

## **Proposed Move of Batley Library from Carnegie Building to Batley Town Hall.**

### **Background and decision rationale.**

#### **Electoral wards affected:**

Batley East

Batley West

#### **Background**

A proposal to move the Batley Library to The Batley Town Hall was considered as part of the Asset Review Report presented at the Cabinet meeting held on 26th September 2023. ([Asset Review Report](#))

The Batley Town Hall building is identified as having available capacity which is proposed to be repurposed and made fit for purpose to support wider council services. This will be funded and delivered within existing corporate landlord baseline budgets.

Batley Town Hall is identified as having available capacity which is proposed to be repurposed and made fit for purpose to support wider council services. This creates an opportunity to support the delivery of a modernised Library provision in a refurbished building. This would release the Batley Library building, which requires extensive investment, as surplus to organisational requirements.

The decision was delegated to the Strategic Director of Adults and Health and Portfolio holder once a non-statutory consultation had been carried out.

#### **Implications for the Council:**

##### **1. Council Plan**

Libraries are at the heart of our vision for Kirklees, as set out in Our Council Plan (please see: [www.kirklees.gov.uk/councilplan](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/councilplan)). We want Kirklees to be a district with a strong, sustainable economy and a high quality of life, with thriving towns and villages and inclusive communities. Libraries have become places where communities come together and residents can learn new skills, join learning groups, enjoy songs and music with children, knit and natter, have a coffee, exercise, and pursue personal development. Libraries are also essential for people to seek support and access public services.

##### **2. Financial Implications**

The proposed move if implemented would provide an opportunity to realise savings through the existing building being vacated.

Through the Asset Rationalisation Project, work has been underway to reduce the number of Council Assets within Batley Town Centre, consideration was given to the combining of both the Library and the Town Hall to assist in providing further revenue savings and Capital Receipts to the Council.

The current Library costs the Council approx. £91.5k to run the asset per year but requires an estimated Capital Investment of between £400k and £1m to bring back to a suitable standard – this estimation is based on condition data – the site has not had an in depth survey undertaken so costs could increase significantly if this takes place.

Batley Town Hall Currently costs the Council Approx. £183k to run the asset per year, bringing in a revenue of approx. £23k from Public Events and Catering. The asset requires a Capital investment of an estimated £8.7m to bring the asset back to a good standard – this is following an in depth

survey of the site having been undertaken. In addition to these costs a further £924k would be required to remodel the space to accommodate the library.

### 3. Legal Implications

We will continue to meet the statutory duty on library authorities to "provide a comprehensive and efficient library service" to everyone who lives, works, or attends full time education in the library area whether the move goes ahead or not.

### 4. Other

There are risks related to any change, but the consultation carried out indicates that there would be some impact on the use of the Library Hub due to the significant reduction in size and flexibility for community activities. It will however still provide a central position for access by users. Any reputational impact to the council should also be managed by ensuring that the services felt to be most important by the respondents to the consultation are addressed and where possible catered for.

## Consultation & Engagement

The purpose of this consultation was to:

- a. inform any decision around relocating the current library provision in Batley.
- b. provide insight into what the community would value the most in a relocated library; being shaped by the voices of the community using it and to give their opinion on the proposal.
- c. to provide the Strategic Director for Adults and Health a report following the consultation to inform a decision about moving Batley Library into the Batley Town Hall.

The consultation carried out can be found on the Kirklees Involve website:

[Involve: Batley & Dewsbury Library Consultation](#)

A seven-week inclusive, accessible non-statutory consultation took place between 27th November 2023 – 15th January 2024. The consultation was available to all members of the public, both library and non-library users. This was also inclusive to key stakeholder including but not exclusive to ward councillors, friends of groups and community partners.

A framework for the consultation methodology was created to ensure that the consultation was as inclusive and accessible as possible, we used a blended approach consisting of:

- **Online survey:** The public questionnaire was in the format of an online survey supported by Kirklees' Consultation & Engagement team.
- **Paper survey:** To ensure accessibility we had paper versions of the questionnaire available in libraries and other community settings for the public to complete, with the support of a Kirklees staff member or volunteer if required. Staff members or volunteers then replicated these answers onto the online survey.
- **Focus groups:** A stakeholder mapping exercise was carried out to identify who may have interest in the proposals. The groups included internal and external stakeholder/partner groups, specific interest groups, "Friends of" and volunteer groups. We also recognised that staff are invested in the service professionally, having their own thoughts, insights, and ideas regarding the proposal so a dedicated focus group was held for their input.

