – 5pm. Any changes to opening hours can not impact on that core offer; opening the Help Desks without opening the libraries would not be practical and changing that core offer would impact residents' access to essential council services such as support with Council Tax, Parking and Benefits.
- 4.11 The consultation highlighted the potential impact on young people during the busy study seasons, particularly summer exams for secondary, college and university students. Flexing opening hours, as seen in some university libraries, to extend the hours during busier periods, was suggested. This would not be possible without a reduction in staffing at other times of the year, which could impact other users of the library, such as older people and families.

#### Reintroduce the mobile library service

- 4.12 The mobile library service used vans fitted with shelving for books and other resources. It provided regular visits to areas of the city not geographically close to library buildings. This service was discontinued some years ago due to rising costs and practical challenges of providing a mobile service, including the cost of maintaining and replacing vehicles. Community collections were set up in several areas which had previously been served by the mobile library to provide access to books, and the Home Delivery Service was expanded to meet the needs of customers who could not travel to other library sites. The reintroduction of a mobile library is not a viable alternative to savings through library closures as it would be more expensive to maintain and manage.

#### Provide community book collections

- 4.13 Community book collections are already in place in Hollingdean Community Centre and St Luke's Church; access to book stock can be supported in communities where a library building is no longer sustainable, and can build on relationships with other community groups and spaces, driving footfall and engaging with those who may be at risk of isolation. This model would require some input from the venue, with volunteers to tidy and maintain stock and to liaise with the Library Service for refreshing stock. It would not provide access to a full statutory library service but could mitigate concerns about access to free books, particularly in areas of more need, where the cost of travelling could be a factor.
- 4.14 This could be practicable for Hollingbury Old Boat Community Centre, where their existing book swap area could be enhanced and supported with stock from the Library Service. It could be provided for Westdene if a suitable venue was identified and officers could work with residents to explore options for this in the area.

#### Improve publicity and outreach to increase usage

- 4.15 Feedback through the consultation has highlighted a need to increase use and awareness of Libraries Extra. Similarly, the Home Delivery Service is highly valued by those accessing it. Although there is limited resource for increasing marketing activity, as a key way to offset reductions in opening hours and supporting more flexible use of libraries, it is important more residents are empowered to access these services, and this will be considered in the development of the new Library Service Strategy. Any additional resource implications of increased take-up need to be considered going forward.

#### Community run models

- 4.16 Library Authorities around the country have a wide range of delivery models, with varying levels of Local Authority involvement, including CICs and volunteer-led libraries. Brighton & Hove Library Service have offered support to community groups in the areas affected by changes to explore options for this type of delivery model. The service could hand over furniture, book stock and shelving and provide support to set up a community space. The Council would not retain any responsibility for the operation or provision of these services and they would no longer be part of the statutory library provision, however, they could still meet some of the needs of the community, providing a third space in their locality, access to books and opportunities for volunteering.
- 4.17 However, feedback from communities during the consultation has expressed concerns about their capacity to take on this level of responsibility and the resources needed to sustain a service long term. The Council remains open to exploring options for community-led library spaces.

#### Explore third-party provider options

- 4.18 In February 2025, there was a Budget Council decision to make savings within the Library Service in the financial years 2025-27. There was no requirement to review the long term delivery model or explore third party options at this time.
- 4.19 To make changes of this extent would require a long term strategic review for the whole service. Any changes must maintain and support the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service and benefit the city beyond limited short term or localised savings. Whole delivery model reviews are costly, complex and time-consuming pieces of work; if this were pursued, it would not achieve the agreed savings within the allocated timeframe.
- 4.20 The new Library Service Strategy will be reviewing the medium- and long-term sustainability of the service, and options for alternative models of provision could be considered if they were to meet the needs of the service and residents of the city.

