1. **SUMMARY**

1.1 The Council has undertaken a review of the Library and Information Service. The purpose of this review is two-fold:

   a. to identify a new vision, objectives and service model for the Library and Information Service, taking account of local need and the level of resources available; and

   b. to set out specific proposals for delivering the new vision, objectives and service model in practice.

1.2 This report seeks Cabinet agreement to commence public consultation on the proposals that have emerged from the review. Subject to Cabinet agreement, consultation will take place for 12 weeks between June and September. The proposals will then be reviewed taking into account the consultation findings, and a further report will be submitted to Cabinet in October for final decision.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 For the reasons given in this report, Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1.1 Note:
a. the new vision, objectives and service model arising from the Library and Information Service review set out in the Strategic Review (Appendix B); and

b. the specific proposals for delivering the vision, objectives and service model set out in the Development Plan (Appendix C);

2.1.2 Agree to a public consultation exercise as outlined in the consultation plan (Appendix D); and

2.1.3 Note that the proposals for public consultation includes proposals to:

a. designate North Chingford, Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone libraries as Library Plus branches, which will be open seven days a week;

b. designate Hale End, Higham Hill, Wood Street and Lea Bridge libraries as Library Local branches, which will be open for 30 hours a week; and

c. close South Chingford and Harrow Green libraries.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Council agreed to reduce expenditure on the Library and Information Service by £1 million over two years in March 2011 as part of the schedule of savings identified for 2011/12 and 2012/13 in the Budget and Council Tax Setting paper. The review of the Library and Information Service was undertaken to identify proposals to deliver this savings target while ensuring that the service continues to improve and meet local need.

4. PROPOSALS

4.1 The Council has a statutory duty (under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964) to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to residents and those who work or are in full-time education in the borough (though the service may be provided to any other group). To ensure this duty is met, the review of the Library and Information Service was divided into three key stages:

- completion of a needs assessment (Appendix A), which describes local needs for a Library and Information Service, including the general and specific needs of adults and children who live, work and study full time in the borough;

- development of a strategic review (Appendix B), which sets out a new vision, objectives and service model for the Library and Information Service taking account of local need and available resources; and

- production of a development plan (Appendix C), which sets out proposals for implementing the strategic review in practice.

4.2 In adopting this approach, the Council has followed the guidance from Ed Vaizey MP, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, in his letter dated 3 December 2010, and the report arising
out of the Local Inquiry undertaken in Wirral MBC in 2009 referred to in
the letter.

Further information on each element of the review is set out below but
Members are referred to the appendices for full details of each
document.

a) Needs assessment

4.3 The needs assessment draws on a wide range of data to establish the
demographic composition of our communities, the way that
communities in Waltham Forest use their local libraries, how those
libraries are managed by the Council, and library users’ and non-users’
views of the Library and Information Service. Each substantive section
of the assessment details a different aspect of need as follows:

• the borough: need based on social conditions and access; and
• the current service: need as demand, service usage and
performance.

It also draws on other data such as the survey of users and non-users
and national performance indicators.

4.4 The needs assessment concludes that whilst the borough currently
meets the core needs of residents in terms of opening hours and stock
levels, a number of opportunities exist to make the service more
efficient whilst improving performance and continuing to meet local
needs.

b) Strategic review

4.5 Based on the information contained in the needs assessment and the
level of available resources to the service, the strategic review
proposes the following vision for the Library and Information Service:

Waltham Forest’s Library and Information Service will offer a
modern and comprehensive network of libraries with a high quality
library stock, free internet, excellent customer care and access to a
range of Council services. The Library and Information Service will
encourage local people to use and get involved in their libraries
and make sure that all services provide value for money.

4.6 To deliver this vision, the strategic review outlines five key objectives
for the service:

i) Waltham Forest will run a comprehensive network of high quality
libraries that meet the needs of our residents and those who work
and study in the borough.

ii) We will ensure that users have access to high quality library stock
and resources designed to meet the needs of our residents.

iii) Libraries will provide excellent customer service to all library users
across the full range of library and information services and wider
Council services.
iv) We will encourage members of the community to become involved with designing services in their local libraries and will work with them to promote the use of our libraries.

v) We will provide a high quality Library and Information Service which provides excellent value for money for local taxpayers, making the best use of all available resources.

4.7 To deliver these objectives, the strategic review proposes reconfiguring the Library and Information Service around three key neighbourhoods (the north, centre and south) and developing a service model that distinguishes between two different types of library:

- Library Plus: branches that are open seven days a week, delivery the core library offer and provide access to a range of wider Council services; and
- Library Local: branches that are open for 30 hours a week, deliver the core library offer and are tailored to the needs of the local community.

4.8 The core library offer, to be delivered by both Library Plus and Library Local branches, is as follows:

- Relevant and up to date information and books in a range of formats;
- Free internet access;
- A range of learning opportunities;
- A wider choice of local services reflecting local needs; and
- Excellent customer service delivered by knowledgeable staff.

