

Report for: Cabinet - 20 January 2026

Item number: 11

Title: Approval of Haringey Library Strategy 2026-30

Report authorised by : Jess Crowe, Corporate Director of Culture, Strategy & Communities

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Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non Key Decision: Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

This report seeks approval for a new Library Strategy for Haringey for the period 2026-30, which has been developed during 2025 through a process of co-production and consultation. The strategy also sits alongside individual development plans for each of the borough's nine libraries, which are being developed collaboratively between staff and Friends of each library; these are living documents which will be refreshed regularly during the life of the overall strategy. The priorities arising from each individual library plan will be made publicly available, once completed.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

Libraries are more than buildings filled with books; they are living, breathing cornerstones of our communities. They embody opportunity, imagination, and connection. In Haringey, our libraries have long been places where residents of all ages and backgrounds come together to learn, to share, and to thrive. This Library Strategy sets out a bold vision for the future - one that ensures our libraries remain dynamic, inclusive, and indispensable in the years ahead.

This vision has not been shaped in isolation. It is the product of extensive engagement and consultation with young people, residents, staff, partners and stakeholders across the borough. Hundreds of voices have contributed through surveys, workshops, focus groups, and community conversations helping us to understand what people value most about their libraries and what they want to see in the future. That collective insight has been central to shaping a strategy that is rooted in the lived experiences and aspirations of our communities and sets out a direction and vision which will be underpinned by individual library plans which will be developed in collaboration with each friends/supporters and library engagement group to ensure that future actions reflect the priorities of the community of each library.

The strategy commits us to:

- Championing inclusion and equity, ensuring libraries are accessible, welcoming and responsive to the diverse needs of our residents.
- Inspiring learning and creativity, supporting literacy, digital skills and lifelong learning for children, young people and adults alike.
- Strengthening community wellbeing, positioning libraries as safe, trusted spaces that foster resilience, belonging and cultural participation.
- Harnessing digital innovation, expanding online services and equipping residents with the tools to thrive in a digital age.
- Embedding sustainability and resilience, ensuring our libraries are environmentally responsible and future-focused.

This strategy is ambitious, but it is also practical. It sets out how libraries will contribute to Haringey's wider priorities for equality, opportunity and sustainability, while embracing innovation to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Above all, it reflects the voices of our residents, whose passion for libraries has guided and inspired this work.

I am seeking Cabinet's approval of the strategy and support for its collective vision which is built on consultation and collaboration and its shared commitment to ensuring that Haringey's libraries continue to enrich lives, strengthen communities and remain dynamic, accessible, and indispensable assets for generations to come.

3. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 3.1 Approve the draft Haringey Library Strategy 2026-30 attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Notes the findings of the consultation report and updated Equalities Impact Assessment attached as Appendices 2 and 3.

4 Reasons for decision

- 4.1 The council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for those who live, work or study in the borough. The duty is supplemented by government guidance, which although not statutory, must still be taken into account. The guidance advises that changes to library services should be based on strategic plans and consideration of alternative delivery models, and on careful assessment of needs and consideration of impacts and mitigations.
- 4.2 When the Council adopted revised operating hours for the library service in December 2024, in the absence of a specific library strategy, we used the principles which already underpinned our Arts & Culture Strategy – Access, Collaboration, Equity, Growth, Lifelong Learning, Visibility & Representation – to inform that decision. The Council also committed as part of that decision to

developing a dedicated library strategy to underpin future development of the library service and put it on a sustainable footing for the future. This report gives effect to that commitment, following detailed consultation and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

5 Alternative options considered

5.1 The Council could decide not to adopt a Library Strategy. However, this would leave the library service without an underpinning strategic direction and would undermine the Council's conformity with its statutory duty in respect of library provision. This option is therefore not recommended.

6 Background information

6.1 Our Vision is for Haringey's libraries to be welcoming, inclusive, and trusted spaces at the heart of our borough - free to access and open to all. As vital community and cultural hubs, they will reflect the diversity of our borough and be shaped by the people who use them. Our libraries will support reading, learning, creativity, and wellbeing – providing services, events and activities that inform, enrich, inspire and connect our communities.

