

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 JULY 2017

OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THOMAS AVELING PUBLIC LIBRARY

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Culture,
Environment and Transformation

Author: Chris White, Head of Libraries, Business Support and
Community Hubs
Stephanie Goad, Assistant Director Transformation

Summary

This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the future of Thomas Aveling Public Library, where the Council has indicated its preferred option to close the library.

The Cabinet will be asked to take a decision on the future of Thomas Aveling library on **11 July 2017**, taking into account the comments of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The report also provides at Appendix 1, as requested by Members, a brief update on the other budget reduction proposals which formed part of the budget agreed by Council in February 2017 - Community Hub opening hours and the future management arrangements for Grain Library.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places on local authorities a statutory duty to provide 'a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it.
- 1.2 Under the Council's Constitution, the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation has delegated authority to manage the library and public information services of the Council in compliance with current legislation and the policies of the Council. The decision to close a library exceeds this delegation and is therefore a matter for the Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council provides a comprehensive library service, and the development of the town centre community hubs is at the forefront of best and national library practice. The service consists of 16 library and community hub buildings (including Thomas Aveling) and two mobile libraries, employing 140 staff. The budget is £2.9m (direct expenditure). The annual budget for books and other information resources is £270,000.
- 2.2 The central role of the Library Service is to support reading as the gateway to literacy and participation in society. Events and activities attracted over 65,000 people in 2016-17 making libraries and hubs vibrant places for learning, fun and personal development. The community hubs provide access to council services with face-to-face contact for a variety of enquiries about the council and partners' services.
- 2.3 Members will be aware that even in the recent times of financial restraint the Council has continued to invest in the service, primarily through the development of the community hubs, maintaining and enhancing the council's presence in local communities. Of particular and recent note are the £1m investment at Strood Community Hub, the £500,000 at Twydall, and £100,000 at Hempstead Library. In November 2016 the then Minister for Libraries wrote to the portfolio holder congratulating the council for making the community hubs such a success, mentioning Strood Community Hub in particular that had featured in the 2015 publication from the national Libraries Taskforce, 'Libraries Shaping the Future: toolkit and case studies'.
- 2.4 This modernisation of the role of libraries has led to increased use of these buildings. Overall 2016-17 was a very successful year for the Library Service with visits up by 2% to 1,151,251. Issues increased by 0.25%, active computer users increased by 18%; event attendance increased by 10%, and web visits by 12%. Members will wish to note that this increased use of Libraries is in contrast to the national trend. Taking Library visits as an example, in 2015-16 physical visits continued to fall nationally as they have been doing year on year to 3,800 per 1,000 population. Medway's figure stood at 4,100 per 1,000 population (source: CIPFA Public Library Statistics 2016). In December 2016 a spokesperson for the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals (Cilip) said that nationwide 340 libraries had closed over the past eight years.
- 2.5 No council service can be excused the need to support the achievement of a balanced budget. Libraries have made reductions in the past (predominantly achieved through back office efficiencies) and along with other services was asked to put forward options in the last budget round. These options focused on services and facilities where customer use was low, so had least impact on service users. This included the proposal to align opening hours at the libraries co-located with the four main town centre community hubs (whose hours were changed last year to a 6.00pm closure, leaving an inconsistent service to customers); Grain Library (the least used of all council libraries), and Thomas Aveling library.
- 2.6 Thomas Aveling School and Community Library is located in a building within the grounds of Thomas Aveling Secondary School in Arethusa Road,

Rochester. The school is part of the Fort Pitt Thomas Aveling Academies Trust. The library is a combined school and small public branch library and was opened in its present form in 2006. It provides all of the regular branch library lending facilities, Wi-Fi and PC access, and some events.

- 2.7 The library is situated at the back of the school and the only entrance for the general public is from Arethusa Road into the main school gates, following the road round the side of the main buildings to the library and playing fields at the rear.
- 2.8 The public library opening hours cover 21 hours a week:
Monday – Friday 3pm to 6pm;
Saturday 10am to 4pm.
- 2.9 The library service currently pays the school £6,500 per year rent for use of the building. The library staffing budget is £29,600 per annum. This expenditure would form the financial saving. There is a notice period of six months to give to the school to withdraw from the current arrangement and officers would seek to negotiate on its length if the decision to close is taken.
- 2.10 The proposal for the potential closure of the library was included in the Capital and Revenue Budgets 2017/18 report submitted to Full Council on 23 February 2017.
- 2.11 An analysis of Thomas Aveling’s performance was undertaken and set out in the consultation document. Public consultation started on 21 April 2017, and ran to 15 June 2017.