Further meetings have and continue to be held with stakeholders by the Strategic Director to ensure the most appropriate choice is made for each location. This included a tour of the proposed location with the Friends of Batley group and follow up meetings in which they provided feedback on the layout and plans.

There has been strong public feeling against the move to the town hall. Community have voiced their concerns around the lack of open plan space, the significant reduction in the size of the children's library and the reduction in space for community provision. Alongside disabled access and the proximity to disabled parking spaces.

The Friend of group also expressed their willingness to explore what other external funding could be sourced to support to maintain the library in its current location by mitigating some of its running costs i.e. fund raising or grant applications etc.

This resulted in 15 focus groups at with a total of 133 attendees. A total of 533 surveys were completed with 416 being completed by residents online and 117 paper surveys uploaded online by library staff and volunteers.

Please note: Data collection involved merging responses from the paper surveys with the online survey. However, the paper survey format bypassed mandatory questions present in the online version. This can lead to slight inconsistencies in the total number of respondents for those specific mandatory questions where individuals who completed the paper survey may not have provided an answer.

### **Options Considered**

- Relocation of the Library into the town hall, with the building being made fit for purpose though a programme of modernisation lead by the recommendations from the public consultation.
- Retention of the current Library location within the Carnegie building maintaining its current service delivery model.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. To retain the Batley Library provision from the existing Carnegie Library Building.**
- 2. To look to develop plans to maintain the Carnegie building to ensure it remains fit for purpose to deliver the library service.**
- 3. Look to explore how the community can support to offset some of the locations running costs in order to retain its current location.**

### **Reasons for Recommendations:**

1. The Consultation Report highlighted that: the moving of Batley library will negatively impact the ability to provide the same level of service provision. The original cabinet report stated library's need to be in our town centres and provide easy public access. The community highlighted that disabled access would be compromised by this relocation.
2. The town hall building is identified as having available capacity which is proposed to be repurposed and made fit to support wider council services. This will be funded and delivered within existing corporate landlord baseline budgets. However, the cost to complete this

refurbishment are significant and equate to a similar amount to maintain the current location. This has become increasingly clear as design work has been undertaken,

3. The result of the consultation indicates that the relocation cannot address the concerns raised by respondents in a way that will minimise the impact of such a move.
4. The consultation found that the location of the library service is important to 71% of Batley respondents as they are not using any other libraries in Kirklees. Accessibility, inclusivity and specifically the heritage of the building in Batley are most important to residents. This would be lost should the library be relocated.
5. Strong death of feeling against a relocation was demonstrated by Library stakeholders as part of engagement with the Strategic Director.
6. The current library building would become vacant and be partially mothballed subject to further review. This savings could not be realised until the building was sold. No timescales could be confirmed as to how long this might take and so costs would continue.

### **Next steps and timelines**

1. To confirm the delegated decision made.
2. To inform Batley Library Stakeholders of the decisions.
3. To engage with Library stakeholders around future funding support for the location.

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## Appendix 1

### Recommendations & Considerations

Drawn from the consultation insights, the following recommendations and considerations can be used to inform decisions on the relocation of Batley Library to Batley Town Hall.

#### 1. Use of Batley Library

A total of 82% (333) of Batley respondents use the library at least monthly and over half of respondents 59% (239) use the libraries at least weekly. This demonstrates the regular usage of the library and importance of the service to residents.

The location of the library services is important to consultation respondents with 71% of Batley respondents stating they are not using any other libraries in Kirklees.

Accessibility, inclusivity and specifically the heritage of the building in Batley are most important to residents.

Batley library survey respondent data demonstrated that the 2 most important things to them are “delivery of services” at 67% (286) and “the building is accessible” at 58% (247).

- a) The recommendation is to ensure that the continuation of delivery of services and building accessibility are considered and demonstrated in the plans for re-location should the proposal go ahead.
- b) Another recommendation for the re-location of the library services is to consider how accessible and inclusive the proposed locations will be for residents of the diverse communities. Key considerations for Batley in particular, are regarding community cohesion and ensuring the Town Hall would feel like a welcoming, inclusive environment to attend for all members of the community - with the licenced bar being a particular concern.
- c) Considerations need to be taken into place with regards to the opening hours of Batley library and the accessibility to the building for community groups on an evening and weekend.
- d) A further consideration highlighted in the focus groups with regards to the re-location proposals was the accessibility of parking, particularly for disabled or elderly library users.

