



Skills, Economy & Growth Scrutiny Commission Briefing: Hackney Library Service (13 July 2026)

Report on the implementation and outcomes of the Libraries Strategy 2022-26

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1. Introduction and Scrutiny Context

1.1 Scrutiny commission background

1.1.1 In January 2023, the Skills, Economy & Growth (SEG) Scrutiny Commission initiated its examination of the future of library services and the Libraries Strategy. This review was further updated in January 2025 when the service was required to present on progress being made operationally regarding the new staffing structure and the broader implementation of the strategy. Notably, following these initial assessments and service implementation, Hackney's library service underwent an external Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review.

1.1.2 The January 2025 update specifically addressed the integration of the revised staffing model and revisited health and safety concerns previously raised by Trade Unions regarding staff wellbeing prior to its transformation. While these issues were prominent in 2023, the Commission found the 2025 progress updates to be satisfactory, leading to the conclusion that staff health and safety is no longer a primary area of concern for scrutiny.

1.1.3 Key stakeholders, including LBH Officers, Cabinet Members, and Trade Union representatives, participated in the session. Their contributions helped frame the thematic points detailed in the following section of this paper.

1.2 Summary of previous concerns

1.2.1 The Scrutiny Commission raised concerns regarding the reduction of 19 full-time equivalent posts and a resulting reliance on relief staff, which has left employees feeling stretched and less secure in their roles. These operational changes were accompanied by calls for greater strategic alignment, as the LGA Peer Challenge team identified a misalignment between the council's corporate strategy and the library service's objectives. Furthermore, scrutiny suggested that the library service could improve communication regarding its evolving community hub offer to ensure residents and other council departments fully appreciate the service's potential.

1.2.2 Accountability and performance measurement also emerged as key areas for potential improvement, with stakeholders identifying a need for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be introduced and qualitative impact data to better demonstrate service success. This discussion included specific criticism from Hackney Unison regarding the council's use of 2022 statistics as a performance baseline.

1.3 Scrutiny commission outcomes and progress

1.3.1 The Scrutiny Commission welcomed the steps taken by Library Management to professionalise the service, notably through bespoke training for frontline officers to maintain high professional standards. Furthermore, to ensure open communication and staff safety, the service has established six-weekly meetings between management and trade unions, facilitating the sharing of Health and Safety incident data.

1.3.2 The Scrutiny Commission heard that service modernisation efforts were proving successful, with staff survey results showing a 13% increase in employee engagement and the library service recording a 70% decrease in sickness rates, suggesting staff feel increasingly valued and motivated.

1.3.3 To address concerns regarding the use of 2022 statistics as a performance baseline, the service explained that much pre-pandemic data was lost due to a cyber-attack and they invited Hackney Unison to share any available data to supplement these records. The Scrutiny Commission welcomed this transparency as evidence of the service's commitment to stakeholder engagement while navigating data recovery.

1.4 Recent developments (2025-2026)

1.4.1 In 2025, the Libraries Service was asked to meet a 15% (£773,000) reduction in the libraries budget over the next two years, required from April 2026. The options in the proposals impacted opening hours across most library sites, but no site closures were proposed. This proposal would ensure all eight Council-managed libraries in Hackney could remain open and every resident could continue to have access to a good, modern library close to where they live. The savings would be made by adjusting opening hours, deleting vacant posts, reducing costs for service development and book purchasing, and reducing security costs.

1.4.2 In February 2026, following the close of the consultation, the Mayor asked the Cabinet to halt proposed reductions to library opening hours, due to increased government funding. As a result it was agreed that staffing levels and a percentage of

the stock budget would be restored to libraries, and therefore reliance on relief staff would be limited to covering ad hoc sickness and emergencies.

1.5 Linked documents

- [LBH Libraries Update report in Jan 25](#)
- [Libraries Strategy Presentation](#)
- [Peer Challenge Feedback](#)
- [Minutes of SEG meeting Jan 25](#)

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The 2022–26 Libraries Strategy has successfully evolved Hackney’s library network from a traditional book-lending model into a series of vibrant community hubs. In 2025/26, overall footfall reached 684,086 visits, a 5% decrease from the previous year's 723,206; however, this reduction was primarily due to the temporary five-month closure of Hackney Central Library. Excluding this closure, footfall is rising across the borough, with significant increases of 30% at Homerton, Hackney Central, and Woodberry Down, and approximately 10% growth at Clapton, Shoreditch, and Dalston CLR James Library compared to the same period last year.

2.2 This transformation, anchored by the 2023 "Fit for the Future" workforce restructure, achieved significant operational and cultural improvements, including a 13% increase in staff engagement and a 70% reduction in sickness rates.

2.3 Backed by a £6 million capital investment, the service upgraded key sites - most notably Hackney Central - leading to a 57% increase in commercial income and a 98% user satisfaction rate. External validation, including an exemplary LGA Peer Challenge in 2024 and multiple MJ and Hackney Stars awards, confirms the strategy’s success.

2.4 The service has successfully cemented libraries as vital community wellbeing and civic infrastructure. Through co-designed community initiatives, digital inclusion projects, and integrated partnerships, it continues to provide robust support for the most vulnerable residents in the borough.

2.5 Hackney’s Libraries consistently see higher usage by women, children, and young people compared to borough averages and customer base reflects local ethnic diversity, with particularly high representation of Black, Mixed, and Asian residents. Since 2019, this diversity has grown, with Black and Asian engagement surpassing borough averages in Stamford Hill, Woodberry Down, Shoreditch, Clapton, and Dalston, while remaining stable at Hackney Central and Homerton.

2.6 Despite temporary site closures impacting recent footfall figures, libraries are seeing strong growth in key areas and continue to play a critical role in supporting vulnerable residents through digital inclusion, health and wellbeing partnerships, and accessible co-working spaces.

2.7 As the service looks beyond its initial transformation phase, it is now prioritising innovation-led delivery, aiming to solidify libraries as central "community hubs" that act

as the primary "front door" to council services while ensuring long-term financial and operational sustainability.

3. Libraries Transformation Programme

3.1 Background:

3.1.1 Since April 2021, Hackney Library Service has undergone an intensive transformation programme, evolving from a traditional book-lending model into a modern, community-focused "one-stop shop" service. This shift was necessary to address declining visitor numbers following a slow post covid recovery and driven by changing societal trends and to meet the Council's mandatory financial savings targets, specifically an annual reduction of £250,000 achieved by 2023/24 through staffing efficiencies.

3.1.2 The central pillar of this transformation was the "Fit for the Future" workforce restructure, launched in April 2023. This initiative established an area-focused management model, consolidating eight management roles into six, while professionalising frontline positions. Library Assistants and Supervisors were upgraded to scale-six Library Officers, with new requirements for Sunday working and cross-branch coverage to ensure consistent service levels across the borough.

