



## Cabinet

**26 April 2023**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 - 2028</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Wellbeing, Communities and Culture
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Anthony Burns
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	21 February 2023
<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
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<b>Borough Priorities</b>	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life.	X
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities.	X
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all.	X
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy.	X
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture.	X
	Be a responsible Council.	X

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 In July 2022 Cabinet considered the adoption of the St Helens Borough Library Strategy and approved the implementation of the delivery plan. During the implementation period issues came to light that merited further consideration and the Council agreed to not take further steps to implement the decision of 13 July 2022. Elected Members asked Officers to reconsider the plans and report to a future meeting of cabinet. This report sets out a revised strategy, a revised delivery plan and a set of new and refreshed equality impact assessments that ensure the needs of all protected characteristic groups have been considered.
- 1.2 Since July 2022 much has changed, there is a national cost of living crisis, and the Council has adopted a new budget strategy in March 2023 to meet the additional anticipated budget gap for 2023/24 and future years.
- 1.3 In light of the worsening financial circumstances, the drive to improve the services provided by libraries and ensure they are targeted to those most in need is more fundamental than ever. This report outlines how the Council intends to transform the Library Service into a modern forward-thinking service that contributes to the delivery of the borough's priorities. It sets out the intention to deliver the statutory library service across the borough through direct provision, alongside outreach work with partners and a Community Managed offer. The strategy focuses on the service rather than buildings to ensure library provision is provided that will make the most difference to people's lives.
- 1.4 Libraries not only provide access to books and information, but they also support wellbeing and improve life opportunities. Libraries bring people together, providing practical support and guidance in the community. The Library Service has a critical role in helping people to realise their potential, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 1.5 The use of libraries has changed, the loan of physical items has declined over recent years, and there has been a growth in the digital offer. For this reason, there is an imperative to review the Council's Library Strategy and the service delivery model.
- 1.6 The views of stakeholders, residents, library users and library staff have been integral to the development of the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 (Appendix A). Engagement and consultation have been conducted using online and paper-based surveys, meetings and focus groups. The feedback has shaped the revised draft strategy. This report proposes a new phase of consultation on the specific proposals contained in that strategy.
- 1.7 The Delivery Plan sets out how the service will target areas of greatest need, reach into communities both physically and digitally and reduce the dependency on physical buildings. The new strategy includes difficult proposals to reduce the number of physical libraries in the Borough from thirteen to seven. This will mean the closure of libraries in Peter Street, Parr, Rainhill, Billinge, Garswood and Rainford.
- 1.8 The Library Service has been designed to align to the principles of the Council's adopted localities model. These principles have shaped the revised strategy which sets out how we will transform and modernise the Library Service to attract new customers, reach new individuals and communities, tackle inequalities, improve outcomes, delivered at reduced cost.

## **2. Recommendations for Decision**

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- (i) Note that the Cabinet decision of 13 July 2022 has not been implemented and has been set aside.**
- (ii) Note the Equality Impact Assessments at Appendix B.**
- (iii) Approve the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028.**
- (iv) Note the proposal within the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 to retain statutory library provision at St Helens, Chester Lane, Thatto Heath, Newton-le-Willows, Moss Bank, Haydock and Eccleston.**
- (v) Note the proposal within the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 to cease library provision at Peter Street, Parr, Rainhill, Billinge, Garswood and Rainford.**
- (vi) Note the proposal within the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 to move away from a building focussed service to an enabling service that addresses borough priorities through partnership working.**
- (vii) Agree a twelve-week period of public consultation on the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 and associated library closure proposals.**

## **3. Purpose of this report**

- 3.1. To seek Cabinet approval of the revised draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 and to consider within this strategy the recommendation to close six libraries: Peter Street, Parr, Rainhill, Billinge, Garswood and Rainford.
- 3.2. Cabinet is asked to consider the Equality Impact Assessments that have been supplied to support the proposals within the St Helens Library Strategy
- 3.3. To commission a twelve-week period of public consultation on the draft St Helens Library Strategy and the proposals contained within it.

## **4. Background / Reasons for the recommendations**

- 4.1 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, local councils in England have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' Library Service for all people working, living, or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it. 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 material free of charge. The statutory duty referred to above is not prescriptive in how local authorities should provide their library services, therefore the delivery mechanisms and geographical spread of service

provision is discretionary in nature. In drawing up and delivering library strategies and plans, local authorities must consider several legal obligations, including the Equality Act 2010, the Localism Act 2011, the Human Rights Act 1998 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 carefully consider the Public Sector Equality Duty imposed on it under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 which provides that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

4.2 The Department of Culture Media and Sports (DCMS) Libraries Task Force in 2018 recommended that local authorities should ensure their Library Service offers safe, welcoming, accessible physical and virtual environments freely open to all, which encourage participation, creativity and mutual learning and support.

4.3 Our Borough Strategy highlights the need for the Council to focus its efforts and resources on tackling the inequalities that exist within the borough. There are communities in the borough where life expectancy, good health and educational attainment are significantly lower than others. The Borough's priorities seek to tackle these inequalities and build a fairer and more sustainable borough for the benefit of current residents and future generations.

4.4 The new Library Strategy has been designed to align to the principles of the Council's adopted localities model:

- To deliver the Borough Strategy Priorities
- To ensure the service is outcome focused with indicators to measure impact.
- To encourage behaviour change.
- To ensure resources are delivered in the most appropriate method and in the right place to address need.
- To ensure services are cost effective and efficient.
- To ensure services are customer focused.
- To maximise digital technology opportunities.
- To ensure the workforce is productive, empowered and solution focused.

4.5 The current financial environment within which the Council operates, presents significant challenge. In setting the Council budget 2021/22 it was necessary to agree £13.44m of savings. This included a budget reduction of £0.496m within the Culture and Heritage portfolio. The challenge faced by the Council is to deliver a modern, local, borough wide accessible service, within a reduced budget.

4.6 In July 2022 Cabinet took the decision to adopt the St Helens Borough Library Strategy and commence implementation of the delivery plan. In October 2022, during the implementation period issues became known following feedback from residents that merited further consideration and the Council agreed to not take further steps to implement the decision until such time that a further consultation exercise on the

proposals was conducted. This report sets out a revised strategy, a revised delivery plan and a set of new and refreshed equality impact assessments that ensure the needs of all protected characteristic groups have been fully considered. It is important to note that Cabinet is taking a fresh decision on the draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 and any views formed when making their earlier decisions should be disregarded.