#### 2. Library facilities and activities

- a) Consultation participants agreed that a “Separate Children’s area” (54%) and “space devoted to books” (53%) were most important for Batley Library.
- b) It is recommended that this is strongly considered during the planning and design of the re-located libraries should the proposals go ahead. Further detail about recommendations for the Children’s Area can be found in section 6.4 on Children’s & Families below.
- c) The following facilities and activities were also ranked highly (between 31% and 38%) as “most important” by Batley Library users in the following order:
  - i.Space for reading newspapers and books
  - ii.Warm spaces
  - iii.Flexible space for events & activities
  - iv.Local history information/resources
  - v.Flexible IT space to use personal devices and/or library computers

It is therefore recommended that they are also considered during the planning and design if the move is approved. Further detail on the Flexible IT space and Local History can be found in sections 6.5 and 6.6 below.

### 3. Safe & Welcoming space

The focus group respondents for Batley Library unanimously responded that the feeling and atmosphere of the library is important, with concerns around how welcoming and safe the space would be in the proposed re-located library.

- a) It is recommended that the initial “welcome” to the libraries is considered if they are re-located to what is thought of as a “civic” building like Batley Town Hall.
- b) The spaces being multi-functional with non-library visitors is of concern to parents/carers and for vulnerable residents. Respondents felt they want to retain the community feeling of the library space where there are larger spaces for activities as well as quieter spaces such as meeting rooms.
- c) The multi-functional use of the library needs to be considered in the planning and design stages to address concerns should the proposals go ahead.

### 4. Children & Families

Both the online survey and focus group respondents prioritised the importance of children and families in the library. A total of 60% of the online survey respondents have children of school age (of those who answered the corresponding question).

- a) Should the proposals for re-location be approved it is recommended that the data be used when planning the design and space. This indicates that order of importance for Batley was:
  - i.Books 64% - 256
  - ii.Space for Activities 56% - 222
  - iii.Comfortable Seating to sit and read 51% - 203
  - iv.Study space 12% - 49
  - v.Displays 12% - 46
  - vi.IT 12% - 46
- b) The responses from “anything else?” replicated the information from focus group participants that the important considerations for the children’s area should be:
  - A dedicated space for babies and children to play/engage in activities that will not be disruptive to other library users where parents/carers do not have to feel anxious about volume
  - An inviting, bright, homely, and cosy feel to the space
  - Ensuring there is a continuation of activities and groups for children and families

### 5. IT Facilities

The Flexible IT space to use personal devices and/or library computers is important to Batley Library respondents. The focus groups data indicated that many of the participants do not have access to IT at home. A total of 32% respondents answered that they don’t use IT in the library (of those who answered the corresponding question). Of those that do they use the IT facilities in several ways.

- a) It is recommended to use the intel from the data indicating what is most important when planning the design and space for the IT facilities in the library should the proposals for re-location be approved. The highest order of usage of IT in the library was:
  - i.Using free Wi-Fi 53% - 213
  - ii.Using a library desktop computer 42% - 166
  - iii.Using own phone/tablet 31% - 122
  - iv.Using own laptop 26% - 103

v.Using a library laptop	12% - 46
vi.Using a library tablet	7% - 28

As indicated above, the usage of free Wi-Fi is important and comments from focus group participants requested that better, more reliable Wi-Fi be implemented.

- b) The focus group data indicated that some users of IT in the library don't feel confident in using Chromebooks or tablet devices and that having access to desktop computers is important which should be taken into consideration when planning the IT facilities.

However, the common usage of personal devices and non-fixed library devices indicates that plug sockets and charging points should be considered in the design of space to use these devices.

## 6. Local Studies

Local history information/resources were ranked high in importance by survey respondents for Batley Library.

a. The focus groups for Batley Library unanimously agreed that retaining resources and a dedicated space for local studies was of importance. It is recommended that this is taken into consideration during the planning and design of the re-located libraries should the proposals go ahead.

b. Considerations for local studies that came from the focus groups include:

- Accessibility of the resources – being on display or in a dedicated area not “hidden in the back.”
- Ensuring the local history collections e.g. electoral registers, world war records etc stay in the library of that area and readily available for projects.
- Subscription continuation of Ancestry