

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Camden Libraries Strategy 26-31	
REPORT OF Director of Recreation and Public Safety	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee	DATE 23 February 2026
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>The Libraries in Camden provide a vital neighbourhood service to residents, that aligns with We Make Camden and the Camden Missions. An ambitious five-year Libraries Strategy (2026-31) has been drafted collaboratively with residents, the library team, other Council teams, and partner organisations. Five key themes have emerged that will help build on the already well respected and high performing service.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>The following documents have been used in the preparation of this report:</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report</p> <p>Contact Officer: Fiona Tarn Head of Libraries London Borough of Camden fiona.tarn@camden.gov.uk 07971746089</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>That the Committee comments on the Libraries Strategy to strengthen the final version of the strategy</p>	

Signed: 
Oliver Jones

Date: 11th February 2026

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report summarises the key considerations in forming the library strategy 2026-31 providing the context of the library service and looking at the next five years including a method to capture the impact of the service.
- 1.2 This report provides an opportunity for the committee to review the draft themes ahead of future decision and adoption.

2. Background to the report

- 2.1 Some library services across the country are facing challenges due to resourcing constraints. Camden Libraries are developing by continuing to seek inward investment. Over the last three years, the service has generated £1,147,000 through various sources including S106, local community infrastructure levy funding, Arts Council funding, Clore Duffield, Mercers, National Lottery and National Heritage Lottery funding. One example of the benefit of this inward investment is the refurbishment of Holborn Library in 2025 supporting the creation of an attractive and flexible space enabling partner organisations to collaborate with the service.
- 2.2 The Camden Libraires Service oversees 9 libraries as its statutory public library offer; a Local Studies and Archive service and a home library service. One of the nine libraries is co-managed with the Friends of Highgate Library. Libraries are viewed as vital neighbourhood spaces and physical visits continue to increase. In 2025 there were 854,143 visits to libraries and 251,975 book issues with 12,075 new library members.
- 2.2 The previous strategy for Camden's Libraries is about to expire 'The Future of Camden Libraries a New Strategic Framework for Libraries 2016-26'
- 2.3 The service developed an all-age multi agency reading strategy in 2025, Camden Reading Together 2025-30 which involved a data analysis by The Reading Agency and Camden's Insights, Learning and Impact Team. This strategy aims to develop the literacy levels of Camden's residents to improve their reading; skills; connection; and wellbeing.
- 2.4 The service is valued and high performing with the highest participation levels in London, and the second highest in England. In 2023/24, 37% of Camden adults reported visiting a public library building or mobile library in the last 12 months with 30% being the average across the country.
- 2.5 Between February and December 2025 there was engagement with the library team, the residents and internal and external partners to gather data to inform the mission, values and strategy for the service.

3. Camden Libraries Strategy

- 3.1 The service is valued by the residents, and the aim of the strategy is to celebrate this and build on it with an approach for the next five years placing people at the heart of the strategy, Libraries Do.
- 3.2 The strategy celebrates some of the key recent achievements of the strategy including:
- Launch of the Imagination Library in partnership with the Dollywood Foundation and funded by the Peoples Postcode Lottery
 - Award of £500,000 capital grant from Arts Council England and the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) Libraries Improvement Fund.
 - Refurbishment of Holborn Library and creation of a neighbourhood space with community partners.
 - Launch of Camden Reading Together 2025-30 and associated deliverables including the launch of the Share and Read with Baby registrar packs.
 - Redesign of Swiss Cottage Children's Library
 - Creation of the second clore learning space in a public library in the UK
 - First and only member of the British Library's Living Knowledge Network in London
 - One of the first Green Library Hubs created through funding applied for by the Chartered Institute of Information Professionals CILIP and received from [National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future.](#)
- 3.3 Five key themes have emerged as we have engaged and drafted the five year strategy. They can be seen below along with the new Camden Libraries mission and values.

The themes and their focus are:

People and Place
Elevating the basics
Cohesion, Inclusivity and Relevance
Partnerships and Outreach
Telling Our Story



3.4 Each theme has a set of goals that will be achieved by 2031.

Libraries Do! Themes	Preliminary outcomes
<p>People and Place <i>Putting Camden Libraries at the heart of their local communities.</i></p>	<p>More visits to our libraries We will aim for a 10% increase across digital and physical visits by 2031.</p> <p>More community involvement. We will have more volunteers and volunteer hours per year by 2031.</p> <p>Improved library spaces.</p> <p>Using data to ensure we are making an impact and meeting needs.</p>
<p>Elevating the Basics <i>Elevating the foundations of the service to deliver a successful and resilient library service</i></p>	<p>Opening times are reflective of the communities they serve within the available resource.</p> <p>The Libraries Team have the skills they require to meet the needs of residents.</p>