- 4.7 Since July 2022 much has changed, there is now a national cost of living crisis and in response in March 2023 the Council adopted a new budget strategy to meet the anticipated budget gap for 2023/24 and future years. This new environment has informed the revised St Helens Borough Library Strategy.
- 4.8 By approving the draft Library Strategy, Cabinet must consider that even though the Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have identified that the proposed library closures will have a negative impact on age, disability and sex (women and girls) and whilst mitigations to lessen or remove the impact have been outlined, it is accepted that the impact cannot be fully mitigated. In developing the Library Strategy, the negative impact of the EIA has been balanced against the need to deliver all of the Borough priorities within a reduced financial envelope, details of which are set out as section 19. There is a need to prioritise the delivery of other statutory duties to vulnerable residents, such as Children and Adults Social Care. In having due regard to the public sector equality duty, Cabinet must weigh the desirability of the achievement of those equality objectives against its financial obligations.
- 4.9 Whilst the strategy will be to the detriment of some residents who share protected characteristics this must be balanced against the benefits of retaining those libraries best placed to tackle inequalities. There are communities in the borough where life expectancy, good health and educational attainment are significantly lower than others. The Borough's priorities seek to tackle these inequalities and build a fairer and more sustainable borough for the benefit of current residents and future generations. The draft Library Strategy recognises how libraries can contribute to addressing inequalities.
- 4.10 The benefits of having a geographical spread of seven libraries across the borough which can deliver library services and assist in tackling inequalities, alongside the need to prioritise the delivery of statutory services to vulnerable residents outweighs the detrimental impact of the six libraries closing on people who share protected characteristics.

#### **St Helens Borough Council Library Service**

- 4.11 The Library Service is currently delivered from thirteen buildings (Since 2020, Billinge Library has been temporarily closed due to the condition of the building and the property owner of Peter Street terminated the Council's lease on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) the service includes both statutory and discretionary elements.
- 4.12 The statutory elements are to encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service. To lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the borough
- 4.13 The Library Service also provides discretionary elements which support borough priorities and tackles inequalities, for example developing speech, language and communication skills in young children. The discretionary element of the service includes:

- Events and activities such as Read and Rhyme times.
- Free access to Wi-Fi and computers
- Home Delivery Library Service
- Schools Library Service
- Borough Archive and Art Collection
- Cultural Hubs Arts in Libraries programme

4.14 Library opening hours range between 8 to 36 hours per week. Performance data shows that there are times in the day and days in the week when visitor numbers are extremely low. In addition, a further challenge is that library buildings range in quality, many are unable to provide the standards expected of a modern service and fall significantly below customer expectations.

4.15 Visitor numbers following the pandemic were slow to recover and in 2021/22 were 54% down on pre covid levels. Since then, visitor numbers have recovered well but remain 10% below pre-covid levels at the end of 2022/23.

Performance Indicator	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 */**	2021/22	2022/23
Number of visits to libraries	447,483	409,161	48,692	204,925	402,169
Number of items borrowed.	399,388	402,866	196,656	365,124	403,002

\* Libraries were closed due to Covid restrictions.

\*\* St Helens Library opened in the World of Glass in September 2020

### **Community Consultation and Engagement**

4.16 The Council has a legal duty to consult on changes to its Library Service. In June 2021, the council undertook a 12-week consultation on changes to the service. The findings of this have been used to shape this revised draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 - 2028 Most respondents supported the overall vision and ambitions set out in the consultation.

4.17 Engagement identified a potential new model of delivery: a Community Managed Library model where a partner would provide the service from a building with a substantial range of reading materials, PC access, events, and activities, with customers having the ability to reserve stock from other libraries via the Council's Library Management System.

4.18 A further, more targeted exercise, was undertaken between December 2021 and May 2022 to explore issues that had come out of the original consultation period this included:

- Engagement with Halton and St Helens VCA who reached out to organisations to explore partnership opportunities.
- Meetings with Parish Councils and other local community organisations, to explore the community managed model.
- Market testing via North West Procurement Portal to identify partners who want to utilise space within library buildings.
- Engagement with St Helens Chamber of Commerce to explore commercial opportunities within library buildings.

- Direct approaches to the Post Office and branded coffee outlets to explore opportunities to develop commercial offers within libraries.

4.19 Interest in the Community Managed Library model was demonstrated during the consultation; however, no community has brought forward specific proposals. Further exploratory discussions will take place with those communities that have expressed an interest and it is anticipated that additional models for library provision will emerge over time. Therefore, the Council will provide information and ongoing support to interested parties who wish to manage a library within their community and will consider transferring the ownership of council-owned assets to facilitate this.

4.20 The exploration of commercial activity to subsidise services was not successful. There was no response to market testing or the St Helens Chamber engagement exercise. Direct approaches to the Post Office and branded coffee outlets also resulted in no expressions of interest. This lack of response means that subsidising libraries through commercial activity is not currently possible.

4.21 Recognising that significant time has lapsed since the consultation in the summer of 2021 was undertaken it is proposed to conduct a further 12-week public consultation exercise on the specific details contained within this report and the Draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028.

4.22 This new consultation will include street-based surveys that aim to engage more than 2,200 people from across the borough, providing a representative sample of the borough's population. In addition, the same survey will be available on-line and in paper form at libraries and other council buildings. Drop-in sessions will be held at all operational libraries to allow face to face engagement. The full consultation plan is attached at Appendix C.

4.23 The findings of this consultation will then inform the final version of the St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 which will be presented to a future Cabinet meeting for consideration and adoption.

## **5 St Helens Borough Library Strategy 2023-2028**

5.1 The draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy 2023-28 (Appendix A) sets out the direction of the service for the next five years. Everyone will have access to an outstanding Library Service through a dispersed network of library buildings and 24/7 access to the digital Library Service.

5.2 The draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy vision is to deliver a:

***Library Service that is inclusive, vibrant, valued, excellent, responsive to customer needs and at the heart of communities.***

5.3 The Mission of the service will be to:

***Maximise the contribution of the Library Service to reducing inequalities within the borough; provide access and participation for all to learning, information, and opportunity; support the delivery of Borough Priorities.***