#### Rebalance staffed and Libraries Extra days across sites

- 4.21 It was suggested through the consultation that Libraries Extra and staffed days could be reallocated across the 11 community libraries in order to achieve savings and reduce impact on some of the libraries proposed for closure.
- 4.22 Libraries Extra (LE) days were increased by 7, reducing staff numbers across 6 libraries, to meet savings in 2023-24. Consideration was given to the spread of staffed days across different geographic areas and days of the week. For example, days at Hangleton and Portslade were retained to offset the impact of closing Mile Oak Library.
- 4.23 Redistribution of LE days could mitigate some of the impacts of reductions in services but would only address the reductions in staff costs. Part of the savings will be met through the closure of sites and related reduction in running costs. To achieve the savings whilst maintaining those running costs would necessitate additional unstaffed days, achieving savings through staff reductions. This would increase the potential impact on residents in more areas of the city and the risk of redundancy for staff.
- 4.24 Experience and data show that fewer people use libraries during LE, which impacts on overall usage. People prefer to use the library when there is a member of staff there, and the consultation results agree with this. LE isn't fully accessible; young people under 16 can't use it and people with disabilities cannot always access the spaces when unstaffed.
- 4.25 Any reduction in services could affect residents. The proposals were developed with the aim of minimising impact on those areas of the city with the most need. Increasing Libraries Extra days across other libraries could impact a greater number of communities across the city.
- 4.26 The introduction of Libraries Extra to Jubilee and Hove Libraries was also suggested, as a way to retain some access during the times proposed for closure. Currently the buildings are not suitable for this level of unstaffed access, as they require a daily security presence and on-site staff to manage the large number of visitors each day. The development of this type of access would require considerable investment and potential changes to the buildings; these could be explored if deemed appropriate in future years.

#### Increase use of volunteers or replace paid staff with volunteers

- 4.27 Brighton & Hove City Council have not developed or considered proposals to replace paid staff with volunteers. Changes of this nature would need considerable development and consultation with staff and trade unions.
- 4.28 Replacing staff with volunteers does not sufficiently reduce costs, as they require significant management oversight, training, support and guidance. This would not achieve the broader service budget reductions as planned.

- 4.29 The Library Service has an existing and successful volunteer programme. Providing volunteer opportunities positively impacts the service, by adding value to core services, and can also reduce loneliness and increase wellbeing for those volunteering. While it is likely the use of volunteers will be developed as part of the next Library Service Strategy, this would require time and staff resource and could not be achieved within the timeframe for savings, whilst maintaining a comprehensive statutory service.
- 4.30 However, where existing volunteer roles exist, the service will consider where this resource could support the service through the proposed changes to provision. The Home Delivery Service works with a network of volunteers to deliver books to residents who cannot easily leave their homes due to disability or caring responsibilities. By increasing the number of volunteers, this service could be extended to meet the needs of those residents who may be impacted by the closure of a local library building.
- 4.31 Where communities and individual residents have engaged with the service during the consultation, it is clear there is a high level of interest in and care for libraries within communities. Those who have offered their support for their local libraries may wish to continue that support through giving time as volunteers.

#### Support local schools to maintain access to books

- 4.32 Throughout the consultation, the links between local schools and public libraries have been highlighted. This was particularly strongly expressed in Westdene, where the public library is part of the school building, albeit with its own separate entrance. Concern was raised that the reduction in public library services in that location could impact school pupils who have limited dedicated space and resources within the school.
- 4.33 Brighton & Hove City Council could explore ways to support the school to continue to provide access to books for pupils; there are options for the school to set up a school library in the space vacated by the public library or to improve their existing library area. The service could hand over furniture, shelving and children's book stock and provide support in the short term to set up a dedicated school library. These options would need to be scoped in more detail, working closely with the school.
- 4.34 The Library Service would fully withdraw from the space and would no longer provide a library at that site. This option would not provide a public library provision or community space for residents but could continue to meet some of the needs of the school. Residents could continue to access a fully comprehensive library service by using alternative sites and online resources.

#### Support communities with digital inclusion

- 4.35 The Needs & Use Analysis and feedback during the consultation highlighted the need for accessible wifi and computer facilities in community venues and the impact on local residents who are not digitally confident. Survey

responses indicated that computer use was a key reason for customers visiting libraries.