3.1.3 Beyond internal restructuring, the programme facilitated strategic investment in leadership, digital skills, and community outreach. A new Engagement & Development Team was introduced to lead on marketing, digital transformation, and cultural programming, ensuring the service could effectively bolster footfall and respond to resident needs. This evolution was supported by an ambitious capital programme that leveraged approximately £6 million in funding for renovations, improved physical accessibility, and modernised digital infrastructure.

3.1.4 In October 2024, the Local Government Association and Arts Council England conducted a Libraries Peer Challenge, which externally validated the service's success. The review recognised Hackney's libraries as resilient, community-focused hubs and praised their exemplary engagement with underrepresented groups. Today, the library service is successfully positioned as a vital piece of social infrastructure - a "front door" to council services that actively combats digital exclusion, supports health and wellbeing, and fosters community cohesion, ensuring the network remains relevant and efficient for all Hackney residents.

3.1.5 In 2025, the service was asked to find a further £250,000 in savings. Already working with minimal staffing and holding vacancies with an over reliance on relief staff, the only options realistically put forward were to reduce library opening hours. This consultation was paused in February 2026 under the Mayor's request and a full breakdown of insight obtained is available in Section 5.

3.1.6 The 2026 consultation underscored a powerful consensus regarding the intrinsic value of library services, with residents consistently championing libraries as essential "Third Spaces" within the borough. Beyond their traditional function as

repositories for books, these sites are viewed by the public as vital, free, and accessible safe havens that are particularly critical during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Community feedback identified these spaces as fundamental public health infrastructure - providing warm, secure environments that actively combat digital poverty and mitigate social isolation - thereby solidifying their reputation as indispensable lifelines for the most vulnerable and marginalised members of the Hackney community.

3.2 Context:

3.2.1 Review of service provision

The Council fulfills its statutory duty under the *Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964* to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Our network operates across eight sites - seven fully staffed libraries and one volunteer-run facility at Woodberry Down - ensuring that the vast majority of Hackney residents live within one mile of their nearest branch.

The recent workforce restructure successfully maintained this full network and its established opening hours, which are tailored to the usage patterns of our customers. Critically, this shift has also secured resources for enhanced community engagement, outreach, and service development, allowing us to better serve residents with the greatest need. Service Managers are currently establishing new delivery standards and robust performance monitoring processes, supported by the implementation of our new Libraries Annual Report (launched April 2024).

3.2.3 Monitoring provision for residents

Hackney's library network serves a diverse demographic, including council tenants, leaseholders, students living in overcrowded housing, and a significant Charedi Orthodox Jewish population in Stamford Hill - a key focus for targeted engagement. Recognising that the pandemic increased resident reliance on libraries for critical digital access, we have implemented an operational model characterised by strengthened outreach, integrated cross-council partnerships, and community hub activities. This approach is successfully enhancing accessibility and meeting the needs of the borough's most vulnerable residents.

3.2.4 Staff development

Staff development is a central pillar of our "Fit for the Future" restructure, which prioritises professionalisation, community-focused skill-building, and clear career progression. Since 2023, we have moved from ad-hoc training to a structured, data-informed programme that fosters leadership at all levels:

- **All-Staff Development Days:** These quarterly sessions, involving 40–50 officers and managers, are used for planning, best-practice sharing, and collaborative training with internal and external partners.
- **Structured Inductions:** New staff complete a two-part induction involving cascaded peer-to-peer training on core systems (SirsiDynix and Libdata) and external accreditation through Libraries Connected (covering digital skills, "Reading Well," and children's workforce modules).

- **Continuous Feedback:** Weekly newsletters, led by the Engagement & Development Manager, keep staff informed and connected. Training effectiveness is measured via evaluation forms, with recent sessions receiving 99% satisfaction ratings.
- **Specialist Training:** Training sessions support further understanding of the "one-stop shop" hub model, with recent topics including homelessness support, neurodiversity, literacy, and cultural awareness training delivered with partners such as Interlink and the Daymer Turkish and Kurdish Centre.
- **Impact:** This investment has led to measurable service improvements, including a 13% increase in employee engagement (well above the 5% council average) and a nearly 70% decrease in staff absenteeism. The restructure also upgraded frontline roles - transitioning Library Assistants and Supervisors to "Library Officers" - providing enhanced training and career progression.

3.2.5 Data collection & strategic progress

We have shifted from basic benchmarking, using pre-covid footfall and participation estimates to sophisticated, real-time data analysis and customer surveying to ensure our services reflect our neighborhoods:

- **Infrastructure for Insights:** New visitor counters installed in Jan 2024 have provided the first full years of accurate footfall data.
- **Targeted Demographics:** We use Strategic Needs Assessments to compare registered customers with ward data. By 2025/26, libraries successfully maintained borough averages for 'Asian' and 'Mixed Ethnicity' customers, while seeing significantly higher usage from young people and Global Majority residents than borough averages.
- **User Satisfaction:** The 2025 Customer Satisfaction Survey (525 respondents) showed 97–98% satisfaction with staff and resources and 99% for events.

3.2.6 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and reporting

In 2023/23 the Engagement and Development Team introduced Annual Report for the service and KPIs to start measuring against. Though the service didn't have reliable metrics to measure against in 2023/24, we started measuring where we could and established a set of 34 Key Performance Indicators related to "Visits and Members", "Customer Satisfaction", "Participation", "Income Generation and Fundraising", "Digital Participation" and "Other Service Standards" such as Stock EDI and Relief Officer Hours.

In 2025/26 we have 3 years of data so are starting to gain a clearer picture of the progression of libraries and the transformation of the services, areas we are going from strength to strength, areas for improvement and areas to keep an eye on, including;

- **Digital & Membership Growth:** Active physical users rose by 78.5% and book borrowers by 62.8%. Digital engagement spiked, with newsletter subscribers up 88.5%, Love Hackney website and LBH website visitors up by 87%, and social media followers up 45.8%.
- **Book Circulation:** Adult (-10.7%) and Children's (-1.3%) book issues declined (primarily due to site closures).

- **Visitor Growth:** Overall annual visitor numbers fell 5.4% and event participation dropped (primarily due to site closures at Stoke Newington and Hackney Central). However, in the period since Hackney Central reopened on 2nd February 2026, footfall is up at most sites, as much as 30% at Homerton, Hackney Central and Woodberry Down and around 10% at Clapton, Shoreditch and Dalston CLR James.
- **Income:** Following the introduction of new meeting rooms and bookable booths at Hackney Central Library, room hire income rose 26% in 2024/25, with overall income jumping by 57% in 2025/26.