- 5.4 The Delivery Plan within the Strategy (Appendix A) demonstrates what the Library Service will do to deliver these outcomes, the timescales for delivery and the dependencies. It is proposed that a flexible and agile Library Service will deliver the following outcomes:
- Excellent customer service and satisfaction with the wider library offer.
  - Increased opportunities and support for learning
  - Increased access to digital resources and technology
  - Access to employment and education support
  - An exciting and diverse arts in libraries programme
  - A targeted library building-based offer, in community settings
  - Welcoming, vibrant and modern spaces that inspire learning and creativity
- 5.5 The findings of previous consultation and engagement exercises have been considered and are reflected in the final draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan which sets out that we will:
- Relocate St Helens Library to a refurbished Gamble Building making it a state-of-the-art cultural centre.
  - Develop seven modern and inspiring Locality Hubs with libraries at their heart.
  - Grow the Digital Library Service offer access 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
  - Extend self-service technology and upgrade Wi-Fi and public access PC's.
  - Offer Community Asset management guidance to support the development of the community management models.
  - Establish a Library Outreach Team to deliver services at the heart of communities.
  - Grow and develop the Schools Library Service.
  - Expand the Arts in Libraries Programme.
  - Invest in the Archive Service.
- 5.6 The outreach offer will see library staff collaborating with partners in community settings to bring the Library Service closer to residents. The Library Service has developed a number of partnerships with community organisations, children's centres and schools and will work with these to ensure residents know how to access library provision.
- 5.7 The library service outreach offer will include:
- The Home Delivery Library Service will be offered to residents with disabilities that create a barrier to leaving their home so they can continue to receive a library service.
  - The Schools Library Service will provide books and resources to nursery, primary and secondary schools.
  - The Archive Service will strengthen relationships with Heritage groups and ensure access to archives is promoted across the Borough. The Archive team will lead on Heritage Open Day events and will contribute to Borough of Culture events.
  - Library staff will provide advice and guidance on sharing books, latest stock choices and access to e-services.
  - Support and advice will be offered to volunteers and community groups who are considering operating Community Managed Libraries.
- 5.8 The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 sets out proposals to deliver a revised statutory library provision by closing six buildings and retaining seven libraries, as well as developing and extending outreach and digital services. Library membership enables those who live, work or study in the borough to use any library in the network to borrow and return items and to access computers.
- 5.9 Each geographic locality area will have a statutory library provision. Where there is more than one library in a locality, the one best placed to serve the area of greatest need will be retained. This need has been assessed using the methodology set out in section 6



below. The table below outlines the libraries that are to be retained and those that will close.

Locality	Wards in the locality	Retained Statutory Library	Proposed Library Closure
Central Locality	Parr Fingerpost & Peasley Cross	St Helens Library	Peter Street Library <i>(Closed 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023)</i>  Parr Library
Rainhill & Bold	Bold and Lea Green Rainhill	Chester Lane Library	Rainhill Library
South St Helens	Thatto Heath Sutton North Sutton South	Thatto Heath Library	None
Newton-le-Willows	Newton-le-Willows East Newton-le-Willows West	Newton Library	None
North St Helens	Rainford Billinge and Seneley Green Moss Bank	Moss Bank Library	Billinge Library <i>(Closed since 2020 due to unsafe building condition)</i>  Garswood Library  Rainford Library
Haydock & Blackbrook	Haydock Blackbrook	Haydock Library	None
West St Helens	Windle West Park Eccleston	Eccleston Library	None

## 6 **Tackling Inequalities**

6.1 The Library Service contributes to tackling inequalities. To identify those areas of the borough which have the greatest need a set of key indicators have been utilised to determined need through the assessment of:

- Educational Attainment
- Health Inequalities
- Deprivation
- Community Safety
- Population Demographics (high concentrations of young people or older people)

6.2 The wards identified as having the greatest need based on these determinants are set out in the table below, the higher the overall ranking total the greater the need:

	Education Ranking	Health Inequalities Ranking	Deprivation Ranking	Community Safety Ranking	Young People Ranking	Older People Ranking	Overall Ranking Total
Parr	17	18	18	18	18	1	90
Peasley Cross & Fingerpost	17	16	17	15	17	2	84
Bold & Lea Green	16	11	15	15	15	6	78
Thatto Heath	12	14	14	14	13	8	75
St Helens Town Centre	13	17	16	17	7	4	74
Newton-le-Willows West	14	12	12	10	16	3	67
Blackbrook	15	10	8	9	7	14	63
Sutton South East	10	15	11	10	5	10	61
Sutton North West	9	13	10	12	5	11	60
Haydock	11	7	5	13	10	12	58
Moss Bank	7	8	13	6	11	13	58
West Park	6	9	9	8	9	7	48
Newton-le-Willows East	8	6	7	7	13	5	46
Windle	4	5	6	5	12	9	41
Billinge & Seneley Green	2	4	4	3	1	17	31
Rainhill	2	3	3	4	2	16	30
Rainford	5	1	2	1	2	18	29
Eccleston	1	2	1	2	4	15	25

- 6.3 This data allows the Council to target its resources at those areas with the highest needs, whilst empowering and enabling residents to manage and deliver services in areas where there is capacity and community support to do so. The ambition is to redesign existing services to provide tailored services to the needs of the area.
- 6.4 The Council has a legal duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. It is proposed that this will be achieved through a variety of delivery methods as libraries are so much more than buildings. The aim of the new strategy is to provide outreach into the heart of communities, to provide book borrowing from locations that are accessible to the Community and to provide digital services that can be accessed directly from people's homes. Whilst the number of library buildings will decrease, access to the service will be improved as options to access the service will increase.
- 6.5 As outreach and book borrowing in shared facilities grows, the intention is to retain a smaller number of library buildings. Retained locations will provide facilities for the borrowing of and access to books for children and adults. The draft Library Strategy has identified the location of the library which is best placed to serve the community's needs. These locations will be more efficient as they will provide services through multi-purpose teams and multi-functional buildings. In time, library buildings will need to be refurbished, redesigned, or relocated to enable additional services to be offered by other Council services or working with our partners. Staff at retained locations will make every customer contact count and the digital offer will be improved and enhanced.
- 6.6 Set out below is the rationale that has been used in making these recommendations and the outline for how communities in the areas will continue to be able to access library service provision.
- **Peter Street Library:** due to the termination of the lease this library closed on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. There are three other libraries within two miles of Peter Street library with St Helens Library due to its strong transport links being the best placed to continue to serve the community.
  - **Parr Library:** the Parr ward has the highest level of deprivation, scoring 90, however the current low usage and footfall demonstrates that the existing library service provision is failing to reach the community in this area. It is therefore proposed to replace this provision with outreach work in community locations across the area,

directly taking the library service into the heart of the community. To access the full range of library services the closest library is St Helens (because of its proximity within the locality and relative ease of access via public transport). St Helens Library is accessible to disabled people and the wider community, has a car park and is on bus routes.