- Computer use and printing (710 respondents - 28%)
- Using wifi (818 respondents - 30%)
- Study/Homework (536 respondents - 20%)
- Work (611 respondents - 23%)

- 4.36 The closure of libraries and reductions in opening hours will impact on those who are currently using library computers; they will need to travel further or change their visiting times to be able to access these facilities. The impact of the loss of IT facilities if Hollingbury Library were to close has been raised by residents and the Old Boat Community Centre. A suggested mitigation for this impact, for the Council to continue to provide wifi and to donate IT equipment no longer in use by the library service, is being considered to enable the centre to continue to support residents in this way. This would incur a cost to the Council and the centre would need to be able to maintain support for the facility in the longer term.
- 4.37 The Library Service could continue to advertise its Libraries Connect computer support volunteer service at the centre, which could be delivered at other library locations as part of the statutory, comprehensive service. This mitigation could be explored in other venues for areas where libraries are proposed to close.

#### Reduce savings targets for libraries and reallocate to other council services

- 4.38 The financial challenges facing the Council impacts on all services, not only libraries. All Directorates are working to reduce their revenue budget spending and achieve savings in the short and medium term. The significant amount of saving identified for the Library Service could not be reallocated to other council services without similarly serious impact in other areas.
- 4.39 This suggestion has been considered and actioned with regard to Rottingdean Library. The saving identified and associated financial pressures for 2026-27 have been reallocated into the council's saving targets.

#### Impact & mitigations

- 4.40 A range of mitigations have been identified to offset the impact of reductions in public library services. These are explored in more detail in the Equalities Impact Assessment; they can broadly be summarised as:
- Ensure communications about any agreed changes to library services are fully accessible to all affected groups.
  - Continue with targeted engagement and support for vulnerable groups about the changes and how to access alternative services
  - Establish ways of monitoring any impacts and of reviewing and adapting mitigating actions as required
- 4.41 We will further explore and develop alternative options as described above.

## 5. Community engagement and consultation

### Public consultation activities

- 5.1 DCMS requires a public consultation period for any proposals to change statutory library services, in order to engage with residents, users and non-users. Changes to opening hours and library closures were included in a public consultation which ran for 12 weeks from 18 July to 10 October 2025, see appendix 1 for a summary of the consultation responses.
- 5.2 The consultation responses included:
- 2711 survey responses
  - 164 emails
  - Nearly 400 people attended 9 public meetings, online and in person

### Consultation engagement

- 5.3 The consultation and associated survey were publicised online, in libraries and other council buildings. Councillors and officers met with a range of stakeholder groups on request, including Rottingdean Parish Council, the Save Our Library (Rottingdean) campaign, Old Boat Corner Community Centre and Westdene Primary School.
- 5.4 City schools were informed via the schools' bulletin and schools closest to libraries affected by the proposals were contacted directly with the offer of additional support to enable pupils' and teachers' engagement with the consultation.
- 5.5 Stakeholders and community organisations were contacted with information about the proposals and survey and were invited to share a response as an organisation or group. They were also asked to share details with a wide range of residents from across the city, including young people, those living with disabilities, those at risk of digital exclusion, Black and Racially Minoritised diasporas, older people, care leavers, the LGBTQ+ community, those with neurodivergence, low-income families and those experiencing mental health issues. A range of visits were also made by library staff to community groups, including the Network of International Women, StoryTree and the Social Prescribers Forum to give additional support to engage with the consultation.
- 5.6 Monitoring data received via the survey and the level of email responses were both evaluated throughout the period. As of 9th September, only 6% of respondents that shared monitoring information were from Black and Racially Minoritised background, which was not representative of the city's residents, 26% from Black and Racially Minoritised backgrounds (Census 2021).
- 5.7 Partner organisations and colleagues were proactively approached for support to ensure the range of voices heard were as diverse as possible. Additional online marketing that features more diverse imagery (of real library customers) was created to support engagement with Black and

Racially Minoritised residents on the proposals. At the consultation conclusion, 12% of respondents identified as being from a Black or Racially Minoritised background, doubling that area of engagement.