3.2.7 Annual reports

The 2025/26 Annual Report for Hackney Libraries is the 3rd report the Engagement and Development Team has produced since the first scrutiny meeting. This and previous reports are shared with the SEG Scrutiny Commission to track ongoing progress and included in the upcoming library newsletter. It represents a significant step in the service's reporting evolution, offering the first full year of comprehensive data across 34 KPIs established in 2024/25, covering areas such as footfall, digital engagement, and income.

New analytical depth in this report includes full-year footfall data, demographic profiles benchmarked against borough averages, and specific sections on health, wellbeing, and international partnerships. Early findings indicate strong performance, with total visits reaching 750,207 and a 98% user satisfaction rate. Furthermore, the report highlights the service's success in digital inclusion, with Public Computer (PC) usage rising by 38%, and its critical role in social support, having distributed over £20,000 in Household Support Fund vouchers to vulnerable residents.

3.2.9 Library refurbishments

The year in 2025/2026 was a significant period for Hackney's physical library infrastructure, with a number of refurbishment projects focused on enhancing accessibility, sustainability, and community use.

Major refurbishments, such as the award-winning renovation of Hackney Central Library, successfully introduced multi-use meeting rooms, enhanced accessibility, and co-designed community spaces that spurred a 30% increase in visitor footfall. Similarly, Stamford Hill Library benefited from critical infrastructure repairs, which started with structural roof works, stage two has started with surveys for windows and cooling in the Library. and will progress to the installation of a new lift, ensuring the facility remains a safe and accessible environment for all users. At Homerton Library we installed a new air source heat pump and cooling system in 2024, and at Stoke Newington Library good progress is being made to repair and restore the external fabric of the listed building including the original sash windows and decorative stonework. See Section 4.17 for further details of all capital improvement programmes.

These site-specific projects were complemented by a network-wide commitment to accessibility and environmental sustainability, encompassing improved wayfinding, climate-resilient "cool and warm" spaces, and new digital infrastructure. Supported by over £6 million in capital investment, these strategic improvements not only solidified libraries as essential community anchors but also delivered significant operational

returns. By the end of the 2026 financial year, these modernised facilities directly contributed to a 57% increase in income from room hires and services, validating the strategy's dual focus on social value and revenue optimisation.

3.2.10 Sector benchmarking

The October 2024 Libraries Peer Challenge, facilitated by the Local Government Association and Arts Council England, provided an improvement-focused reflection on our service. The team engaged with over 70 stakeholders, including council staff, elected members, and partners, to evaluate our strategy, workforce structure, and resilience.

Feedback was consistently positive; the service was recognised as a modern, resilient, and community-focused entity with exemplary engagement among underrepresented groups. Successes were attributed to staff empowerment and the dedicated work of the Engagement and Development Team. Key highlights included high-impact creative health partnerships such as "Art at Heart," health and wellbeing partnerships at Homerton Library, and the Dalston CLR James Library -based "Welcome Hub."

Looking ahead, the team recommended closer executive involvement to better integrate libraries as central community hubs and the "front door" to council services. Strategic recommendations included developing a formal, service-led definition of the "community hub" model to drive income, combining service budgets to allow for reinvestment, and establishing robust Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to provide clear performance feedback.

3.2.11 Awards and Recognition

Hackney's Library Team and Engagement and Development Team, earned national acclaim in 2025 as a finalist for "Best Council Services Team" and received a highly commended award for "Workforce Optimisation" at the MJ Awards 2025.

The service's momentum continued into 2026 at the annual Hackney Stars, where it secured three wins: Project of the Year for the "Remaking Hackney Central Library" initiative, Excellence in Resident Support for its partner work with the Welcome Hackney Team in Dalston CLR James Library to develop and run the "Welcome Hackney: Refugee, Migrant and Asylum Seeker Hub", and Team of the Year for the joint efforts of the Libraries and Engagement and Development Teams. Additionally, the Hackney Central Library was a finalist for the prestigious Library of the Year award by The Bookseller and shortlisted in the "Best use of Arts and Culture in Placemaking" category at the National Planning Awards 2026.

The Library service has developed new international partnerships with library services in Dnipro, Ukraine, New York libraries and the Neukolln library service in Berlin to share and exchange knowledge.

4. Update on the delivery of the new Libraries Strategy

4.1 The Libraries Strategy directly responds to the engagement with 8,500 residents, a Task and Finish Group of elected members, extensive consultation with library staff and strategic conversations with relevant cross-Council departments.

During consultation to develop the new strategy in 2021, residents that use and don't the libraries told us that in the future they would like to use the library spaces more in a hybrid manner, for cultural and community hub activities, digital and lifelong learning, and places that include the community in co-producing what it can offer. Results of the consultation and the strategy can be found here: <https://hackney.gov.uk/libraries>

4.2 The outcomes of the new strategy for residents are:

- To increase reading and literacy.
- To enable cultural and creative enrichment.
- To support the Council's corporate priorities.
- To enable greater prosperity and thriving communities.
- To improve digital access and literacy.
- To help everyone achieve their full potential.
- To support stronger and more resilient communities.
- To encourage healthier and happier lives.

4.4 Embedding the Libraries Strategy 2022–26

Since 2023, Hackney Libraries have evolved from traditional book-lending spaces into essential "one-stop shop" community hubs. This period has been characterised by data-driven service improvements, expanded co-located council services, and award-winning programmes for digitally excluded and socially isolated residents.

4.5 Systems and Processes

To achieve a more connected and effective service, Hackney Libraries implemented several key "enablers" including, the development of new policies covering internal communications, stock, marketing, digital transformation, and volunteering, alongside the creation of a new annual reporting framework and centralised data evaluation processes. Furthermore, the service modernised its operations by digitising the Community Library Service, reviewing safeguarding and work experience protocols, establishing standardised partnership agreements, and launching new digital spaces to improve internal team communication.

4.6 Access and Inclusion

Hackney Libraries have developed a robust ecosystem of support for residents with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), moving beyond standard accessibility to provide bespoke vocational pathways and specialised community programmes. The "supported work experience" model offers neurodiverse young people the opportunity to gain professional confidence in a safe, community-facing environment.

4.7 Specialised SEND Programming, Work Experience & Vocational Pathways

- **Bespoke SEND Placements:** Between 2024 and 2026, the service developed tailored work experience programmes for students aged 12–25 from schools including **Side by Side** (Orthodox Jewish SEND school), **Stormont House**, **The Autism Project**, and **Unity Works**.

