

Library Service Strategy 2023-2027

Aims and ambitions



HILLINGDON
LONDON

www.hillingdon.gov.uk/libraries

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Executive summary

Welcome to Hillingdon library service's five-year strategy, a set of five key aims and ambitions that will build on existing successes and introduce new initiatives, while continuing to meet demand and be sustainable for the future.

Hillingdon's library service is a key council service that serves everyone in the community throughout its network of branches. They are uniquely placed to foster safe and strong communities, thriving healthy households and to seek opportunities to learn, work and live independently. As a free, universal service working with local partners and organisations, libraries provide a safe and welcoming space that links residents to their communities and to the wider world of literature and learning.

We are proud of our library service and want to go further and be more ambitious. The legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other recent global events, has left us with challenging circumstances as well as exciting opportunities. Resources need to be deployed creatively at a time when free, accessible library services have never been more needed. For that reason, libraries will continue to be reviewed to ensure budgets stretch as far as possible, with hours that take usage and location into account. Three libraries – one in the north, south and centre of the borough – will act as flagship branches, offering the longest opening hours and largest stock collections. Through the life of this strategy, consideration will also be given to whether communities would benefit from libraries sharing buildings with other council and community services, by relocating or inviting others into their space.

Libraries are also looking for new ways to promote the service and attract new visitors. The service wants to reach beyond traditional library users so that everyone in the borough can benefit from what libraries provide, and new initiatives set up to respond to what residents need. That means retaining the elements of the service that are most valued and cherished, while keeping an eye on the future and making sure libraries can adapt to meet demands.

The cornerstones of a traditional library service remain: namely, books, computers and information. Over the years, libraries have extended their offer to include a diverse programme of events and activities, mostly free or low cost, to support residents in living fulfilling, healthy and informed lives. The activities include children's storytimes, dementia support sessions, older people's exercise classes, reading and writing groups, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) projects, author talks, coffee mornings and peer-led groups. The Home Library Service will continue to deliver books and information to those who are housebound, and the mobile library will make regular roadside stops to improve access for those with limited mobility and visit schools.

WiFi and computer access remains free, and the service will explore ways that public IT can improve as well as finding digital solutions to improve the customer experience and reduce transactional work for staff so they can devote more time to helping library users. We will also continue to invest in and develop our 24/7 online library.

This Library Service Strategy is aligned to the overall priorities of Hillingdon Council and provides a framework for library staff, the council and its partners. It is also a guide for residents on how we intend to deliver library services across the next five years. We recognise the significant economic and environmental challenges facing public services, but through flexible management of resources and budgets, and providing services in different ways we will ensure every single person who lives, works or studies in the borough finds a library service fit for the future and that they are proud to use.



**Cllr Eddie Lavery,
Cabinet Member for
Residents' Services**



CHILDREN'S



National supporting policies

- Universal Library Offer framework
- Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England
- Legal framework and Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

Local supporting policies

- Council Strategy 2022-2026
- Equalities and diversity
- Climate Action
- Digital Connectivity Strategy (digital council and digital inclusion)

Key challenges and framework for change

- Stakeholders and partners
- Funding challenges and asset review
- Pace of technological change
- The climate emergency – how libraries can support



Ambition statement

Hillingdon libraries commit to building on and increasing the services they provide, so that as many people as possible can take advantage of the transformative power of libraries.

We will achieve this by pursuing ambitions in the following areas:

- reading, literacy and culture
- health and wellbeing
- improving digital services and inclusion
- information and learning
- sustainable service delivery.



Aims/ambitions:

Reading, literacy and culture

However much libraries change and diversify, the cornerstone of the service is to provide reading material to those who live, work or study in the borough. You can rely on stock in a variety of formats for all levels and ages of interest and ability. Library books are drawn from a wide range of tastes and interests so that you can be challenged, excited, educated and comforted by the books you encounter.

Libraries are with readers and information seekers for life. The educational and wellbeing benefits of reading for pleasure are well known, and it's more vital than ever that children are given the best possible start in life. We offer weekly early years sessions in each of our libraries, delivered by trained staff, that help children and their grown-ups to bond over books.

We also host events and activities that celebrate culture and the arts, from writing workshops to author talks, live music and art exhibitions, for all ages and backgrounds to enjoy.