- **Rainhill Library:** There are two libraries within the Rainhill and Bold locality. On the index of need, the Rainhill ward scores 30 whereas the Bold and Lea Green ward scores 78, for this reason it is recommended that the Chester Lane Library is retained as it serves the area of greatest need in this locality. The closest libraries are Thatto Heath (because of its proximity to the Rainhill ward) and St Helens (relative ease of access via public transport). These libraries are accessible to disabled people and the wider community, have car parks and are on bus routes. The Rainhill library site accommodates the Rainhill Trials exhibition, which does not belong to the Council and is not part of the statutory library offer. Should an organisation not be willing to take on a lease for the site, the Rainhill Trials exhibition will need to be relocated. Officer support will be provided to the Rainhill Railway and Heritage Society to assist with this exercise.
- **Billinge Library:** The current Billinge library building is closed and requires significant investment, and this coupled with the low need score for the ward means that the library is identified for closure. The closest libraries are Moss Bank (because of its proximity within the locality) and St Helens (relative ease of access via public transport). Both libraries are accessible to disabled people and the wider community, have car parks and are on bus routes. Billinge Parish Council have expressed an interest in pursuing a Community Managed Library approach and has engaged an architect to explore the possibility of extending and adapting their premises in the community to accommodate a new Community Managed Library. Billinge Parish Council have indicated that it may require capital assistance to facilitate the changes. Further work will be done to seek to develop this alternative service provision.
- **Garswood Library:** The current Garswood library building fails to meet the modern standards expected of a library and this coupled with the low need score for the ward means that the library is identified for closure. The closest libraries are Moss Bank (because of its proximity within the locality) and St Helens (relative ease of access via public transport). Both libraries are accessible to disabled people and the wider community, have car parks and are on bus routes. Council welcomes contact from any organisation or volunteers interested in operating a Community Managed Library. To mitigate the impact of the closure, discussions are taking place with Community Health Partnerships (CHP) to consider opportunities to have a book loan facility within the Garswood Medical Centre.
- **Rainford Library:** This area has the second lowest need score and therefore it is proposed that the Council run library service will cease. Rainford Parish Council and the community have expressed an interest in pursuing a Community Managed Library approach. It is proposed to work with Rainford community members and the Rainford Parish Council to explore how a Community-Managed Library could be developed in the existing building with the potential for a community asset transfer.

6.7 To date the Council has committed £3.6m on improvements to the external fabric of the Gamble Building with the intention to create an exciting cultural hub that will include a library, the Borough Archive, and the Borough Art Collection. The Council submitted a Levelling up Round 2 bid, disappointingly this was not supported by Government but the Council remains committed to bringing the building back into use and in January 2023

Cabinet approved the allocation of £0.533m to implement Phase 4 (RIBA Stages 2 and 3) to design the internal modifications of the Gamble Building property improvement programme with the intention to submit a revised Levelling up Round 3 bid when the opportunity presents itself

6.8 The Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy provided in-principal approval for several capital pipeline schemes in February 2023 subject to detailed design and feasibility studies and further approval. These schemes will support capital investment to relocate, develop and modernise the libraries that are retained.

- 6.9 The Library Strategy Delivery Plan will result in a transformed Library Service that:
- Moves away from a building focused service to an enabling service delivering borough priorities through developing robust partnerships.
  - Customises services to meet the needs of the communities they serve.
  - Where possible it is co-located with partners, whilst increasing volunteering opportunities.
  - Recognises the overall contribution of Libraries, Arts, Culture, Archives and Heritage to the Borough’s ambitions.
  - Recognises the opportunity to influence town centre regeneration within the Town Deal Investment Plan.

## 7 Consideration of Alternatives

7.1 During the development of the Library Strategy a number of delivery methods have been considered and discounted. The table below sets out the alternatives considered:

Options Considered	Brief Summary of Considerations
Do nothing	The current library service delivery model is neither efficient nor effective. Some libraries are open as little as 8 hours a week and consequently are unable to deliver an effective service, this is also an inefficient use of the Council’s buildings. The way residents access the service has also changed with a 10% reduction in visitors. This option is not considered feasible as it will not contribute towards the achievement of the Borough priorities, nor deliver reduced cost.
Focus delivery at sites where footfall is highest.	Focusing delivery at libraries where the footfall is highest would not allow the service to deliver the borough’s priorities, this approach would be ineffective in tackling inequalities in the borough.
Community managed libraries	Extensive work has been undertaken with existing groups to explore the potential of a Community Managed Library offer. Some progress has been made but at the time of this report no agreements have been reached. Following adoption of the Library Strategy Delivery Plan, officers will continue to explore this option. Where no partner can be identified to operate a Community Managed Library, libraries will close on Friday 22 December 2023. The buildings will be declared surplus to requirements and the Councils Asset Management strategy will determine the future of the buildings.
Increase income generation via	Opportunities to let space in library buildings to reduce operational costs have been explored. Market testing via

rental of space with libraries to increase resources available to the service.	Halton and St Helens VCA between June 2021 and May 2022, and the Northwest Procurement Portal between 25 <sup>th</sup> April and 9 <sup>th</sup> May 2022, did not identify any interest. Direct approaches to the Post Office and branded coffee outlets also resulted in no expressions of interest.
Closing more than six libraries.	As part of the budget consultation in January 2023 the option to consider further savings from the library service was considered. Following strong consultation feedback, Cabinet chose not to consider any additional financial savings to minimise the required library closures.
To retain a single library.	To meet its statutory obligation the Council could elect to just have one single library in St Helens town centre. It was clear from the previous consultation that this option was not supported by the community, nor would it enable the outcomes from the library service to be maximised nor would it help to tackle inequalities at a local level. For all these reasons this option was discounted.

## 8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 provides a framework to deliver a modern and inspiring Library Service. Libraries will become central to tackle inequalities and support the achievement of the Council's Borough Strategy Priorities.
- 8.2 The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 sets out proposals to deliver a revised statutory library provision across the borough with the retention of 7 libraries: St Helens, Chester Lane, Thatto Heath, Newton- le-Willows, Moss Bank, Haydock and Eccleston.
- 8.3 The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 sets out proposals to close 6 library buildings at Peter Street, Parr, Rainhill, Billinge, Garswood and Rainford with effect from Friday 22 December 2023. Library membership enables those who currently use these buildings to access any library in the retained network, to borrow and return items and to access computers and information. The buildings owned by the Council will be declared surplus to requirements and the Councils Asset Management strategy will determine their future. The leases on non-council owned buildings will be surrendered. [OO]
- 8.4 The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 makes provision for the introduction of an outreach service that will be initiative-taking and target engagement in community settings. The plan sets out a service which will target resources to areas of greatest need, be less dependent on buildings and reach out into communities both physically and digitally.
- 8.5 The Council welcomes contact from prospective partners to explore the creation of a Community Managed Library offer. Officers will offer support, advice and assistance to help bring a community managed offer forward, especially in areas where it has been necessary to close library buildings.

8.6 By approving the draft Library Strategy, Cabinet must consider that even though the Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have identified that the proposed library closures will have a negative impact on age, disability and sex (women and girls) it is accepted that the impact cannot be fully mitigated. Cabinet must weigh the desirability of the achievement of those equality objectives against its financial obligations and the Borough's priorities to build a fairer and more sustainable borough for the benefit of current residents and future generations. The benefits of having a geographical spread of seven libraries across the borough which can deliver library services and assist in tackling inequalities, alongside the need to prioritise the delivery of statutory services to vulnerable residents outweighs the detrimental impact of the six libraries closing on people who share protected characteristics.