- **Long-Term Integration:** During 2026, the service hosted five SEND students in long-term, sustained placements, focusing on building professional skills such as shelving, display making, and public engagement.
- **Skill Building:** Tasks are designed to build confidence; for example, students at Hackney Central were encouraged to lead reading sessions for small children and create promotional posters, making them feel like part of the library "family".
- **Unity Works Collaboration:** A dedicated partnership with Unity Works provides specific digital skills and employment sessions for 16–24-year-olds with SEND to ensure they are equipped for a digital-first job market.
- **Creative Validation:** Students from Stormont House co-designed murals for the refurbished Hackney Central Library, ensuring their artistic contributions are a permanent part of the borough's civic infrastructure.
- **Rhyme and Sign:** A collaboration with the **Homerton Hospital Deaf and Partially Hearing Team** provides specialised literacy sessions for babies and parents, breaking the "silent library" stereotype to support early communication.
- **Assistive Technology Hubs:** Dedicated hubs at Hackney Central and Dalston libraries, created with **Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and Scope**, provide accessible tech and resources for residents with sensory or physical disabilities.

4.8 Equalities and Anti-Racism

The Hackney library service serves a remarkably diverse population, with 2024/25 data confirming that all libraries have significantly higher levels of Global Majority residents as registered customers than borough averages. Feedback from this demographic consistently emphasises the library as a "de-stigmatising" and "approachable" environment that fosters localised pride and ownership. By co-designing book stock collections and programmes with these residents, the service has successfully transformed from a traditional repository of books into a vital engine for social equity and inclusion.

4.9 Strategic Inclusion of Global Majority Residents

In 2025 the Engagement and Development Team updated Strategic Needs Assessments to ensure each library reflects its local neighbourhood, specifically targeting groups that are traditionally underrepresented.

- **Representative Collections:** The service has prioritised diversifying its book stock, with 11.8% of the collection now categorised as Diversity, Equality and Inclusion stock (DEI), significantly higher than the 9.1% average of its peers.
- **Targeted Acquisitions:** Specific investments were made in Black and Global Majority stock in collaboration with New Beacon bookshop, as well as new Arabic, Islamic, and Torah collections to serve specific community needs.
- **High Engagement Levels:** Data from 2025/26 indicates that libraries have maintained levels of 'Black' and 'Other Ethnicity' customers that are higher than borough averages.
- **Cultural Validation:** Residents have expressed profound emotional connections to these changes, with one user noting the deep happiness of finding books in their native Arabic for the first time since arriving in the UK.

4.10 Influencing Change Through Co-Designed Programming

Feedback from underserved communities, staff networks and Global Majority residents has directly shaped the library's move toward co-curated content and specialised support services.

- **Co-Curated Reading Lists:** Reading lists are now co-designed with staff, community partners, and students (such as those from Bridge Academy) to mark key equalities campaigns and have been highly effective, increasing the usage of promoted book titles by up to 173% in a single month.
- **Specialised Writing Groups:** Feedback led to the creation of dedicated spaces for creative expression, including a Black Women Writers Group and a QTIBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous People of Colour) Writing Group.
- **Employment and Sanctuary Support:** The library's transformation into a "Welcome Hub" was driven by the needs of refugees and sanctuary seekers, providing a one-stop shop for support for English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL), E-Visa applications, and employment workshops.
- **Therapeutic Spaces:** Partnerships with organisations like 'I Found Me' now offer creative therapy sessions specifically for Global Majority refugees and young people.

4.11 Digital Inclusion and Digital Transformation

Through strategic partnerships and targeted investment, Hackney Libraries has delivered a comprehensive digital transformation that bridges the gap for residents facing digital exclusion. By integrating technical support with essential council services - such as Universal Credit management and E-Visa applications - the service has moved beyond providing basic internet access to becoming a critical engine for digital equity. In 2024/25 alone, Public Computer (PC) usage across the network surged by 38%, driven by a shift from general browsing to high-stakes activities like job applications and financial management.

Key Programmes

- **Digital Buddies Expansion:** The "Digital Buddies" programme supported 461 residents in 2024/25, representing a 32% increase in one-to-one assistance for those lacking basic digital confidence.
- **Hublets:** New handheld iPad style hublets are being tested at Hackney Central Library to give customers access to newspapers and digital resources. These are proving successful with older residents and customers with SEND.
- **Meeting pods:** Responding to staff and customer needs during consultation on plans to redevelop Hackney Central Library, new meeting pods have been installed for phone and virtual meetings and generating income for the service.
- **Assistive Technology Hubs:** Partnerships with the RNIB and Scope established dedicated hubs at Hackney Central and Dalston libraries, providing specialised resources for residents with sight loss and other accessibility needs.
- **Golden Bytes Pilot:** Launched in collaboration with the Hackney Pensioners Convention, this programme provides tailored digital skills training specifically for older residents to help them navigate an increasingly online world.
- **Universal Credit & Financial Support:** Library PCs have become a primary tool for residents to manage Universal Credit and pay bills, particularly for the

21% of daily visitors experiencing homelessness or living in temporary accommodation.

- **E-Visa Application Support:** Partnered with the Hackney Migrant Centre to provide the digital infrastructure and staff support necessary for sanctuary seekers to process complex E-Visa applications.
- **Unity Works Partnership:** Established a digital skills and employment programme specifically for young people (ages 16–24) with SEND, ensuring neurodiverse residents are not left behind by the digital transition.
- **Enhanced Web Engagement:** The "Love Hackney" library pages saw a 190% increase in traffic by 2025/26, reflecting a successful shift toward digital-first communication and resource discovery.
- **iPad Lending for Housebound Residents:** As part of the Community Library Service (CLS) review, a new iPad lending service and digital support programme were introduced to provide digital connectivity to housebound residents.
- **Digital Transformation Strategy:** Developed a comprehensive 2024–2026 strategy to modernise library infrastructure, including the installation of digital notice boards across all sites for real-time community information.
- **Collaborative User Research:** Libraries served as "live labs" for the National Health Service (NHS) and Council ICT teams to conduct user research, ensuring new digital strategies for maternity services and housing improvements are designed with input from digitally excluded residents.

4.12 Health, Wellbeing and Resilience

Through strategic co-location and local partnerships, Hackney Libraries have evolved into vital hubs for health and wellbeing, supporting over 7,100 residents in 2025/26 alone. By hosting a range of services - from clinical support like smoking cessation and vaccination clinics to preventative social activities like yoga and gardening - libraries provide a non-stigmatising "de-hospitalised" environment that improves mental and physical health. These programmes are particularly effective for reaching isolated older people, sanctuary seekers, and residents with long-term mental health conditions, fostering social connections that are often described by users as a "lifeline".