3. The case for change

- 3.1 The consultation document issued included an analysis of issues in relation to the proposals for Thomas Aveling. It set out the usage of the library compared to other libraries, and also what is known about the 910 customers who borrowed items from the library between January 2016 and February 2017. The analysis also looked at the demographic profile of the users who registered at Thomas Aveling and have borrowed an item over the last two years.
- 3.2 The service measures customer use of libraries through four key statistical indicators, as well as measuring customer satisfaction across the whole service. Thomas Aveling’s performance compared to the other 15 libraries is set out below:

Indicator	2016-17 ranking	2015-16 ranking	Notes
Items borrowed	15 th	14 th	Performance declining, less items borrowed in 2016-17
Visits	11 th	12 th	Performance improved, but likely to reflect after school use given worsening data on items borrowed
Enquiries	15 th	15 th	
Events & activities attendance	15 th	15 th	

3.3 The least well performing library is Grain library, and Members will want to understand why the option to close Thomas Aveling has come forward before Grain. There are special circumstances at Grain, where the community is more remote from other library locations, and where the library is integrated into the opening of the other community facilities also housed at the Chapel building. Nevertheless, officers are currently investigating how a service that makes greater use of volunteers can be developed at Grain. This is not an approach that is seen as required or appropriate Thomas Aveling public library.

3.4 The analysis of the 910 Thomas Aveling customers indicated the following user breakdown:

- 273 (30%) are Thomas Aveling school students;
- 264 (29%) are of primary school or early years age;
- 210 (23%) are adult users;
- 66 (7%) are over 60;
- 97 (11%) other users, other teenagers; staff; teachers.

3.5 Further analysis showed that:

- The 910 customers borrowed 14,120 items from Thomas Aveling Community Library between January 2016 and February 2017. Taking the direct running costs of £36,100 this means that each issue is costing £2.50;
- Those 910 people also borrowed 35,575 items from other Medway libraries, most notably Chatham, Rochester and Strood. This indicates that for many borrowers Thomas Aveling is not the main library that they use;
- The data also tells us that these borrowers had actually joined the library service at many other locations, most notably Chatham, Rochester and Strood;
- The use of the library is very heavily influenced by young people and usage falls dramatically during school holidays e.g. in October 2016 the average number of daily visitors was 153, for the October half term this figure reduced to 29, and during August, in the school holidays, the average number of daily visits was 36. The average Saturday footfall can be 50 per cent of weekday footfall;
- Of the books that were issued between April 2016 and end February 2017 at Thomas Aveling Community Library, 71% have been books for young people and 29% were books for adults. The equivalent figures for all Medway libraries' books issued in the same period shows that 53% were adult books and 47% were books for children.

3.6 The demographic analysis of the registered users of Thomas Aveling showed that:

- Females users are over-represented compared to the population, whilst males are under-represented;
- 0-18 year olds are over represented compared to the population reflecting usage by school pupils after school;
- All other age groups, including those over 65, are under-represented;

- Black and minority ethnic users constitute a modestly higher proportion of users compared to the population.
- 3.7 The conclusions that the Library service drew from this data analysis was that Thomas Aveling is not meeting the needs of the local population. The very low use by people over 65, traditionally strong supporters of the service, is unusual. However, this finding has come as no surprise to local staff who frequently hear from older people that it is not their preference to visit the school site generally, and especially during the dark winter afternoons and evenings.
- 3.8 The preponderance of use of the library by young people is initially a welcome finding but is likely more reflective of the lack of use by adults, as demonstrated by the atypical adult/young people book borrowing ratio.
- 3.9 A rise in visits as has occurred at Thomas Aveling recently is generally seen positively as it provides the service with the opportunity to ‘cross-sell’ other services to customers and this is a part of the overall strategy for supporting customers. Looking at the interaction between visits and issues (of books and CDs) one would expect an increase in visits (as happened in 2016-17) to be matched by an increase in issues, but the reverse has happened – more young people have attended but borrowed less items. The anecdotal testimony of library staff is that many young people are using the library as a place to wait for collection after school.
- 3.10 In the consultation document the council set out its preferred option based on the above analysis. It made clear that this was not a decision based on statistics or costs per issue alone. The key factor in arriving at its preferred option was the lack of opportunity to change the library offer to current users and non-users in any progressive way. The following arguments were cited:
- Opening the library at 3pm is not when most people want to come and borrow books and take part in activities. Most libraries have a range of opening hours, but they are rigid at Thomas Aveling due to the limitations of the school-based site. Evidence from other locations illustrates that many adult customers prefer to make use of their library in the morning and early afternoon. The current opening hours of 3-6pm weekdays are unable to be altered and do not offer the service the ability to engage with all residents and provide space for a range of community groups;
 - The location of the library at the rear of a large secondary school does not encourage adults to venture on site when the school closes down for the day. Older people in particular tell library staff that in the winter they do not want to walk all the way round to the back of the school site;
 - The council has an excellent relationship with the school who have been good partners in seeking to make the school and community library concept work. However, this co-location was conceived in a different era of school governance arrangements, and when the child protection and school security agendas were very different. The current site does not provide the opportunity to invest and reshape the service to encourage more use or to develop the community hub concept on this site;

- Where the council has been able to invest in a library through building improvements and enhancing the activity offer, the results are evident. Twydall and Hempstead are two such buildings and both have shown substantial growth in footfall and book loans. For these two buildings in 2016-17, visits have increased by 17% and 18%, borrowing has increased by 17% and 27% and computer use has increased by 20% and 25%. It is believed that other libraries that are also performing less well can benefit from a review of their activities and events, and hopefully in the future from building improvements too. This is not possible at Thomas Aveling.