We will:

- support early language and literacy development to give every child the best start, through a rolling programme of activities in each library
- encourage children, young people and adults to enjoy reading for pleasure by providing a wide range of reading materials and an imaginative programme of activities and events
- provide an inclusive library service, meeting the diverse needs of all residents and library users
- remove barriers to borrowing items and using libraries
- facilitate access to cultural experiences
- provide access to an engaging and diverse range of reading materials.



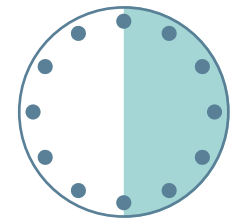
"My son really enjoys coming to Tiny Tales. He loves learning many new songs. He is learning to sit and listen to stories and songs. It is helping to support his speech and language."

Parent, Tiny Tales at Hayes End Library, November 2022

Sharing stories with young children helps to develop their speech, language and early literacy skills, encourages word association and helps them to learn about the world in which they live.

Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL)

In 2022, more than **5,500** children joined the Summer Reading Challenge in Hillingdon libraries.



Adults who read for just 30 minutes a week are 20% more likely to report greater life satisfaction.

The Reading Agency



In 2022, **31** early years sessions a week ran in Hillingdon libraries, with attendance of more than **11,000** children and their grown-ups.

"Since losing my sight I have been unable to read print, so talking books are incredibly important to me. Reading takes you away from the humdrum of normal life, visiting situations and places you will never face or visit. We have a reading group at our local library and we read a different book every month, which introduces me to different authors. It's also a very sociable time and lets me meet other people and chat about books."

Gill, VIP Reading Group, Uxbridge Library

Reading matters because it can have a lifelong positive impact on a child, affecting their health and wellbeing, creativity and educational outcomes.

BookTrust

Aims/ambitions:

Health and wellbeing

Hillingdon libraries work closely with partners to bring health information and activities into the community. Our successful Heart Month initiative every February focuses on healthy eating, exercise and mindfulness, and has provided residents with the opportunity to learn ways they can improve their own mental and physical health. Many of our branches also host regular chairobics sessions for older people, and we've partnered with Sport England and others on Alive and Kicking, lending footballs and delivering coaching sessions to young people.

All our libraries are accredited as dementia friendly venues, with several branches offering regular sessions and activities for those living with dementia and their carers. Our book collections include the nationally recognised Reading Well range for children, teens and adults. And all of our libraries are free, welcoming spaces, meaning that while they are open, people are invited to interact with groups and events that reduce social isolation and foster friendships.

We will:

- reduce loneliness and social isolation by providing the space for people in the community to interact with each other and try new things
- improve health and wellbeing, and support prevention agendas through socially inclusive activities and targeted promotions
- hold stock and information in all libraries that provides access to high quality and reliable advice/guidance to support mental health/social/emotional and physical health and wellbeing
- continue to develop resources that support people living with dementia, and their carers
- work with external and internal partners to deliver a robust programme of healthy initiatives across our libraries.



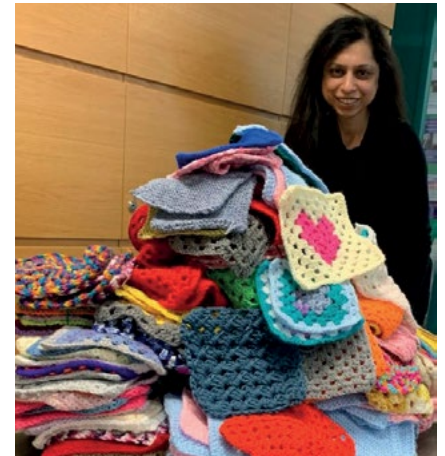


Reading for pleasure has many non-literacy benefits and can increase empathy, improve relationships with others, reduce the symptoms of depression and improve wellbeing throughout life.

The Reading Agency

Participation in shared reading groups is linked to enhanced relaxation, calmness, concentration, quality of life, confidence and self-esteem, as well as feelings of shared community and common purpose.

The Reading Agency



"I have been with the group for over six years, and made so many friends, I look forward to attending the sessions. I have fun, laugh, chat and party."

Dementia group attendee,
Yeading Library



Not only do you get the joy of reading, you also enjoy a spirited discussion that enables wide ranging thinking which would be impossible alone. Added to this are the mental health benefits of social interaction with members of our diverse community in Hayes.