Key Programmes

- **Social Prescribing with Family Action:** Provided dedicated support sessions across libraries, reaching 277 residents a year, connecting them with community- based health resources.
- **Gloji Smoking Cessation Clinics:** Host over 1,800 clinical sessions a year at Clapton, Shoreditch, and Homerton libraries, supporting hundreds of residents in quitting smoking.
- **King's Park Moving Together (KPMT):** A successful physical activity partnership that expanded from "Moving Together" sessions at Homerton to include hula hooping and specialised yoga for sanctuary-seeking women at Dalston.
- **The Community Theatre Project:** A three-year partnership with the John Howard Centre (NHS) using theatre skills to build confidence and citizenship for service users leaving a secure mental health setting.

- **Older People’s Wellbeing Hubs:** Collaborations with **University of the Third Age (u3a)** and **Hackney Pensioners** deliver Tai Chi, Pilates, Dancing, and philosophy clubs to 5,350+ attendees a year.
- **Warm & Cool Spaces Initiative:** Libraries serve as designated "Cool Spaces" in summer and "Warm Spaces" in winter, providing "Kind Coat" schemes and winter warmer coffee mornings for vulnerable residents.
- **Mental Health & Support Pop-ups:** Regular hosting of specialised clinics and drop-ins with partners including **Mind**, **Positive East** (sexual health), and **Talking Therapies**.
- **Creative Health Workshops:** Collaborations with **Output Arts** and **Scriberia** delivered creative literacy and crafting workshops in care homes and for housebound residents via the Community Library Service.
- **Early Years Health:** Partnered with the **Homerton Hospital Deaf and Partially Hearing Team** to provide "Rhyme and Sign" sessions for babies and parents at Hackney Central.
- **Energy and Financial Wellbeing:** Partnerships with **Scope** and **CREW Energy** provided energy-saving advice and vouchers to over 1,100 residents, alleviating the mental stress associated with the cost-of-living crisis.

4.13 Marketing and Campaigns

Hackney Libraries' marketing and campaign strategy has undergone a significant modernisation between 2023 and 2026, shifting toward a "digital-first" and partner-led approach that has dramatically increased resident engagement. By co-designing reading lists, involving users in redesign projects, and high-profile award nominations, the service has successfully repositioned libraries as vibrant, inclusive cultural destinations beyond quiet spaces for study. This is evidenced by a 190% increase in traffic to the redeveloped "Love Hackney" library pages and the successful promotion of diverse collections, which saw interest in featured book titles jump by as much as 173% in a single month.

Key Programmes

- **Newsletter & Digital Growth:** The Hackney Libraries Newsletter grew by 89% in the 2025/26 period alone, reaching over 11,500 subscribers, while total social media engagements surpassed 211,000 across Instagram, Facebook, and Eventbrite.
- **Co-Curated Reading Lists:** The service launched a highly successful "curated monthly" reading list programme, co-designed with partners like the Stuart Hall Foundation and local students; these lists increased usage of promoted titles by 104% to 173%.
- **Award-Winning Recognition:** Strategic campaigns around building improvements led to Hackney Central Library being shortlisted for prestigious national honors, including *The Bookseller's* "Library of the Year" and the "National Planning Awards for Arts and Cultural Placemaking".
- **Flagship Event Campaigns:** High-impact marketing for large-scale events broke previous footfall records, with the "Children’s Black Book Fair" and "Queer Book Fair" each attracting over 1,000 attendees in a single day.

4.14 Literacy and Learning

The Engagement & Development Team has strengthened and developed new partnerships with Hackney Education, Employment and Skills and external providers to bolster literacy, learning, and development from infancy through adulthood. This collaboration enhances staff-led programmes, including early literacy initiatives for under-5s and sessions for primary school-aged children. By creating stronger links between providers, we have developed a more visible and cohesive 'cradle-to-grave' offer, ensuring support for all residents - from the borough's youngest children to adults seeking essential life skills.

By 2026, the service achieved 99% satisfaction for its events and activities, driven by a deliberate shift toward co-designed, representative programming that promotes reading for pleasure and supports formal education. Key successes include record-breaking footfall at cultural book fairs and the successful integration of literacy support for the most vulnerable, including SEND students and housebound residents.

Key Programmes

- **Read Easy Partnership:** Successfully supported over 30 adults with low literacy through weekly one-to-one learning-to-read sessions held in libraries.
- **Reading Champions & Ambassadors:** Collaborated with Hackney Education to engage 28 primary and secondary schools in a scheme that empowers students to promote reading for pleasure among their peers.
- **The Great Libraries Quest:** Launched a revamped summer reading challenge that integrated the Hackney Museum and Archives.
- **Record-Breaking Cultural Fairs:** Attracted over 1,000 attendees to both the Children's Black Book Fair and the Queer Book Fair in 2025/26, setting new daily visitor records for these flagship events.
- **SEND Work Experience:** Developed bespoke, supported vocational placements for students from schools like Side by Side, Stormont House, and The Autism Project, focusing on building professional confidence.
- **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library:** Partnered with Early Years and Family Hubs to launch this international scheme on World Book Day 2026, providing free monthly books to children under five.
- **Writers Groups Expansion:** Supported a network of over 800 adults in 2025/26 through an expanded network of monthly writing groups, including specialised sessions for Black Women Writers, Afrikan Heritage Writers, and QTIBIPOC Writers.
- **Co-Designed Reading Lists:** Introduced monthly curated lists - such as for Black History Season and Trans History Month - which successfully increased the usage of promoted titles by up to 173%.
- **Adult Education & ESOL:** Hosted 19 weekly courses in English, Maths, and ICT in partnership with Adult Learning, specifically targeting learners who lack the confidence to sign up in traditional college settings.
- **Under 5s Rhymetimes:** Maintained high engagement for early literacy, with 22,435 children attending rhymetimes and storytelling sessions in 2025/26.

4.15 Arts, Culture and Creative Health

Through a commitment to "cultural and creative enrichment," Hackney Libraries have transformed into vibrant arts hubs that celebrate the borough's diverse identity. By

2026, the service achieved a 99% satisfaction rate for its programming, having shifted toward a co-designed model where residents and staff work with Engagement and Development Team to curate exhibitions and event programmes. These successful projects have not only increased footfall, with major events drawing over 1,000 attendees in a single day, but have also been nationally recognised for excellence in arts and cultural placemaking.