6.2 This vision is critical to helping the council reverse the long-term decline in footfall that libraries have experienced in Haringey as in other areas across the country over the last decade and a half. We have begun to see signs of recovery in library usage following the particularly challenging period of the pandemic-related lockdowns, and we hope that this strategy and the actions it describes will help to maintain that recovery and secure Haringey's library service for the longer term.

6.3 Underneath the vision we have identified six priorities which follow and build upon the priorities of the wider Arts and Culture Strategy. These priorities will guide the development of the service and the individual library plans and determine our focus over the five years of the strategy:

1. Upholding Equity
2. Improving Access
3. Encouraging Collaboration
4. Supporting Growth
5. Embedding Lifelong Learning
6. Promoting Visibility and Representation

6.4 Between March and September 2025, the Council undertook a borough-wide engagement programme, designed to reach a broad and diverse cross-section of residents and shape the draft strategy. Full details of this programme can be seen in Appendix 4. Activities included:

- Formation of a Co-design Steering Group, made up of volunteers from Friends of Libraries groups and library users, who helped shape strategy principles and engagement questions. There were 3 sessions in total, in June, July and August. We ran 2 sessions with Friends to scope appetite for this approach.

- Face-to-face engagement in all libraries, in a range of schools, and a dedicated Youth Panel session.
- Digital engagement via the Commonplace platform - four thematic online surveys exploring strategy priorities (280 responses), library use (286 responses), non-use (67 responses), and future technology (156 responses).
- Targeted communications to promote the surveys through council newsletters, social media, digital screens on high streets, and Friends of Libraries networks.

6.5 Each of these engagement activities helped shape the draft strategy and were then supplemented by the final Draft Library Strategy consultation which ran from 24 September to 4 November 2025. It was hosted online on the project site page haringeylibraries.commonplace.is and offered as a print-on-request document in Haringey libraries. In total, 53 responses were received. The majority, 57.7%, of respondents indicated that they were female. The largest proportion of respondents (23.1%) were aged 45–54, with notable representation from the 35–44 and 65–74 age groups (both 19.2%), while younger respondents (under 25) and those aged 75+ were least represented. Disabled respondents made up 13.3% of those sharing their demographic data, of which the majority indicated they were neurodivergent.

6.6 Throughout the engagement and consultation process, there was broad support for these priorities (the full consultation report can be seen at Appendix 2). The strongest support was for libraries' role in Embedding Lifelong Learning: 91.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this priority, particularly around supporting opportunities for children and young people. Residents suggested book clubs, teen reading initiatives, and stronger links with schools. The Libraries Service has already begun to engage with schools and the Council's Education Service to strengthen those links and will set targets for higher levels of engagement and participation.

6.7 The lowest support was for Supporting Growth, with which 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. This reflects differing views about how far libraries should go in terms of offering a wider range of activities, events and service offers, beyond the traditional focus on books and libraries being primarily a place for quiet reading. We will seek a balance between these two functions in the development of the service and in individual libraries through the Library Development Plans.

6.8 The draft strategy also set out three potential future opportunities: London Borough of Culture 2027, the Library of Things initiative and the Business Information Point offer. We have incorporated responding to the London Borough of Culture opportunities into the main body of the strategy, and believe that the Business Information Point is an opportunity that could be picked up in the individual library development plans for the libraries where this will be relevant. At this point in time, we are not proposing to take forward the Library of Things initiative as part of the library service offer. Initial set-up costs, as well as ongoing operational and equipment maintenance costs were a consideration. Further research into how the model works in other boroughs

suggests that it would carry some financial risk for the Council which could be required to subsidise the service. Haringey has also recently implemented another offer, in partnership with Veolia and North London Waste Authority and supported by the National Lottery Communities Fund, the Fixing Factory, which helps train residents to repair donated items which are then offered for sale at affordable rates.