	There is a clear plan for the digital offer.
Cohesion, Inclusivity and Relevance <i>Libraries as places of sanctuary, shaping offers to meet resident's needs and sharing spaces to connect residents of all ages and cultures</i>	More Connectedness. The impact measures will demonstrate that libraries are supporting people to connect. Collections will be shaped by residents through community days giving residents the opportunity to contribute to book selections
Partnerships & Outreach <i>Working with others to ensure relevance and meet need</i>	More engagement through Cultural experiences. The number of people attending events will increase by 5% by 2031. Contributed to inclusive economic growth through pathways to employment
Telling our story <i>Connecting with residents and partners in a deeper way</i>	Telling our story in a more amplified and strategic way. Involved the community through Ambassador roles

4. What are the key impacts

- 4.1 The adoption and implementation of Camden's Library Strategy is expected to generate significant and wide-reaching benefits for residents, and communities. Key anticipated impacts include:

Impacts
Service Development and Innovation with People at the heart Continue our proactive approach to inward investment plans including a place making Kilburn Library refurbishment, review of opening times, achieve the Arts Council Libraries Development Framework and national accreditation for the Local Studies and Archive Service and initiatives such as auto enrolment.
Through partnership delivery of a high-quality reading, learning, events and information offer Build on the relationships in place and continue to offer reading choices, a robust information offer that meets the diverse needs of residents and a programme of informal and formal learning and cultural events.
Creation of inclusive neighbourhood spaces responding to We Make Camden Missions, the inclusive economy and local need Continuing to develop local library plans, the team, tailoring the local offer including community stock days, with a refreshed digital plan and gaining Libraries of Sanctuary. Supporting the inclusive economy and reducing

inequalities through learning, green, business support and employability programmes.
Increasing reach, awareness and measuring the impact Refresh and further develop a clear communication plan to improve the way we advocate and engage with people and develop a partnerships framework and deliver a robust outreach plan. Creating a social impact assessment with the Insight Learning and Impact Team
Working with Residents Develop a group of Camden Libraries Ambassadors and a Youth Advisory Panel to advocate and develop the service and challenge the service is delivering for residents. Connecting with local volunteers.

5. Library Strategy Engagement

- 5.1 The Library Service started engaging in February 2025 up to December 2025. This started with the Library Team and the mission and values and considering how the service connects with We make Camden. Engagement with the residents started in the Summer of 2025 until December.
- 5.2 The service engaged in different ways including community walls in the libraries; community conversation sessions with the Participation team's support. Some of the conversation sessions occurred in library setting and some in community settings to help reach the non-library user. A professional storyteller created long scrolls through facilitating conversations residents of all ages added words and pictures to the scrolls. Round tables with internal and external partners took place. The partners included the British Library, University of the Arts London (UAL, The Reading Agency, Lifeafterhummus, Arts Council, Regeneration, Digital Inclusion, Culture and Leisure. A group of Sociology students from University College London (UCL) researched and engaged with residents and created a set of recommendations for the future service. The Home Library Service Members were contacted by phone and asked for their feedback. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport have also commented.
- 5.3 The numbers engaging in some of these initiatives are below. It is unknown how many people engaged with the community walls as this was ongoing over six months in all libraries.

Engagement Method	Data
Scroll engagement sessions	85 people - 61 female, 10 male and 14 children
Community Conversations	Sidings 11th November - 10 people Holborn - 12th November - no attendees at session but some engagement at the scroll

	Swiss Cottage 13th November - 15 people plus Kentish Town - 18th November - 15 people Swiss Cottage – 8 th December – 18 people
Round tables	Internal - 6 External - 13

An Equalities Impact

[Equality Impact Assessment Form Libraries Strategy 26-31 1 v2.pdf](#)

6. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance

This report sets out the 2026-2031 Camden Library strategy. There are no additional financial implications arising from the report at this stage.

7. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

In considering the report the Committee must have due regard to the impact the report will have upon the Council's statutory duty with regard to equalities as set out in Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. In summary these legal obligations require the Council and Cabinet, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to 1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; 2) to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't; 3) Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't (which involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding). Under the Duty the relevant protected characteristics are Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion, Sex, Sexual orientation. In respect of the first aim only - i.e. reducing discrimination, etc. - the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership is also relevant

8. Environmental Implications

The draft Libraries Do! Strategy has a section 'Camden Libraries supporting

sustainability' which demonstrates the commitment the service has to work with residents to address the challenge of Climate Action including being one of the first three Green Library Hubs in the country funded by the [National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future](#). Since 2021 three of the libraries have been through a retrofit programme.

9. Appendices

[Camden Libraries Strategy 2026-31 - Draft 02 26.docx](#)

REPORT ENDS