## **9 Legal Implications**

9.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty under Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who wish to use the service, provided that although a local authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it is not under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

9.2 In fulfilling its duty, a local authority shall, in particular, have regard to the desirability of securing facilities that are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and 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.

9.3 Case law provides that a local authority must undertake a proper analysis of the library related needs, both specific and general, of all persons desiring to make use of its library service before reaching a judgment as to what services would meet those assessed needs. Such an assessment of needs can rely on the expertise and experience of its professionals and on information gathered from a variety of reliable sources, including consultations.

9.4 Case law has established that a "comprehensive service" cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. A "comprehensive service" has therefore been taken by the Courts 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 the services' core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on Council resources. Decisions about the service must be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws upon evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the borough.

9.5 In drawing up and delivering library strategies and plans, local authorities must consider several legal obligations, including the Equality Act 2010, the Localism Act 2011, the Human Rights Act 1998 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 carefully consider the Public Sector Equality Duty imposed on it under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 which provides that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

9.6 Detailed information with regard to equalities and the application of the public sector equality duty is given at paragraphs 10 and 14. This report also includes detailed Equality Impact Assessments at Appendix B.

9.7 Decisions to reduce library services in other local authority areas have been the subject of judicial review proceedings. In order to act in accordance with public law principles it is important that any decision taken is reasonable, rational and procedurally correct. It is important that all relevant factors are considered, especially with regard to the need for effective consultation and the application of the Public Sector Equality Duty mentioned above.

## 10 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Implications

10.1 Detailed Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have been completed which are attached at Appendix B. It is worth careful consideration of each of these assessments before considering the recommendations set out in this report. The EIAs have identified that there will be a negative impact in areas where libraries close on people who share the following protected characteristics: sex, age and disability. These impacts include:

- difficulty travelling to other libraries.
- potential loss of social interaction and the impact on mental health and wellbeing.
- Reduced access to free Wi-Fi and public access PCs.

10.2 Mitigations have been proposed to lessen or remove the negative impacts identified. Despite these mitigations it is probably that negative impact will be experienced by some people who share the protected characteristic of age, disability and sex (women and girls). Reducing their opportunity to engage in public life through the library service. This is a list of identified negative impacts and mitigations.

Potential negative impact	Action required to mitigate the potential negative impact
The closure of Libraries will impact on groups with protected characteristics who are current users, and any person who wishes to access its library provision, whether they live in the community or elsewhere within the Borough. The groups most likely to be affected are disabled people, older people, and families with young children and disabled children	<p><b>Consultation:</b></p> <p>Develop a specific set of Equality Impact consultation questions for community groups (and adapt Equality Impact Questions for use in the general Consultation Survey) to understand the impact of the proposed closures and where there is a clear disproportionate or negative impact to identify mitigation</p>

<p>Changes to Library opening hours may impact on people who share different protected characteristics.</p>	<p><b>Consultation:</b></p> <p>Public consultation will be developed on the changes to library provision, with specific questions on library closures and changes to opening hours and how these impact on protected characteristics. Both a representative sample and open consultation will take place, including consultation with groups. There will be both paper and digital consultation forms available. It is anticipated that the consultation will run for 12 weeks in 2023.</p>
<p>Some disabled people, older people and families with young and disabled children may find it difficult to travel to other libraries. There is a potential impact for people who share these protected characteristics where their local library will close. Some may find it difficult to travel to other libraries if they are required to walk certain distances, travel lengthy routes, or take a journey which requires them to change bus or train to get to a library. There may also be a financial barrier to accessing alternative travel methods.</p>	<p><b>Signposting to alternative library provision:</b></p> <p>The library website will be updated with bus and train information, as well as car parking arrangements and disabled parking bays for each library.</p> <p>The Home Delivery Library Service will be offered to people as a reasonable adjustment to mitigate any barrier to library service access that they might experience as a direct result of the proposed closures, providing they meet the referral criteria.</p> <p>Digital support will be targeted at those who most need it. Better marketing and promotion of the e-library service offer is needed, as some people may be able to download books, audio, newspapers, magazines and comics to their own devices.</p>
<p>Some disabled people, older people, children and people with younger children rely on regular visits to their library to socialise and establish friendships and experience social and emotional support. User feedback suggests that many people who share different protected characteristics feel the library is a safe, familiar place in which they are comfortable, included, and respected. There is a potential impact for people who share these protected characteristics where their local library will close.</p>	<p><b>Familiarisation visits to other libraries:</b></p> <p>These will be offered to disabled people, older people, and people with young families who may feel upset and angry that their library is closing and/or anxious about visiting other libraries. This will help them to feel welcome to visit other libraries, encourage them to continue to attend groups that promote social, emotional and wellbeing support and to help with the adjustment to the loss of their familiar library space.</p> <p>Staff will sign post vulnerable residents to additional support agencies</p>



<p>The Library Service currently only collects data related to the protected characteristics of age, disability, and race when someone joins the library, providing they complete the membership form fully. Therefore, there may be users visiting the library who are not library members but have one of the protected characteristics.</p>	<p><b>Engagement and Consultation:</b></p> <p>Ensure the open survey is available as a paper version and is in libraries and other venues for people to complete. The Library Service will work in partnership with other council officers and stakeholders to make the survey as widely available as possible, particularly to those who work with people who have a protected characteristic, e.g., SEND and Inclusion team. The Equality Impact questions within the consultation survey will help to identify the impact on individuals and may identify further mitigations.</p>
<p>Local schools and nurseries who visit Libraries that will close to look at books and find out about the services on offer.</p>	<p><b>Engagement and Consultation:</b></p> <p>Ensure the open survey is sent to local schools and nurseries impacted. Use the Equality Impact Questions to understand the impact of the proposed closures and to identify any mitigation.</p> <p>Staff will also sign post to other libraries and ensure take up and use of the Schools Library Service.</p>
<p>Local interest groups which use a closing Library will be negatively impacted when the library closes</p>	<p><b>Engagement and Consultation:</b></p> <p>Comparison data - gather and utilise information from the consultation/discussion process/approach taken with community groups potentially displaced by library closures to assist with offering alternative places to meet.</p> <p>Specific engagement with groups in each closing library to support, if necessary, with the relocation of their exhibitions and displays.</p>
<p>The closure of Libraries may result in an increase in referrals from disabled people onto the Home Delivery Library.</p>	<p><b>Improve Home Delivery Referral Process:</b></p> <p>Develop a reasonable adjustment checklist to determine eligibility to the service for future self-referrals from disabled people.</p>
<p>The closure of Libraries may result in an increase in usage of the Digital</p>	<p><b>Promote Digital Library Service:</b> Better promotion/awareness of the Digital Library Strategy. Providing training for customers</p>

Library Service if the Strategy is adopted.	so they can access the digital library offer at any time of the day. Supporting customers to download books and offering tablet/device loan to access on-line provision
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10.3 To address and attempt to minimise the impact of libraries closing, a number of specific mitigations have been identified:

- signposting to alternative library provision in the borough.
- providing travel information to other libraries (bus routes, active travel routes etc.).
- promotion of online e-services.
- provide access to the Home Delivery Library Service where appropriate and necessary.