Reading Friends Reading Group member,
Botwell Green Library, November 2022

Aims/ambitions:

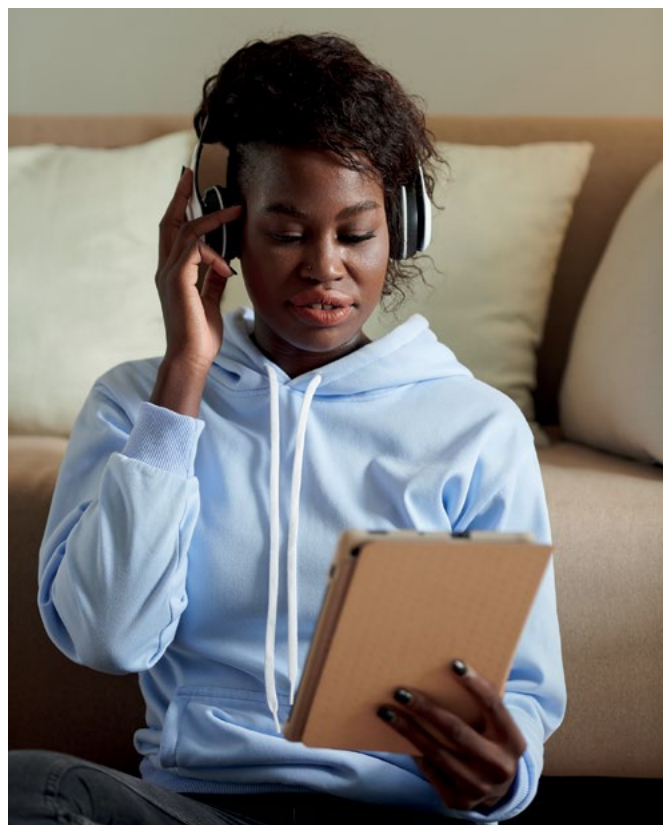
Improving digital services and inclusion

COVID-19 lockdowns showed us how natural it was for library services to continue delivering online, providing access to trusted information, ebooks and digital newspapers and magazines. But it also highlighted how cut off people can feel without the IT skills that were needed to stay in touch in lockdown. All our libraries offer free WiFi and public PCs, as well as help on how to get online. As more and more organisations encourage people to engage with them digitally, libraries play a key role in providing the up-to-date technology and the support you need.

We also recognise that STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) are key to the future of the country, and will build on our existing offer of code clubs, Lego clubs, and STEM kits young people can borrow free from the library to use at home.

We will:

- invest in public IT to improve the customer experience
- support people developing their digital skills and confidence so they can make the most of the opportunities afforded by digital
- provide access to quality online resources for reading, information and learning for adults, young people and children
- explore digital solutions that enhance the customer experience both remotely and in libraries, including self service options and investment in online resources
- develop STEM and STREAM (STEM plus Reading and the Arts) provision, open to all through the development of the offer.



Socially excluded groups tend to be the heaviest users of many government services, yet they are also less likely to be able to use online channels; 40% of benefit claimants have 'very low digital engagement'.

As measured by the Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index



1 in 20 UK households have no home internet access.

2 million UK households struggle to afford internet access

36% of workers lack essential digital skills for work

Good Things Foundation, Digital Nation 2022



I learned how to make a game today! I would recommend Code Club to my friends because it is very interesting.

9-year-old, Code Club, Uxbridge Library



Since 2019, the council has invested more than

£250,000

enhancing its digital library collection so that residents can access a wealth of online resources for free and from the comfort of their own homes.

"Everyone left with a working circuit and they were really happy.

"Children who finished quickly helped others that were struggling and all adults helped too."

Library staff – STEM activity



To date, the Hillingdon libraries app has been downloaded to **3,664** devices since its introduction in March 2020.

It was launched **35,323** times in the period from July 2021 to June 2022.

April 2021 to March 2022:

1,867 online memberships

204,802 digital newspapers and magazine issues read

58,850 digital book loans



"My child did not know she liked science until we came to this event!

"Absolutely fabulous and lovely to see the young volunteers."