4.9 In addition, Library Plus branches will also:

- Provide access to an enhanced Library and Information Service with better resources;
- Be open seven days a week; and
- Offer access to other Council services and services delivered by external partners.

4.10 Finally, the strategic review proposes a key service standard: that all residents should live within 1.5 miles of their nearest library and 2 miles of their nearest Library Plus.

c) Development plan

4.11 The development plan sets out proposals for implementing the strategic review in practice. Using a series of selection criteria, it identifies how the library service model should be implemented in each of the three neighbourhoods and recommends the following proposals for public consultation:
• The north: North Chingford library should be designated as a Library Plus, Hale End library should be designated as a Library Local, and South Chingford library should close.

• The centre: Walthamstow library should be designated as a Library Plus, and Higham Hill and Wood Street libraries should be designated as Library Locals.

• The south: Leyton and Leytonstone libraries should be designated as Library Pluses, Lea Bridge library should be designated as a Library Local and Harrow Green library should close.

4.12 The development plan also contains a number of further proposals to address the objectives set out in the strategic review. These proposals include:

• moving staff who work in libraries into the Residents First Customer Services team, where their duties will be primarily face-to-face support and assistance to library users, and their working hours and practices will be focused on the needs of service users and corporate standards for customer care;

• the creation of a new library development team, which will undertake the specialist work required to ensure the Library and Information Service continues to meet local need; and

• a review of the library home delivery service, with the aim of expanding this service and increasing community involvement in its operation.

4.13 The first two proposals will be subject to consultation with affected employees. Members are referred to the development plan for details of all the proposals.

4.14 In summary, the proposals arising from the review are designed to deliver the Library and Information Service vision referenced in 4.5 and the statutory requirements for a comprehensive and efficient Library and Information Service.

Consultation

4.15 Subject to Cabinet agreement, a consultation programme is planned to seek residents’ views on the proposals arising from the Library and Information Service review. A detailed consultation plan is attached (Appendix D). The consultation is open to all residents and service users for response but the service also plans to undertake targeted consultation with key stakeholders to ensure the process is accessible to all affected groups. The consultation will last for a 12 week period in line with the government’s code of practice for written consultations. The 12 week period will include the period of school summer holidays, but it is considered to be sufficiently long to allow those who wish to participate the opportunity to do so. At the end of the consultation, the responses will be considered and taken into account when final proposals are developed for Cabinet in October.
4.16 The proposals will also be subject to a 90 day consultation with affected staff in accordance with statutory requirements. This process will take place in parallel to the public consultation.

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

5.1 In 2010, the Council agreed a new set of priorities and commitments, including priorities to “protect the most vulnerable” and “regenerate our borough”. The proposals arising from the Library and Information Service review support these priorities by ensuring that libraries continue to provide vulnerable residents with information services they depend on, and provide residents who are unemployed, and those living in overcrowded conditions, with access to the vital space and resources they need to improve their skill levels and employability.

5.2 Additional strategies that the review proposals support include:

- The draft Residents First Strategy, which is subject to consultation: this proposes a set of key principles and commitments that will determine the Council’s approach to delivering customer-focused, resident-led services, including a specific proposal that libraries become residents’ primary face-to-face point of contact for routine Council service transactions.

- The borough’s Culture Strategy, Taking Our Place in London: the aim in this strategy to “increase participation in arts, culture and sport across the borough’s diverse and changing population” is supported by proposals in the development plan to increase library usage.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 See 4.15 and 4.16.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

7.1.1 At this stage, Cabinet is being asked to agree to a public consultation on the proposals arising from the Library and Information Service review. The cost of this consultation will be met from the existing Residents First Unit budget.

7.1.2 Should Cabinet agree to the implementation of the review proposals following public consultation, the overall savings target for the Library and Information Service would be achieved. If Cabinet did not agree to implement these proposals, the Library and Information Service would need to develop alternative proposals to achieve its savings target. Alternatively, the service could remain unchanged and the budget would remain at its present level. However, savings of £1m would still need to be identified as the Medium Term Financial Strategy is predicated on delivery of these savings.
7.1.3 The development plan includes a number of proposals to ensure the Library and Information Service delivers better value for money. These include smarter procurement of stock and services, a staffing restructure, and greater use of self-service technology.

7.1.4 Any risks associated with delivery of the consultation exercise will need to be managed using the Council’s agreed risk management tools.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Members must satisfy themselves, subject to views expressed in consultation, that the proposals would deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service to those who wish to use it (section 7, Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964). This duty must be complied with alongside the Council’s other statutory duties. In particular, in deciding whether to approve the proposals for consultation, Members must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, which is dealt with at 7.3 below, and its duty of best value under s.3 of the Local Government Act 1999. Members are also referred to section 4 of the Strategic Review, which provides full detail of these duties. Whilst the Wirral Inquiry and Mr Vaizey’s letter of 3 December provide helpful guidance in approaching the section 7 duty, which has been followed, they are not court decisions and not legally binding on the Council.