6.9 The consultation feedback further highlighted the importance of clear performance reporting, effective communications, and transparency in how the library service is managed. We are committed to being fully open about how well we are doing in implementing this strategy and have set out plans to publish an annual report to achieve this accountability. We intend to continue to work in the way in which we have developed this strategy, working closely with Friends of Libraries in a Co-Design Group and through extensive engagement and consultation. We have also stepped up our communications and promotion of the great services on offer in all our libraries, for example with a “Library of the Month” campaign featuring a different library each month and highlighting the contributions made by Friends Groups to the success of each library.

6.10 The Council recognises that the last two years have been difficult as budget challenges have meant that we had to consult on and implement reduced library operating hours. The consultation on this strategy and on the earlier proposals around opening hours have demonstrated how much Haringey residents value their libraries and want them to be open and accessible as long as possible. We will work over the lifetime of the strategy to identify ways of achieving this and providing the greatest possible access to library buildings and facilities, within the constraints of the Council’s very challenged budget.

7 Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-2026 High level Strategic outcomes?

7.1 The libraries service features in the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-26 under the theme *A Culturally Rich Borough*. There are two key actions: to develop a libraries strategy and deliver our capital programme of investment in our library buildings and infrastructure. This report delivers on the first of these commitments by presenting a draft library strategy for approval.

7.2 The capital investment programme has improved the accessibility, energy efficiency, attractiveness and flexibility of the library buildings, enabling them to be used by more people and groups, with the aim of increasing access and footfall and generating income. This contributes to the maintenance of a comprehensive and efficient library service, as well as to the achievement of the Corporate Delivery Plan objective of building a fairer, greener borough.

8 Carbon and Climate Change

8.1 The proposals contained within this report have no implications for carbon reduction and climate change.

9 Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Director of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

Finance

The proposed Library Strategy (2026-30) sets the vision and priorities for Haringey's libraries over that period whilst acknowledging the challenging budgetary framework the Council faces both now and over the medium term. Indeed Priority 4: Supporting Growth recognises the importance of establishing a sustainable and affordable service, that enhances library usage and increases earned income.

The delivery of the strategy is expected to be met through the existing Libraries Service funding envelope. Should additional resource requirements be identified over the five-year period these would need to be brought to Cabinet for consideration in the normal way via the annual Medium Term Financial Planning process.

Procurement

Strategic procurement has been consulted on and notes the contents of this report. There are no current procurement implications.

Legal & Governance

Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 local councils have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all people working, living or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it. In providing this service, councils must encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service and lend books and other printed materials free of charge.

This is a decision to be taken at local level as to how library service best meets this requirement, including the number of libraries, their respective locations and their hours of operation. In fulfilling this duty, the Council is required to have particular regard to the desirability:

- I. of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and
- II. of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and

III. of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.

Guidance from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, updated in February 2025 states that the Secretary of State does not seek to prescribe how councils discharge their statutory duty, that a wide range of approaches are open to councils when deciding how to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service and that a 'comprehensive and efficient service' will mean different things between councils depending on the needs of each area.

In preparation of its library strategy, the Council must consider several legal obligations, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Best Value Duty (duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness). In particular, the Council must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty imposed on it under s149 of the Equality Act 2010.

This draft strategy has been shaped by the community engagement activities and consultation outcome taking into account the views of local people to enable the local authority to meet its statutory obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for those live, work and study in its area.

The recommendations set out in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 of this report falls within the definition of a Key decision under the Councils Constitution.

Equality

The Council has a public sector equality duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status apply to the first part of the duty. Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken for the proposed Library Strategy and is attached at Appendix 3. The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the Library Strategy is anticipated to have a positive impact on

all protected characteristic groups, except for Marriage and Civil Partnership, which will experience a neutral impact.

No groups are anticipated to be negatively affected. Data suggests that young people with a range of intersectional characteristics, particularly those living in the central and eastern areas of the borough, as well as women who are parents or carers, may particularly benefit from the strategy.

10 Use of Appendices

Appendix 1: Haringey Library Strategy 2026-30

Appendix 2: Haringey Library Strategy Consultation Report

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4: Haringey Library Strategy Engagement, Co-design and Consultation Summary

11 Background papers

None