Parent, Botwell Green Library

Aims/ambitions: Information and learning

The importance of providing trusted information from reliable sources cannot be overstated, and our libraries commit to ensuring the resources and signposting we offer are accurate and up to date. We also see our branches as spaces where everyone can come to improve their skills in a multitude of ways, from informal groups and IT support to providing an environment that encourages study and learning.

We will develop our support to those who live, work or study in the borough to learn workplace skills, offering work experience and Duke of Edinburgh's Award placements as well as bespoke placements for people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and volunteer profiles that enhance the work done by library staff.

We will:

- provide welcoming and accessible services for people with physical, learning and developmental disabilities
- create opportunities for people with SEND to develop workplace skills
- support and provide work experience and volunteering opportunities to enrich the lives of young people and support them to move successfully into adulthood and be ready for work.
- create adult volunteer profiles and opportunities for peer-led groups that enhance the services delivered by staff
- provide access to reliable/curated information
- facilitate and deliver opportunities for learning.



“I would like to thank you for this great opportunity; I have really enjoyed organising the events throughout the year and have gained lots of skills from it. I hope the following year is just as productive and exciting for the next group of volunteers, as I think the events really improve the library service and are great for the children.”

Laila, aged 16, Reading Sparks volunteer



As a Project Search intern, I had the opportunity to do a 10-week work experience placement. If I had any questions, staff I worked with were all very helpful and supportive.

I improved my attention to detail, my verbal communication skills and my IT skills when assisting and observing colleagues. I found my overall experience very rewarding.

Gursagar, Project Search/HACS placement



“Volunteering has helped me to improve my confidence when talking to different people. It has also gave me some kind of responsibility.”

Lucy, aged 15

“Working in various Hillingdon libraries has improved my communication with customers, my confidence in my working environment and my problem-solving ability when supporting customers. I feel very happy with my improvement over the last 12 weeks and I know I would like to work in a library environment.”

Daniel, Project Search/HACS placement



Aims/ambitions:

Sustainable service delivery

National and world events have impacted public service budgets while increasing operational costs. Nevertheless, Hillingdon recognises the essential role libraries provide in communities and how valued the service is by residents. We are ambitious in our strategy because we are committed to its aims and confident in our track record of delivering.

We will manage our budgets and buildings carefully but imaginatively, ensuring each library offers a core service while also delivering enhancements based on the communities they serve, and being flexible in how the service is delivered. Opening hours will be set based on the busyness, size and location of branches and kept under rolling review – as trends and resourcing changes we will be flexible in our approach. Our buildings are open to partners whose aims and values match ours, increasing people's access to services. We will also contribute to the Climate Action plan, finding ways to make our libraries more energy efficient and offering opportunities to residents to learn more about the environment.

We will:

- deliver a core offer in all libraries comprising access to books, information, IT, and an early years activity. Enhanced offers will be built on community need and the tiers of libraries
- group libraries into four tiers to deliver the right level of offer based on demographics, busyness, size and location
- review use of all buildings to fully utilise assets – make the most of commercial opportunities, co-locating services within an existing library building, relocating a library to a new building, or remodelling a library to maximise its potential
- use budget and resources flexibly to set opening hours based on usage and demand
- retain home and mobile library services to reach isolated and housebound people in all parts of the borough

- have a responsive, trained and adaptive workforce across all libraries
- explore digital solutions to service delivery, increasing ways for residents to engage with the library service
- have closer partnerships with council services to improve access for residents
- review our processes and assets to reduce carbon emissions, and enable communities to respond to the challenge of the climate emergency.



In the 2022/23 financial year, Hillingdon libraries recorded more than:

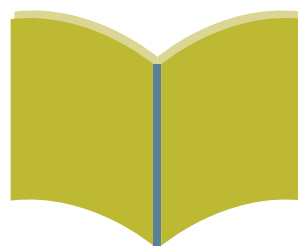
944,000 visits

280,000 digital book loans

13,600 new library members

875,000 physical book loans

106,000 PC bookings



The Home Library Service visits more than 100 people a month who are housebound and unable to visit a static library.



The busiest libraries in the borough are **Uxbridge**, **Ruislip Manor** and **Botwell Green** libraries, issuing the most books and welcoming the most visitors.

They account for around a third of all Hillingdon library visits, while the seven busiest branches account for nearly 60% of all library visits.



On average, the mobile library makes 28 roadside stops a week.