7.2.2 The proposals to reduce the numbers of libraries by two and to reduce opening hours in other libraries require public consultation. To be lawful, the consultation must take place at a formative stage in the decision making process and with those affected by the proposal, provide sufficient time and information to provide for an intelligent response, and the outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account. The current proposals for consultation meet this standard.

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

7.3.1 In making its decision, the council must have regard to its public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act. The duty is to have due regard to the need (in discharging its functions) to:

a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;

b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;

c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

7.3.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Further details on the PSED are set out in section 4 of the Strategic Review.
7.3.3 The Cabinet is being asked to agree to undertake a consultation exercise on the proposals for the Library Service. An Equalities Analysis for this exercise is attached at Appendix E. The main issue identified and addressed is ensuring there is equality of access to the consultation. Specifically, a need to encourage responses from children and young people, older age groups, proportionate responses from both genders, black and ethnic minority groups (BAME) and disabled people and engagement with faith and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. The consultation is using a range of techniques to achieve this and responses will be monitored.

7.3.4 As regards the underlying Development Plan proposals, an Equalities Analysis is being developed. The final form of the Analysis will depend on consultation responses amongst other matters. Officers are currently able to provide a provisional assessment of the main equality impacts which the proposals that will be subject to consultation may have. No final decision is being made on the proposals. Members will be provided with a finalised Equalities Analysis after consultation and before a final decision is made.

7.3.5 There are positive impacts of the proposals, particularly the increase in services and opening times at the proposed library plus buildings and the aim to increase on line services and the creation of a development team working to improve access and use of the service.

7.3.6 The law on the equalities duties is clear, however, that focus should be on the potential adverse impact of proposals. The analysis identifies, some areas where the proposals may have disproportionate adverse impact on protected characteristics and which will need to be considered when the final decisions are made. The consultation process may also identify other areas to consider and will be incorporated into the finalised Equalities Analysis.

7.3.7 The areas provisionally identified are:

**Race:**

There is evidence that different ethnic groups use certain libraries more than their representation in the general population. Black and Asian/Asian British people are disproportionate overall users of South Chingford library and white people and Asian/Asian British people are disproportionate overall users of Harrow Green library. Any closures could therefore have a particular impact on the ethnic groups identified using the library in question disproportionately (though people from other ethnic groups would of course also be affected).

**Gender**

There is evidence that female population use libraries more than their representation in the general population. Therefore, any closures could have a disproportionate impact on women by requiring them to use other libraries. Further, the comment under pregnancy/maternity is also relevant to female users for self evident reasons.

**Pregnancy / Maternity**
The Library Service has significant numbers of pre-school children users attending with their parents. The proposed closure of two libraries will require some mothers with children to travel further and they may face additional barriers in doing so.

**Disability**

Statistical evidence tells us that a significant proportion of the population are disabled. Disabled people are more likely to have mobility difficulties and so travelling additional distance to alternative libraries will have a disproportionate impact that will need to be considered. Reduction in library provision will also be relevant to people with other disabilities, in particular sight impairment and blindness.

**Faith and belief**

There is evidence that there are disproportionate levels of use by different religious groups, in particular Muslims and Christians. Therefore, closures may have a disproportionate impact on these groups.

**Age**

There is evidence that children use libraries more than their representation in the population and therefore closure will have a disproportionate impact. Further, there is evidence that the oldest age groups may face additional barriers (e.g. lower mobility) to accessing alternative services if libraries were closed.

**Community Toilets**

Although not part of the Library Service, both libraries proposed for closure provide community toilets. This may impact particularly on the younger and older groups and those with disabilities. It is recommended that the service responsible for the community toilet scheme consider the potential impact of this change.

7.3.8 The provisional Equalities Analysis will be updated following the consultation exercise taking into account further information from this process and the nature of the final proposals. At this point, the proposals will also include actions to mitigate any adverse impacts.

7.4 **Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)**

7.4.1 At this stage, Cabinet is being asked to agree a public consultation on the proposals arising from the Library and Information Service review. Undertaking this consultation does not have any significant sustainability implications.

7.5 **Council Infrastructure (e.g. Human Resources, Accommodation or IT issues)**

7.5.1 At this stage, Cabinet is being asked to agree a public consultation on the proposals arising from the Library and Information Service review.
Undertaking this consultation does not have any significant implications for Council infrastructure.

7.5.2 The potential impact on the Community Toilet Scheme has been identified.

7.5.3 None of the existing library buildings have covenants or other restrictions imposed on their current or future use.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)
Letter to all library authorities from Ed Vaizey 3 December 2010
Local Inquiry – Wirral MBC 2009

Approval by the Portfolio Holder

I have cleared this report for inclusion on the Cabinet agenda.

Signed: G. Reardon Date: 6th June 2011
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Arts and Culture