Key Programmes

- **Award-Winning Placemaking:** The Hackney Central Library refurbishment was a finalist for the **National Planning Awards** in the "Arts and Cultural Placemaking" category and was shortlisted for *The Bookseller's Library of the Year Awards*.
- **Flagship Cultural Fairs:** New daily visitor records were set in 25/26 with over 1,000 attendees at both the **Children's Black Book Fair** and the **Queer Book Fair**.
- **Artist in Residence Programme:** At Stamford Hill Library, Artists in Residence (Output Arts) delivered professional creative workshops to 222 participants, including care home residents and students.
- **Community Theatre Project:** A three-year partnership with the **John Howard Centre (NHS)** used theatre skills to help marginalised service users from secure mental health settings build confidence and "reclaim citizenship".
- **Heritage and Identity Exhibitions:** Libraries hosted high-profile displays such as the "**Referees of Hackney Marshes**" exhibition at Homerton (a Portrait of Britain winner) and exhibitions with **V&A East** at Dalston and Hackney Central.
- **Co-Designed Public Art:** Residents and students from schools like Gayhurst Primary and Stormont House co-designed new murals and a mosaic for the refurbished Hackney Central and Shoreditch libraries.
- **Writing and Creative Groups:** Participation in monthly writing groups grew to 1,395 adults in 25/26, with specialised sessions for **Black Women Writers**, **Comic Creators**, and **QTIBIPOC** groups.
- **Musical Accessibility:** Through a partnership with Hackney Music Service and Casio, a piano was installed in Hackney Central Library and Library staff have been trained by the Family Music Hub to integrate music into storytelling.

4.16 Partnerships - Cross-Council Partnerships and Initiatives

Hackney Libraries have become central to the Council's localised "one-stop shop" model by initiating deep cross-directorate partnerships that use library buildings to reach residents directly in their neighborhoods. By 2026, these collaborations have evolved from basic co-location to integrated service delivery, where libraries provide the physical infrastructure and trusted environment for everything from statutory housing surgeries to specialised health clinics and sustainability initiatives. These partnerships have been particularly vital for reaching digitally excluded and vulnerable groups, such as residents in temporary accommodation or sanctuary seekers, who may not otherwise engage with traditional council offices.

Key Programmes

- **Public Health & NHS Integration:** Libraries host a wide array of clinical and wellbeing services, including **Gloji smoking cessation clinics** (1,800+

sessions), vaccination clinics, and "Rhyme and Sign" sessions for deaf children delivered with the Homerton Hospital team.

- **Welcome Hackney (Refugees & Migrants):** The **Welcome Hub** at Dalston Library provides a "one-stop shop" for sanctuary seekers, offering support from the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Team (RASM), Hackney Works, and ESOL in a non-stigmatised environment.
- **Sustainability & Climate Action:** Partnered with the **Sustainability Team** to deliver the "Warm Hubs/Kind Coats" scheme, energy-saving advice drop-ins, and the **Library of Things**, which has saved residents over £420,000 and diverted 23 tonnes of waste.
- **Hackney Education & SEND:** Collaborated on the **Reading Champions Scheme** with 28 schools and developed bespoke, supported work experience placements for SEND students from schools like **Side by Side** and **Stormont House**.
- **Housing & Ward Surgeries:** Libraries provide essential face-to-face access to local government by hosting regular **Housing Surgeries** (over 55 sessions annually) and **Ward Councillor Surgeries** across all sites.
- **Adult Education & Skills:** Libraries host 19 weekly courses in English, maths, and ICT, specifically targeting "priority learners" who lack the confidence to sign up for classes in formal college settings.
- **ICT & Digital Transformation:** Collaborated with Council ICT to develop a **Digital Access Strategy** and a **Digital Skills pilot for older people** ("Golden Bytes"), while also serving as research labs for improving the NHS app and housing services.
- **Employment & Skills (Digital Buddies):** The **Digital Buddies** programme, run with the Employment and Skills team, provided 1:1 support to over 460 residents in 2024/25 alone to help with job applications and Universal Credit.
- **Consultation & Engagement:** Libraries act as the "main vehicle" for the Council to reach digitally excluded residents for public consultations on major borough plans, including the **Climate Action Plan** and **Air Quality Action Plan**.
- **Policy & Poverty Reduction:** Partnered with the **Policy and Strategy Team** to distribute over **£20,000 in Household Support Fund (HSF) vouchers** annually to vulnerable families during library events and coffee mornings.

4.17 Capital Programme

Strong leadership and a passion for culture change and transformation shown by the new Assistant Director and strategic service managers has enabled the delivery of an ambitious capital improvement programme and the leveraging of substantial funding for libraries. Hackney Libraries successfully secured around **£6 million** in capital and grant funding between 2023 and 2026 to deliver a major investment programme across its network. These funds have been utilised to renovate and upgrade existing facilities, improve physical accessibility, and enhance the digital infrastructure of the service.

Key Programmes

- **Hackney Central Library Refurbishment:** During 2025/26, the service utilised £830,000 from the Local Regeneration Fund to refurbish Hackney

Central Library as part of broader town centre improvements in Hackney Central. This flagship project transformed the site into a modern library, featuring new furniture, meeting rooms and bookable booths, new technology, and incorporated murals co-created with primary and SEND pupils from local schools.

- **Stamford Hill Infrastructure Upgrades:** In 2024/25 the service secured capital funds for a number of improvements to Stamford Hill Library. Major works include a full roof replacement, completed summer 2026. Reflective film was installed on all windows as a non-mechanical cooling intervention. The old lights are being replaced with low energy, cooler LED lights across all areas of the Library. The next stage of improvements are to review the suitability of the windows, to further insulate the building. Surveys are underway and include scope for improved cooling in the building. Upcoming projects focus on installing a new lift to improve accessibility for elderly and disabled residents, as well as future ambitions to develop a community garden.
- **Homerton Library Sustainability and Modernisation:** The service installed an air source heat pump and cooling system at Homerton Library in 2024 which has brought down the internal temperatures effectively during the recent heatwave. An innovative test case where secondary glazing of water filled windows has recently been installed on the front, ground floor windows. The outside area of the library will form part of the local Buzzline initiative, where residents will see an improved green space at the front and side of the building as well as improving the pollinator habitats in Homerton.
- **Digital Infrastructure Investment:** In 2024/25 the service successfully raised £34,000 of S106 funding to install digital notice boards across all library sites to provide real-time information advertising events and programmes and providing important public health, SWEP and cost of living advice to residents. In 2025/26 the service achieved a further £120,000 in S106 funding for security gate improvements at three libraries. Hackney Central Library installation is complete, with Stamford Hill Library and Homerton Library to follow in 2026/27.
- **Dalston Ground Floor Improvement:** Funding has been secured to assess the ground floor of the Dalston CLR James Library, with plans to reconfigure the space to improve accessibility, create two new event spaces, and generate additional income by optimising underused areas.
- **Stoke Newington Library:** The council secured £4.5 million in capital funding for a major renovation of Stoke Newington Library's exterior and roof, with works commencing in July 2025 and expected to conclude by late 2026. Significant progress has been achieved: several roof sections have been repaired, insulated, and recovered, with ongoing works across the remainder. To ensure the building's integrity, original roof lights have been replaced with temporary watertight protection, and the restoration of the historic War Memorial Hall glass dome is progressing. External brickwork and masonry repairs are nearing completion, with masonry and timber sash windows now stripped in preparation for final restoration. Additionally, the drainage system has been upgraded to accommodate increased rainfall, while original rainwater goods are undergoing specialist restoration off-site. Regarding internal improvements, capital funding has been secured for initial design proposals, and architects are now appointed and active. A costed feasibility study is scheduled for completion in the autumn of 2026, which will inform a

subsequent capital bid for the library's final phase of the full internal refurbishment and re-installation of the library furniture. Regular communications on the refurbishment project are posted on [Love Hackney](#) and a monthly newsletter in the form of posters in the site notice board on Church Street alongside written updates are provided by the construction company Total.