**11. Social Value**

11.1 The Library Service delivers significant social value; it reduces isolation and loneliness, develops literacy skills for children, young people and adults, improves wellbeing for both adults and children and provides social networks through its libraries.

11.2 Free public access PCs and Wi-Fi in libraries enable residents to access online banking, universal credit and job seeking opportunities and other support and development resources available on-line.

**12 Sustainability and Environment**

12.1 Most library buildings are over 50 years old and have poor energy efficiency. Over the life of the Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023- 2028 the service will seek to relocate to more energy efficient buildings or improve the efficiency of the current buildings. This will be subject to future reports and approval processes.

12.2. The Home Delivery and Schools Library Services currently use diesel fueled vehicles. These will be replaced with hybrid or electric vehicles as part of the Council’s wider fleet replacement process.

**13 Health and Wellbeing**

13.1 Libraries offer a wide range of health information, both online and through quality-assured reading lists dealing with the more common health conditions. In their role as community hubs, libraries also offer non-clinical spaces in localities where health and wellbeing partners can collaborate with the community in a trusted and non-threatening venue.

13.2. Libraries are also places where people can come together to meet others. Reducing social isolation is a critical issue in the context of improving wellbeing. In the current cost of living crisis, libraries have become warm hubs. Research suggests there are significant associations between frequent library use and reported wellbeing and between improved access to health information through libraries, with reduced calls on services such as GPs. In areas where we propose to close libraries residents will be sign posted to other community venues operated by the faith and wider voluntary sector which offer socialization opportunities.

13.3. Through the arts and books on prescription service, GPs can refer patients into the Arts in Libraries offer, thus supporting improved wellbeing.

13.4. A study on the economic value of the health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries found that using the library has a positive association with general health. The predicted medical cost savings associated with library use is £1.32 per person per year, based on reductions in GP visits due to improved access to health information and social interaction.

## **14 Equality and Human Rights**

14.1 The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 proposes reducing the number of library buildings and adjusting the opening hours of those that remain open. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the public sector equality duty) states:

- (1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (2) A person who is not a public authority but who exercises public functions must, in the exercise of those functions, have due regard to the matters mentioned in subsection (1).
- (3) Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
  - (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
  - (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
  - (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- (4) The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.
- (5) Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—

- (a) tackle prejudice, and
  - (b) promote understanding.
- (6) Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act.
- (7) The relevant protected characteristics are:
- age
  - disability
  - gender reassignment
  - pregnancy and maternity
  - race
  - religion or belief
  - sex
  - sexual orientation
- (8) A reference to conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act includes a reference to:
- (a) a breach of an equality clause or rule;
  - (b) a breach of a non-discrimination rule.

14.2 The public sector equality duty has been considered in numerous cases and the principles to be applied are very clearly established. In essence, the analysis of the adverse impacts on the protected characteristics defined in s149(7) is onerous and prescriptive. Its key purpose is to identify adverse discriminatory impacts and to identify the mitigation measures that will be taken to ameliorate those impacts. The public duty under s149 is to give equality impact assessments “due regard”. Case law has established that decision makers must assess the risk and extent of any adverse impact and the ways in which such risk may be eliminated before the adoption of a proposed policy and not merely as a “rear-guard action,” following a concluded decision. Case law has also established that, with regard to the public sector equality duty, the following principles are relevant:

- i) The public authority decision maker must be aware of the duty to have “due regard” to the relevant matters.
- ii) The duty must be fulfilled before and at the time when a particular policy is being considered.
- iii) The duty must be “exercised in substance, with rigour, and with an open mind.” It is not a question of “ticking boxes;” while there is no duty to make express reference to the regard paid to the relevant duty, reference to it and to the relevant criteria reduces the scope for argument.
- iv) The duty cannot be delegated to another body.
- v) The duty is a continuing one.

- vi) It is good practice for a decision maker to keep records demonstrating consideration of the duty.

14.3 Case law has established that provided there has been a rigorous consideration of the public sector equality duty and that there has been a proper appreciation of the potential impact of the decision on equality objectives and the desirability of promoting them it is for the decision taker to decide what weight to give to these factors in the light of all other relevant factors. A decision can then only be successfully challenged in the courts if a claimant can show that the public body's decision is so unreasonable that no reasonable public body could have reached it.

14.4 The Council has completed Equality Impact Assessments on the proposed Library Strategy in order to demonstrate due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duties set out above. The proposed draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan outlines how the service is expected to transform over the next five years, with outcomes focussed on increasing access to digital services, expanding outreach activity in partnership, and offering the Home Delivery Library Service to children and adults with medical issues preventing them from using a library. The strategy also outlines a reduction in the number of library buildings from 13 to 7, and a revision to the opening hours for the 7 remaining libraries.

14.5 Equality Impact Assessments identify the impact of proposed changes on people who share different protected characteristics. Separate equality impact assessments were completed for (i) all 13 libraries, to assess the implications of the proposed closures, and the proposed changes in delivery, (ii) the Digital Library Service, and (iii) the Home Delivery Library Service.

14.6 The EIAs identified that people who share the protected characteristics of age, disability and sex (women and girls) were most likely to be disadvantaged by the proposed Library Strategy. Mitigations have been proposed to lessen or remove the negative impacts identified. Despite these mitigations it is probably that negative impact will be experienced by some people who share the protected characteristic of age, disability and sex (women and girls). Reducing their opportunity to engage in public life through the library service. A list of identified negative impacts and mitigations is set out at section 10.2.

14.7 In addition to the consideration of the public sector equality duty, the factors set out at 4.8 are also relevant when considering the draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028. Paragraph 4.8 provides details of these factors to be weighed in the balance when considering the Council's public sector equality duty.

## **15 Customer and Residents**

15.1 The aim of the Delivery Plan is that by 2028 customers and residents will see:

- An increase in the number of people using libraries.
- An increase in the loan of physical and digital books
- An increased outreach programme.
- Further development of partnerships to provide library services and activities where they are most needed and attracting a wider customer base.
- More people using the Digital Library Service, with increased opportunities for library staff to offer training and support for people to download e-books and access digital technology.
- Improved and modernised physical library spaces

- Co-location with other services and partners
- Opening hours aligned to meet community needs.
- Retention of Archive Service Accreditation and increased number of visits to the Archive and increased access to archive materials within community settings
- An increased number of arts, heritage and cultural activities and events
- The Schools Library Service will continue to develop its services to more schools and educational settings.
- Increased use of the Home Delivery Library Service where appropriate
- Increase opportunities for volunteering.
- An increase in the number of community managed libraries
- Customer feedback and insight is used to improve and develop the service offer.
- Funding and investment secured to improve access and diversify services.
- Commercial opportunities explored to further improve the customer offer.