### Consultation responses

- 5.8 The detailed response data is available in the Summary of Consultation Responses, appendix 1. The majority of respondents do not agree with the proposals for reductions in services; they see libraries as vital public spaces whose closure or reduction would have far-reaching negative impacts.
- 5.9 The following themes were identified through the consultation process and a response is provided to each of them below.

### Opposition to reduction in library budgets

- 5.10 Respondents overwhelmingly oppose library closures and reductions in opening hours, describing libraries as vital, irreplaceable community assets that provide much more than just access to books.
- 5.11 Many respondents believe the proposed savings are small compared to long-term social and educational costs. They urge the council to find savings elsewhere.
- 5.12 The concerns expressed about reductions to the Library Service budget are understood. The report sets out how the impacts of the savings will be mitigated and how a comprehensive and effective library service will be delivered. The report also sets out how the savings amount for Rottingdean Library has been removed from the Library Service savings.

### Concerns over impact on children and literacy, and schools' use of libraries

- 5.13 Many stress the crucial role libraries play in encouraging children to read, supporting schoolwork, and providing educational opportunities that may not be available at home.
- 5.14 Many parents and carers described libraries as essential for children's literacy and development, offering access to books they could not otherwise afford and providing educational activities. School links were highlighted as important, and libraries located near schools are especially valued.
- 5.15 The view that libraries are important for children's reading skills and enjoyment of reading is fully accepted. The children and young people's offer across the city's Library Service will continue to be promoted and developed. Supporting the communities using libraries proposed for closure with ongoing access to books and resources for children and young people will be work undertaken in t2026.

### Loss of study space for young people and students

- 5.16 There was strong opposition to reducing Jubilee and Hove's opening hours, with many respondents stressing that current late openings and weekend hours are essential for people who work full-time, parents, students, and families. Students under 16 are unable to use Libraries Extra unaccompanied, limiting their access to alternatives.
- 5.17 A wide range of learners wishing to study within the Council's libraries is welcomed, and the impact of earlier closing of central libraries is recognised. Libraries Extra will continue to be available in community libraries during the hours proposed for reduction at Jubilee and Hove and the service will retain two late nights at Jubilee on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

#### Libraries as 'third' spaces that support community cohesion and reduce social isolation

- 5.18 Libraries were repeatedly described as safe, warm, and inclusive spaces that support social connection, wellbeing, and provide free spaces for all ages, especially children, the elderly, low-income families, and vulnerable groups.
- 5.19 Libraries were also described as safe havens for LGBTQ+ people, migrants, and other minorities - places where they feel welcome and can access relevant resources. Several respondents mentioned the importance of libraries as neutral spaces for community cohesion and integration.
- 5.20 The feedback shared by library users about their feeling of safety and support within city libraries is welcomed. The Council recognises the concerns raised during the consultation and will continue to work with communities in the city to understand and respond to needs appropriately within the Library Service, as detailed in the EIA, appendix 4.

#### Difficulty travelling to alternatives, particularly for families, elderly and disabled

- 5.21 There was strong concern that closures or reduced hours could disproportionately affect those who cannot easily travel further, such as people with disabilities, older people, families with young children, and those on low incomes.
- 5.22 Concerns were expressed about financial constraints and public transport costs, as well as the inconvenience of travelling longer distances to reach another library.
- 5.23 While some would consider driving to the next available library, parking is cited as a barrier to this (the example of limited spaces in the on-site car park at Patcham being given by multiple respondents).
- 5.24 Parents with young children highlighted the difficulty of travelling to alternative libraries, especially when they rely on walking or public transport due to climate change concerns and financial constraints.

- 5.25 The concerns of residents regarding additional or more challenging travel options are acknowledged. Some customers will need to travel further to access services, but the proposals retain 11 libraries across the city, in areas which are accessible by public transport or by car. Online services support those who wish to travel less, with online ordering and loan renewal as well as access to e-resources.