4.18 Customer Satisfaction

Hackney Libraries have consistently demonstrated exceptional levels of user satisfaction, with the 2024/25 Customer Satisfaction Survey revealing that 98% of the 525 respondents were satisfied with staff, library accessibility, and the range of resources provided. This high standard was further reflected in event-specific feedback, where satisfaction with literacy, culture, and learning sessions rose from 95% in 2024/25 to an impressive 99% by 2025/26. The vital role these spaces play is underscored by the fact that 73% of survey participants described libraries as "absolutely essential," often referring to them as a "lifeline" for mental wellbeing and social connection.

The service's commitment to excellence has also been validated through rigorous external evaluations and digital growth. In 2024, a fully funded LGA Peer Review praised the library service for its exemplary projects and successful engagement with underrepresented groups, noting the high diversity of Hackney's customer base compared to other London boroughs. This positive sentiment is echoed online, where the service saw a 30% year-on-year increase in five-star Google reviews by 2026. Residents frequently highlight the welcoming atmosphere and the practical value of the facilities, with many noting that the libraries provide a safe, quiet, and inclusive environment that supports everything from job applications to early years learning.

5. Libraries Consultation 2026: Resident insights

5.1 Executive Overview

In early 2026, Hackney Council proposed changes to library opening hours across six of its eight branches to meet a mandatory 15% budget reduction (£773,000) for the 2026/27 financial year.

Following a public consultation process and a subsequent shift in financial outlook due to improved central government funding, Mayor Caroline Woodley requested that the Cabinet halt the proposed reductions. This decision was formally approved, ensuring all library opening hours remained unchanged. This summary details the consultation approach, resident feedback, and thematic insights gathered during the process.

5.2 Consultation & Engagement Approach

The consultation ran to gather views on three proposed operational options (Targeted Closures, Weekend-Focused Closures, and Evening/Specific Day Closures).

- **Methods:** The primary vehicle was a survey hosted on Citizen Space, supplemented by paper surveys in libraries and the Service Centre. Supporting evidence, including the Strategic Needs Assessment and Equality Impact

Assessment (EqIA), was provided online and in reference copies.

- **Promotion:** A multichannel approach was used, including *Love Hackney* magazine, social media (Facebook/Instagram), and in-library communications (A1 posters, digital noticeboards, and leaflets).
- **Reach:** 1,366 responses were received (1,153 online; 213 paper), providing a data accuracy of +/- 2.6% at a 95% confidence level, indicating high representativeness of the borough's views.
- **In-person Engagement:** Six drop-in sessions were held, engaging 162 users, alongside a focus group with the Hackney Pensioners Convention to reach underrepresented groups (older people, youth, males, and non-white library users).

5.3 Key Findings & Sentiment

Sentiment across all options was overwhelmingly negative, with deep concern expressed regarding any service reduction.

- **Option 1 (Targeted Full/Half-Day Closures):** Received as the "least worst" option, though 66% of respondents still disagreed with it.
- **Option 2 (Weekend-Focused Closures):** The most strongly criticised, with ~80% disagreement. Users highlighted that Saturday closures disproportionately punish full-time workers and students.
- **Option 3 (Evening/Specific Day Closures):** Similarly unpopular (~75% disagreement), with 6:00 PM closures viewed as an exclusion barrier for commuters and adult learners.

5.4 Thematic Insights & Community Feedback

The analysis of thousands of comments highlighted several core themes:

- **Libraries as "Third Spaces":** Residents defended libraries as vital, free, and safe havens - particularly critical during the cost-of-living crisis. They are viewed as preventative public health infrastructure that supports mental health, prevents isolation, and provides "warm hubs" during winter.
- **Digital Inclusion:** Libraries remain the only point of internet, printing, and Wi-Fi access for many vulnerable groups, including job seekers and those without home internet. Reducing hours was seen as a direct driver of digital poverty.
- **Socioeconomic Impacts:** Significant concern was raised for marginalised demographics, including solo parents, students living in overcrowded accommodation, the elderly, and neurodivergent individuals who rely on the quiet, accessible library environment.
- **Geographic Equity:** Frustration was noted regarding the perceived unfairness in how cuts were distributed. Residents highlighted that classifying "small" libraries (e.g., Clapton, Homerton) based on footfall ignores their role as high-density community anchors, while larger or currently-refurbished libraries (e.g., Stoke Newington) were perceived as protected.
- **Financial Management:** Many respondents critiqued the Council's financial decision-making, suggesting that revenue should be sought through alternative means - such as commercialising underused spaces (renting rooms/cafés), voluntary council tax levies, or taxing wealthy developers/film crews - rather than compromising public frontline services.

- **Staffing and Security:** High appreciation for frontline staff was balanced with concerns regarding job security. Security presence was polarised; seen as essential by some for managing antisocial behaviour, but as an ineffective expense by others who would prefer funds to be diverted back into service hours.

5.5 Strategic Context for Scrutiny

The feedback gathered provides a clear mandate on the social value attributed to library services by residents. While the immediate proposal to cut hours has been halted, the consultation data offers a foundation for future service planning.

6. Strategic Challenges: short, medium and long-term

In 2026, the Hackney Library Service is navigating a complex landscape of immediate operational challenges and long-term structural shifts. While recent refurbishments and high satisfaction rates demonstrate the service's value, it faces acute pressure to modernise its infrastructure and balance its community role with severe financial constraints.

6.1 Short-Term Challenges (Current Year - 2026)

- **Climate Change & Infrastructure Failure:** Extreme heat has become an immediate operational threat. In June 2026, five out of eight libraries were forced to close simultaneously because indoor temperatures exceeded the 30°C rule of thumb safety guideline for staff areas of each building. New buildings like Dalston and Shoreditch "failed" in the heat for the first time, revealing that current cooling systems are inadequate for record-breaking temperatures.
- **Urgent Capital Repairs:** Managing ongoing and unexpected building failures is a primary concern. This includes completing the Stamford Hill roof replacement and addressing the "worse than expected" structural condition of Stoke Newington Library, which has delayed its reopening in order to address newly surfacing structural challenges appropriately before the final phase of the library re-installation can be progressed.