15.2 Residents are free to use any library across the borough as well as any library within the Liverpool City Region via the Library Light model. Library Light enables residents to:

- borrow up to six books from any neighbouring local authority library.
- reserve up to six books from any library in the Liverpool City Region by contacting them directly.
- access library computers and printers in other libraries across Liverpool City Region (charges may apply for printing).

## 16 Asset and Property

16.1. The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 proposes a reduction in the number of Library buildings. At this stage, the exact future use of these buildings cannot be determined as community groups may have an interest to take on the use of the buildings for a community managed library or to explore a community asset transfer. Should there not be a demand for this or use by the Council, the buildings will be declared surplus to requirements and the Council adopted Asset Management Strategy will determine the future of the buildings.

16.2. The table below provides an outline of the impact of adopting the draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2028 on each library building:

Library	Impact
Billinge Library	<p>This library closed in March 2020 due to Health and safety concerns.</p> <p>It is in a poor state of repair, with the condition of the floor and roof of particular concern.</p> <p>The building will be declared surplus to requirements and referred to the Strategic Property Group for consideration.</p>
Chester Lane Library	<p>This building accommodates Chester Lane Library, the Library Support Unit, Home Delivery and Schools Library Services.</p>

	<p>Work has commenced to investigate the creation of a Locality Hub at this location for a range of co-located services. Opening hours will be adjusted to reflect customer usage.</p> <p>The 2019 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £121,000 to address issues within this library building.</p>
Eccleston Library	<p>This library will remain in its current location, opening hours will be adjusted to reflect customer usage.</p> <p>As part of the Council estates review, options for co-locating other Council partners together in a new locality hub building in this locality will be explored.</p> <p>The 2019 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £9,724 to address issues within this library building.</p>
Garswood Library	<p>It is proposed to close this library.</p> <p>The current lease from the Liverpool Diocese will be surrendered.</p>
Haydock Library	<p>This library will remain in its current location, opening hours will be adjusted to reflect customer usage.</p> <p>Following a successful application to the Libraries Improvement Fund it is proposed to invest £276,000 in the building and by 2025, Haydock Library will be the first fully sensory library for children and young people with SEND in the borough.</p> <p>The 2019 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £130,053 to address issues within this library building.</p>
Moss Bank Library	<p>This library will remain in its current location, opening hours will be adjusted to reflect customer usage.</p> <p>The viability of co-locating within Moss Bank Children's Centre is being explored.</p> <p>The current building is leased from Torus. Once a new location is identified the lease will be surrendered.</p>
Newton Library	<p>This library will remain in its current location, opening hours will be adjusted to reflect customer usage.</p> <p>Options will be explored to relocate the service as part of the Earlestown Town Centre Regeneration plans. Any options will be explored in consultation with the community.</p> <p>The 2018 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £130,053 to address issues within this library building.</p>
Parr Library	<p>It is proposed to close this library.</p> <p>In November 2022 Cabinet commissioned an Outline Business Case (up to RIBA Stage 2) costing £0.625m to develop a Parr Leisure and Locality Hub and Rugby League Training Centre. This would include space for a library.</p>

	<p>The current building will be declared surplus to requirements and referred to the Strategic Property Group for consideration as to its future use.</p>
Peter Street Library	<p>This library closed on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.</p> <p>Peter Street Community Centre's management committee served notice on the Council to terminate the lease from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 as they had secured a tenant prepared to sign a long lease and who wished to occupy the space where the library was located.</p>
Rainford Library	<p>It is proposed to close this library.</p> <p>The Council welcomes contact from any organisation or volunteers interested in operating a Community Managed Library.</p> <p>The building will be declared surplus to requirements and referred to the Strategic Property Group for consideration as to its future use, which may include its use as a community managed library. This would be determined if suitable under the Community Asset Transfer Policy.</p> <p>The 2019 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £29,905 to address issues within this library building.</p>
Rainhill Library	<p>It is proposed to close this library.</p> <p>Council welcomes contact from any organisation or volunteers interested in operating a Community Managed Library.</p> <p>The building will be declared surplus to requirements and referred to the Strategic Property Group for consideration as to its future use, which may include its use as a community managed library and/or heritage centre. This would be determined if suitable under the Community Asset Transfer Policy.</p> <p>The 2019 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £34,489 to address issues within this library building.</p>
St Helens Library	<p>This library will remain in the World of Glass until the refurbishment of the Gamble Building is complete, at which time it will move back to be accommodated alongside the St Helens Archive.</p> <p>The Council currently leases space within the World of Glass.</p>
Thatto Heath Library	<p>This library will remain in the current building, opening hours will be adjusted to reflect customer usage.</p> <p>The building condition will be reviewed and improved.</p> <p>The 2019 Condition Survey identified remedial works to the value of £34,489 to address issues within this library building.</p>

## 17. Staffing and Human Resources

- 17.1. The Library Strategy and Delivery plan 2023 – 2028 sets out a network of seven libraries, a proactive and targeted outreach offer, a Home Delivery Library Service, Schools Library Service, Archive Service and Arts in Libraries programme, as well as dedicated resource to support Community Managed Libraries. This will require the current workforce to be reduced, reshaped and trained. The proposals will result in a reduction in the number of



staff employed in the service with potential staff redundancies. Staff and the trade unions will be consulted on the proposals and dealt with and supported in accordance with the Council's Policies and Procedures. Every effort will be made to avoid compulsory redundancies.

17.2. As the number of library buildings will be reduced, a small number of facilities management staff (including cleaners) may be affected by the changes. Given demands within the Council, it is anticipated that redeployment opportunities will be offered to all staff involved.

**18. Risks**

18.1. The table below provides an outline of the impact of adopting the draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028.

Risk	Mitigation
<p>Any decision made by the Council about its Library Service may be subject to legal challenge via judicial review or Local Inquiry by the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) who provide the superintendence of Library Services.</p>	<p>Decisions to reduce library services have been the subject of judicial review proceedings and to act in accordance with public law principles it is important that any decision taken is reasonable, rational and procedurally correct. It is important that all relevant factors are considered, especially with regard to the need for effective consultation and the application of the Public Sector Equality Duty.</p> <p>The consultation process and policy context will evidence that the Council's decision is reasonable, rational and procedurally correct should the adoption of the Library Strategy result in a challenge.</p> <p>Officers have met regularly with the Libraries Superintendence Team within the DCMS, they have provided critical friend advice on the approach the Council has adopted.</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessments have been completed to inform the development of the strategy.</p> <p>Independent legal advice has also been sought.</p>
<p>Community groups do not come forward to take on the running of libraries.</p>	<p>The buildings owned by the Council will be declared surplus to requirements and referred to the Strategic Property Group for consideration as to their future use.</p>
<p>Should the Library Service vacate a building it rents from other organisations this may have an impact on their financial viability.</p>	<p>Advance notice of any changes will be provided along with support to identify new tenants.</p>

The reduction in the number of statutory libraries may reduce the number of people accessing and benefiting from the service	The Library Service will be proactive in working with the users of those libraries that are proposed to close, identifying suitable alternatives within the remaining Library network, holding familiarisation events and activities to ease the transition.
The condition of some of the buildings that are proposed to be retained is poor. Should investment in these sites not be secured there is a risk further closures could occur due to poor building conditions.	Applications will be made to the Strategic Asset Investment Group to address the condition issues within the library buildings to be retained.