#### Digital and financial exclusion

- 5.26 Digital exclusion was frequently mentioned and the fact that libraries provide essential internet and computer access for those who cannot afford it at home, which is crucial for job-seeking, benefits, homework and administrative tasks.
- 5.27 Libraries are seen as one of the last remaining places where people can spend time without having to spend money or face commercial pressures.
- 5.28 The Council appreciates the impact of internet and computer access in communities. Those who are digitally less confident can be supported through the Library Connect network of volunteers, which will continue to operate from the remaining libraries.
- 5.29 The feedback that libraries are a free and warm space is recognised. The Council will continue to work with communities in the city to understand and respond to needs appropriately within the Library Service, as detailed in the EIA, appendix 4.

#### Jubilee & Hove

- 5.30 There was a strong response to retain late nights and weekends at Jubilee and Hove Libraries, noting these are peak times for working people, students, and families.
- 5.31 Many respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal to reduce Jubilee Library's opening hours. There was particular emphasis on the importance of Sunday afternoons for families, and the importance of weekday evenings for students.
- 5.32 The Council acknowledges that the impact of any changes at the central libraries will impact on the greatest number of people, due to the high levels of use. The service would retain 11 libraries across the city and 7 day/week access.

#### Community libraries

- 5.33 There was a strong response to keep Rottingdean and Westdene libraries open. Respondents highlight their usage (especially by children and older people), their role as community and cultural hubs (Rottingdean Library's position within The Grange), proximity to schools, and the minimal financial savings compared to the social cost. Many argue that closing these libraries would increase isolation and reduce access for those unable to travel.

- 5.34 The Council acknowledges the impact of changes at community libraries upon residents in those areas. The Council will continue to work with communities in the city to understand and respond to the needs of specific areas, particularly where libraries are proposed for closure.
- 5.35 Suggestions were made for alternative ways to make savings or deliver services, as at paragraph 4.4
- 5.36 59% of respondents shared monitoring information which is summarised, alongside all of the consultation data in Appendix 1. As well as being asked about their use of libraries services, respondents were asked if they would be impacted in relation to their personal characteristics and these responses were taken into consideration in development of the Equalities Impact Assessment, appendix 4.

## **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 The total savings assigned to the Libraries Service in 2025/26 was £0.111m £0.042m has been achieved through operational streamlining in 2025-26.
- 6.3 Within the Medium Term Financial Strategy further savings of £0.140m have been identified for 2026/27 to be met through reductions in library services and staff hours.
- 6.4 The impact on savings of removing Rottingdean Library is £30k, which is made up of £25k direct costs and £5k associated management costs.
- 6.5 As a consequence of rising costs and Rottingdean Library remaining open, there is likely to be an additional pressure of £10k in 2026/27 for this library. Therefore, in total the proposed Libraries savings in 2026/27 have been reduced by a total of £40k taking the total from £140k to £100k.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams Date consulted: 27/11/25

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1 A decision to change the operation of the library service must be made in accordance with the statutory duty in Section 7 of the Libraries and Public Museums Act 1964. The Cabinet needs to be satisfied that, if the changes proposed in the report are made, the Council as a library authority will still be able “to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.” The duty relates to those whose residence, place of work or study is within the Council’s area. In fulfilling its duty, a library has to have regard to the desirability of (a) securing that facilities are available for the borrowing of books and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the requirements of both adults and

children and (b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as may be required by persons using it.