6.2 Mid-Term Challenges (2026-2027)

- **Immediate staffing restructures affecting Engagement and Development Team:** Although wider service savings spare frontline library roles, reductions to the Engagement and Development Team could critically undermine the service's community hub model. These specialist roles are essential for managing partnerships that drive digital inclusion, health and wellbeing partnerships, learning, co-location, and social engagement, while providing the marketing and digital infrastructure expertise necessary for the service's continued success.
- **Service Reorientation:** Libraries are becoming frontline community support services. Hackney data shows that library service reductions disproportionately affect low-income households, people without internet access, children and young people, older residents and Black and Global majority communities. Demand for these services is growing while resources remain constrained.

Finalising the transition from "static" libraries to horizontal, adaptive "community hubs" remains a work in progress. This includes cementing co-location partnerships with other services for example Housing, Employment and Skills and Public Health and others to justify the libraries' strategic role as a community hub.

6.3 Long-Term Challenges (Beyond 2027)

- **Strategic Financial Sustainability:** Local libraries in London and across England face a combination of immediate financial pressures and deeper structural challenges that affect their long-term sustainability. While libraries remain one of the most valued and heavily used local authority services, they are operating within an increasingly constrained funding environment. The biggest challenges are not libraries themselves, but the continued pressure on local government finances. And the increased demand and statutory spending pressures. Libraries also face significant inflationary pressures and many library buildings are ageing assets that require substantial capital investment to remain operational.
- **Digital Transformation & Inclusion:** There is a shifting trend toward digital resources, with physical book issues slightly declining while digital issues and PC demand rise. Libraries need to provide digital access points for residents in social housing or temporary accommodation who rely on them for essential tasks like Universal Credit management and job searching, but also continue to perform their critical role in increasing literacy and promoting community cohesion and a borrowing culture. Digital services often increase rather than reduce costs because they require ongoing licensing and technology renewal. Libraries may become even more important as trusted spaces for navigating misinformation and digital exclusion when AI and digital technology reshapes expectations.
- **Workforce costs:** Staffing remains the largest area of expenditure. As libraries evolve into community hubs, staff are increasingly expected to support digital inclusion, employability, health initiatives, community engagement and cultural programming, requiring broader skill sets.
- **Environmental Adaptation:** Long-term investment is needed to upgrade the entire library estate to "green standards." This involves moving beyond temporary heat mitigation to installing sustainable heating and cooling systems (like ground source heat pumps) across all buildings to ensure they can remain open year-round. Libraries require decarbonisation works, accessibility improvements, roof and structural repairs, heating system replacements and digital infrastructure upgrades.

7. Recommendations and Future Strategic Direction

Building upon our recent transformation, the service is transitioning from a period of operational stabilisation to a forward-looking, innovation-driven delivery model.

Our future strategy focuses on four key pillars:

7.1. Defining and Operationalising the 'Community Hub' Model

The central long-term goal is to transition libraries from being seen as discretionary cultural services to essential civic infrastructure. Hackney's recent pilots confirm that a system-wide approach, aligned with broader council objectives, delivers stronger outcomes. Accordingly, the Engagement and Development Team will move beyond the initial 'test and learn' phase to establish a formal, corporate-led definition of libraries as 'Community Hubs.' This initiative will prioritise:

- **Centralising Access:** Positioning libraries as the primary 'front door' for council services, thereby streamlining resident access to health, housing, and wellbeing support.
- **Driving Integration:** Utilising library facilities as the central infrastructure for co-located service delivery.
- **Protecting and Retain Core Functions:** Safeguarding the traditional library services that maintain these sites as safe, welcoming, and trusted spaces for our residents.

7.2. Creating Financial and Strategic Sustainability

To maintain service resilience in a challenging economic climate, the service will:

- **Demonstrate social value:** Future sustainability will increasingly depend on libraries evidencing their preventative value. The difficulty is that the library's benefits often accrue across multiple public services and over long periods, while library costs appear immediately in council budgets. Libraries services that can demonstrate alignment with wider council priorities may be better protected from future reductions. Hackney Libraries services is working with the Public health team on the 'Ripple Mapping' outcomes and also with universities to demonstrate the social value and economic value our local libraries create.
- **Integrate Budgets:** A financially sustainable library service in the future is likely to have a stable core council funding environment recognising libraries as preventative infrastructure. Most public libraries derive the majority of their funding from local authority budgets. Long-term sustainability may require a more diversified funding model. This could include combining service budgets (where appropriate) to allow for agility and cross-departmental resource sharing.
- **Income Generation:** Libraries have limited income generation potential through room hire, commercial lettings, events and grant funding. Income opportunities vary significantly between locations and can supplement but rarely replace core public funding. Continue evolving the income generation strategy for libraries, maximising revenue from room rentals and commercial activities to reinvest directly into library services.
- **Invest to save:** A modernised estate will have lower operating costs and improved energy efficiency. Explore opportunities for installing private meeting and phone call booths at other libraries for income generation opportunities.

7.3. Strengthening Data-Driven Performance

The service will have robust evidence of social and economic impact to support investment decisions. This includes a strategic shift from basic benchmarking to sophisticated impact measurement:

- **Standardise KPIs:** Implement our 34 KPIs across all branches to provide stakeholders with clear, actionable performance data on social value, digital participation, and income.
- **Qualitative Impact:** Supplement quantitative data with qualitative insights to demonstrate the library service's role in public health, digital inclusion and community cohesion.
- **Libraries accreditation:** the service will submit an application to Arts Council England for inclusion in their new accreditation programme for libraries.

7.4. Focusing on Workforce, Policy, and Volunteering

The service continues to develop a flexible workforce able to deliver digital, cultural and community outcomes and will consolidate recent operational progress by:

- **Policy & Process:** Finalising the update of all internal policies and establishing standardised working practices to ensure consistency across the network, including sharing a new induction pack for new starters.
- **Training:** Continuing the roll-out of data-informed training to support staff in delivering specialist community and digital programmes, including training all front line staff in Ripple Effect Mapping techniques.
- **Volunteer Expansion:** Formally review volunteering arrangements to identify opportunities to enhance service provision and programme delivery through increased volunteer involvement.

7.5. Deepening Strategic Partnerships

The service will have a clear role in reducing inequality and supporting inclusive growth. It will forge strong partnerships with health, education, cultural and voluntary sectors and formalise its successful pilot partnership model based on case studies such as the Welcome Hub, Creative Health and Digital Buddies:

- **Scale Success:** Build on proven pilot programmes by standardising successful partnership agreements and aligning this work with the Council's neighbourhood programme.
- **Executive Alignment:** Increase executive involvement in defining library-led service delivery to ensure our strategy remains aligned with broader Council corporate priorities