## 19. Finance

- 19.1 The Council continues to operate in a challenging environment, with repeated cuts in central government funding since 2010 having materially diminished Council budgets and ongoing uncertainty around future levels of settlement. In addition, demand for Council services continues to grow and the current economic environment has introduced yet more financial pressures.
- 19.2 The Council annually agrees a Medium-Term Financial Strategy that provides an overarching framework which sets out the context in which decisions on resource allocation and budgeting will be taken. The primary purpose of this Strategy is to provide an indication of the future financial position of the Council and, in turn, inform the annual budget setting process. It quantifies the likely level of resources that are available to deliver the Council's statutory and non-statutory services and achievement of its core strategic objectives.
- 19.3 The aim of the annual Budget is to provide, within the overarching constraints that exist, the most appropriate balance of resources to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities and to set a foundation for, and facilitate, the delivery of the Council's statutory responsibilities, key ambitions and its existing and emerging corporate priorities and borough level strategic objectives.
- 19.4 Given the continued shortfall in available resources there is an ongoing corporate need to review how all services are delivered to identify efficiencies and reduce overall costs - including changes to how services are delivered or supported or driving change through technology and/or more efficient commissioning. Reviews also need to consider the cessation or reduction of discretionary services or moving to provide minimum levels of statutory services. Although these are unpalatable and challenging options, such actions are essential in ensuring that the necessary levels of savings are achieved, the Council sets a legally balanced budget, continues to remain financially sustainable, and provides vital front-line services.
- 19.5 Significant service reconfiguration will, out of necessity, therefore, need to continue to take place, delivered through transformed services, working in partnership, where appropriate.
- 19.6 In setting the budget for 2021/22 and having regard to a projected gap in excess of £33m for the period 2021/22 to 2023/24, Directorates were required to propose potential savings options to address the forecast gap for the period. The approved budget required

£13.440m of savings in relation to 2021/22, the vast majority of which fell within Adult, Children's, Public Health and other Place-based services.

- 19.7 This sum included a budget reduction of £0.496m within the Culture and Heritage portfolio, relating to the Library Service and the implementation of a Localities model, with the strategic objective of delivering a modern, localities based, borough wide accessible service, within a level of reduced resources.
- 19.8 In not implementing actions to deliver the cost reductions, further pressure is placed on the Council's financial position. Members will be aware that this is regularly reported to Cabinet and Council via the regular Financial Monitoring Reports.
- 19.9 The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026 and Revenue & Capital Budget 2023/24 report approved by Cabinet and Council in February and March 2023 reported on the ongoing budget gaps and the imperative that agreed savings options (including a **further** £7.445m of savings for 2023/24) are progressed and delivered in 2023/24 and over the medium term in order to provide a balanced budget for 2023/24 and to reduce the forecast future funding gaps.
- 19.10 The proposed Delivery Plan has been modelled and it is estimated that the revised costs will result in an ongoing net cost reduction of £0.338m. This sum excludes savings from business rates, repairs and maintenance, and residual overheads as these will only be achieved once the future use of the buildings is determined in accordance with the terms of the Corporate Asset Management Strategy.
- 19.11 Capital investment to upgrade the public computer offer, self-serve kiosks for book loans and Wi-Fi printing, scanning, and copying, library building refurbishment and/or relocation will be the subject of future Cabinet and/or delegated decisions.
- 19.12 In approving the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026, in principle approval was given to several capital pipeline schemes, subject to detailed design and feasibility. These include Locality Hub schemes to support the delivery of the locality model of working, and business cases will be developed in relation to capital investment proposals to develop and modernise the libraries that are retained.
- 19.13 Section 16 of this report provides detail of costs that have previously been identified relating to remedial property works to address issues within individual library buildings.

## **20 Policy Framework Implication**

- 20.1 The investment will support all the Borough Strategy priorities.
- 20.2 The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028 also contributes to the delivery of a number of Council Strategies and Plans including:
- Children's and Young People's plan
  - School Readiness Strategy
  - Early Years Strategy
  - St Helens Closer Together: Bridging the Inequalities gap.
  - Town Deal Investment Plan
  - Integrated Care Partnership Priorities
  - St Helens Together: Our strategy for the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector 2021-2026

- Arts Strategy
- Heritage Opportunities Plan
- St Helens Borough Commercial Strategy 2021-2026

## **21 Impact and Opportunities on Localities**

21.1. The draft Library Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023–2028 will deliver the intended outcomes of the Council localities approach by ensuring that through data analysis, the Council is targeting its resources at those areas with highest needs, whilst empowering and enabling residents to manage and deliver services in areas where there is capacity and community support to do so.

21.2 Libraries provide an ideal location for co-location with other services and will be the start of the Council's Locality hub model. They are well placed to play a role in locality hubs because of their existing position of trust within local communities, the contribution they make across a range of agendas, and their ethos of partnership working.

## **22 Background Documents**

22.1 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023 Cabinet – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2026 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2023/2024.

22.2 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023 Cabinet – The Gamble Building Creative and Learning Hub

22.3 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023 Cabinet - Asset Strategy and Asset management Plan 2023-2026

22.4 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022 Cabinet– St Helens Borough Library Service Strategy and Delivery Plan 2022-2027.

22.5. 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 Cabinet– St Helens Borough Library Strategy Update

22.6 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 Cabinet - St Helens Borough Libraries Strategy Consultation draft.

22.7 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021 Cabinet– Introduction of Locality Management

22.8 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022 Cabinet – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022-2025 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2022/23

22.9 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 Cabinet – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2024 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2021/22

22.10 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 Cabinet – Budget Report

22.11 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020 Cabinet – Budget Strategy 2021-2022

22.12 St Helens Borough Library Service – Library Buildings Fact Sheet

22.13 Library Strategy and Delivery Plan Consultation Plan

## **23 Appendices**

23.1 Appendix A – Draft St Helens Borough Library Strategy and Delivery Plan

23.2 Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessments

23.3 Appendix C – St Helens Borough Library Strategy Consultation plan