- 7.2 Case law has clarified that “a comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. Comprehensive has therefore been taken to mean delivering a service that is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on council resources.” [\*Bailey v London Borough of Brent\* \[2011\] EWHC 2572 \(Admin\)](#) (approved by the Court of Appeal [2012] EWCA Civ 1586).
- 7.3 The Department of Culture Media and Sport has produced non-statutory guidance entitled “Libraries as a Statutory Service” (updated 21 February 2025) which is designed to assist councils when considering its statutory service and in particular when proposing changes to it. This includes reference to the need to demonstrate plans to consult with local communities alongside an assessment of their needs. A “Needs and Use Analysis” in two parts is attached to this report and should be considered by the Cabinet when making its decision. Case law has also indicated the importance of an analysis of needs if making changes to provision.
- 7.4 Given the nature of the changes proposed, a period of consultation with those potentially affected has been carried out. The process of consultation has been done in accordance with the *Gunning* principles:
- Proposals were consulted on at a formative stage to allow for genuine input and potential changes prior to any final decision.
  - Consultees were provided with sufficient information about the proposals to understand them and provide meaningful feedback.
  - Sufficient time had to be given for respondents to participate in the consultation process- in this case 12 weeks was given
  - The consultation responses need to be conscientiously considered by the Cabinet before making a final decision.
- 7.5 A summary of the consultation responses has been provided as appendix 1, and these have been further analysed in part two of the “Needs and Use” analysis and the Equality Impact Assessment which are both attached, and in the report itself which includes a consideration of the responses to points that were put forward.
- 7.6 The Equality Act 2010 states that, when carrying out their functions, public bodies must have “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination, and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not (Equality Act 2010, Section 149). Case law indicates that due regard means “the regard that is appropriate in all the particular circumstances in which the public authority concerned is carrying out its function as a public authority” but that it is a duty to give due regard rather than achieve a particular result. It also

means that the public body should take account of any countervailing factors.

- 7.7 An equalities impact assessment has been carried out in relation to the recommendations. Cabinet needs to have significant regard both to the equality impact assessment itself and to the analysis of it in the body of this report. This is particularly important given that the equality impact assessment has identified negative impacts for some people with different protected characteristics, including age (both for older people and children) and disability.

Name of lawyer consulted: Allan Wells      Date consulted: 25/11/2025

## **8. Risk implications**

- 8.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who live, work or study in the area (section 7). Case law indicates that consideration of the duty can take into account the constraints on council resources. Any changes to provision can be challenged at any time through a complaint to DCMS. The processes followed and decision making can be challenged through Judicial Review.
- 8.2 If changes are made to the library service, staff will then be part of a consultation on changes to their roles and rotas. Risks which could impact on staff will be addressed in a separate Equality Impact Assessment and a full support package as part of the staff restructure consultation period. The integration of other services has also impacted staff and added to the levels of change being managed by the team. This level of change presents the risk of potential for industrial unrest. Colleagues have been engaged in the consultation process as key stakeholders and all staff are supported through the usual HR processes and line management.

## **9. Equalities implications**

- 9.1 The Equality Impact Assessment has been updated. The original Needs & Use Analysis informed the first EIA, which particularly indicated possible impacts on those under 16, older people, those with disabilities, those from black and racially minoritised communities, women, carers, those experiencing homelessness, and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- 9.2 The public consultation period provided additional feedback and information from respondents about how the changes could impact them, and if they would be impacted in relation to their personal characteristics. This data has been used in the development of the extended EIA, appendix 4, which examines the potential impact of each proposal on each of the affected groups.
- 9.3 It is recognised the proposed changes to library services are likely to impact a large number of people and could have more impact on certain groups or

in certain geographic areas. There could be a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups in the city, including disabled people, older people, children and young people, carers, migrants, refugees, and those living in poverty. These groups are more likely to rely on libraries for access to resources, including internet and computers, and safe spaces to meet and spend time within their community.

- 9.4 The consultation highlighted particular concerns about the potential impact on older people and the availability of community spaces in the areas proposed for closures. Libraries are valued as free spaces to improve wellbeing and decrease loneliness.
- 9.5 There were also responses highlighting the potential impact on children and young people, particularly children in the community libraries and young people studying in the central libraries. It's recognised that libraries help level the playing field for children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing free access to books, learning resources, and enrichment activities. Reductions in access to services risk widening educational and social inequalities.
- 9.6 The EIA includes possible mitigations for those impacts, and the Library Service is committed to responding to the needs of all residents to continue to provide a comprehensive service across the city.
- 9.7 The EIA concludes with a series of SMART actions to ensure those mitigations are taken forward. These broadly fall into three areas of work:
- Ensure communications about any agreed changes to library services are fully accessible to all affected groups.
  - Continue with targeted engagement and support for vulnerable groups about the changes and how to access alternative services
  - Establish way of monitoring any impacts and of reviewing and adapting mitigating actions as required

## **10. Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 Travel is kept to a minimum, but, where necessary, active and sustainable travel is prioritised. The proposals retain 11 libraries across the city, in areas which are accessible by public transport, and many of which are co-located with or close to other community assets such as schools, shops, Family Hubs and GP surgeries. Online services support those who wish to travel less, with online ordering and loan renewal as well as access to e-resources.
- 10.2 Through the consultation, the service has heard that customers value having access to a library within walking distance of their home and that they use the service in conjunction with other journeys, such as school pick-ups and shopping trips. Maintaining services within communities enables residents to minimise journeys by car or public transport. Brighton & Hove enjoys an excellent and comprehensive network of public transport including buses and trains, and a network of cycle lanes and traffic calming to incentivise greener transport options. However, some residents will need to journey by car due to their needs, such as disability or young families, which makes

public transport journeys less practical for them or where the public transport links from their home to a particular library are not very practicable.

- 10.3 The areas where there are proposed closures are served by frequent bus routes. For Westdene the number 27 runs between Westdene and Saltdean, via the city centre but also passing bus stops where changes to other bus routes are provided. Hollingbury is well served by the number 46 route and several of the 5s – which enable connections and some direct routes to Patcham Library. A map indicating these bus routes is included in the EIA.
- 10.4 The Council is exploring ways to make the best use of resources, including buildings. The co-location of libraries with other community spaces is part of the long-term sustainability strategy, including a new library in the Moulsecoomb Hub in 2027-28, co-location of Council Help Desks and Adult Education & Skills at Jubilee in place from 2025. The service is actively seeking other opportunities to share spaces in communities, to both reduce running costs of libraries and improve access for residents.

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

- 11.1 Throughout the consultation, respondents (both within the survey and at public meetings) highlighted health and wellbeing implications associated with proposed reductions to library services. Some emphasised that libraries are seen as vital safe spaces for social connection, combating loneliness and isolation, particularly for older adults, disabled people, carers, and parents/carers with young children. Libraries were described by some as essential spaces, providing a warm, welcoming environment for those who may otherwise struggle with social exclusion, digital poverty, or the ongoing cost of living crisis. Some noted that as libraries offer free access to books, information, and digital resources, these can support both lifelong learning and emotional wellbeing. The proposed loss or reduction of local library services was linked by respondents to increased risks of social isolation, reduced opportunities for community engagement, and diminished access to educational and cultural resources, all of which could have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and the wider community.
- 11.2 The savings will be made mostly through a reduction in staff numbers with an associated risk of redundancy and associated impact on wellbeing. Wherever possible, the service is holding vacancies to minimise the risk of redundancy. All staff consultations are supported by HR and include the option of retraining and redeployment. Early and regular engagement with all Library Service staff has been maintained through the public consultation phase and line managers will continue to support their teams through the staff consultation period.

## **Other Implications**

### **12. Procurement implications**

- 12.1 There are no procurement implications resulting from this report or its recommendations.

### **13. Crime & disorder implications:**

- 13.1 There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report or its recommendations

### **14. Conclusion**

- 14.1 The report outlines proposed changes to the city's library services.
- 14.2 The report has detailed the processes followed and steps taken to examine and understand the needs of residents. The report recommendations would support the library services to continue to meet those needs and provide a sustainable and affordable library service across the city, particularly focused on serving those in most need.
- 14.3 Cabinet are asked to approve the recommendations. The proposals enable the Library Service to meet the majority of the savings allocated whilst maintaining a comprehensive and efficient library service for the city.

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **1. Appendices**

- 1. Summary of Consultation Responses Report
- 2. Needs and Use Analysis Part 1
- 3. Needs and Use Analysis Part 2
- 4. Equalities Impact Assessment

### **2. Background documents**

- 1. Report for Cabinet in July 2025 "Library Sustainability Plan"
- 2. EIA produced in July 2025 to inform public consultation – available in July 2025 Cabinet papers