Taking account of all of the constraints at Thomas Aveling Community Library, the data that had been gathered, and the operational knowledge of running the service, officers concluded that the library is not meeting the needs of the community in the manner being achieved at most other libraries.

3.11 A diversity impact assessment (DIA) was completed for Thomas Aveling, and has been updated in the light of consultation, and will be further amended if required, following the Cabinet's decision. Having considered the DIA issues, the consultation document included four proposals that could form the core elements of alternative provision mitigating the impact of closure of Thomas Aveling library. They were outlined to assist consultation respondents to comment directly on the Council's possible mitigation proposals. The four elements were:

- Visit a community hub. Chatham, Rochester and Strood are nearest and as 'community hubs' provide good opening hours, facilities and events;
- Provide a stop from the Mobile Library which includes books for both children and adults;
- Market the on-line services that are available to mitigate partly the need to travel to another library;
- Seek to contact older residents, care homes and residential homes about services as they are under-represented amongst the current user base.

4. Consultation

4.1 An eight week consultation ran from 21 April to 15 June 2017 providing the opportunity to involve the public in the consideration of the future of Thomas Aveling Library. The consultation document (Appendix 2) included a questionnaire that was available online on the Council's website, with hard copies available to those who requested one. The consultation was drawn directly to the attention of the 910 recent users of the library (January 2016 – February 2017) through e-mail and letter. Three drop-in consultation sessions took place, including on a Saturday morning.

4.2 The report on the consultation findings can be found at Appendix 3. There were also a small number of letters and other communications received during the consultation period, and the views expressed at the public drop-in sessions. All of these contributions have been reflected in the report on consultation. The responses have provided a good range of opinions and suggestions.

4.3 Results from the Questionnaire

The survey received 151 responses; this would represent a maximum response of 16.6% if all came from the 910 Thomas Aveling users who were contacted about the consultation. Of those responding, 145 identified themselves as current Thomas Aveling users. Summary results in relation to the proposals that were offered for the future of Thomas Aveling are set out in the table below, with the key headline being that 87% of respondents did not wish to see the library closed and replaced with alternative provision.

Proposal	No of respondents	% of respondents
1. Replace the library with alternative provision as outlined in consultation document	11	7%
2. Current service to remain in place	131	87%
3. Withdraw the service without alternative provision	3	2%
4. Propose an alternative option	4	3%
Did not answer	2	1%
TOTAL	151	100%

4.4 Respondents' profile and how they currently use Thomas Aveling

- ❖ Of the full 151 respondents:
 - 91% were members of the public; (12 did not say; 2 said they represented organisation)
 - 74% identified themselves as living in Rochester
 - the gender make-up was 64% female, and 24% male (others did not specify), similar to the registered user profile.

- ❖ Across the age ranges
 - 23% were aged 35-44;
 - 15% were under 16;
 - 14% were 45-54
 - 11% were 55-64
 - 9% were 25-34

- ❖ 22 people said they had a long standing health problem or disability

- ❖ 60% of respondents identified themselves as White British. The next two largest ethnic groups with 5% were, 'Any other white background' and 'Black/Black British – African'.

- ❖ Visit patterns - the three main visiting patterns were:
 - 32% visited at least once a month
 - 27% visited at least once a week
 - 22% visited at least once a fortnight

❖ Usage of the library

- 95% of respondents used the library to borrow books
- 27% used a computer
- 24% attended an event
- 24% borrowed DVDs
- 14% carried out homework after school
- 4% used the library as a safe place to wait to be picked up

4.5 Use of other libraries and other library services

The questionnaire also sought to understand the use by respondents of other library buildings and other library services, and people’s willingness to use a service they do not currently use. Of the respondents who currently use Thomas Aveling, 39% currently use another library, with Rochester, Chatham and Gillingham as the most used alternatives. Of the 6 non-Thomas Aveling users who responded these were also the most used alternative libraries. Of the 131 respondents who would prefer the current service to remain in place, 37% do already use an alternative library.

4.6 Only a very small number of current Thomas Aveling user respondents (6-7%) are currently using other library services such as eBooks and eAudio books, the mobile library and other online electronic resources. This low use was also replicated amongst the non Thomas Aveling users who responded. But when asked if they would consider using these facilities there was a positive response: 32% would consider using eBooks; 27% would consider using the mobile library and 21% other electronic resources.

4.7 Issues and concerns raised during consultation

Set out below are key issues of concern and suggestions made by respondents drawn from the free text in the survey, correspondence received and the public drop-in sessions.

Issues raised in public meetings and correspondence	Service response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of a local community facility, and events and activities • Support for the calm atmosphere at Thomas Aveling • Thomas Aveling welcomes autistic children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community hubs, whilst necessitating travel, provide a more developed service, with access to the whole range of council services through trained customer contact officers. • Hubs also provide more events for adults, young people and older people, and more opportunities to engage with a range of community groups • Spaces are frequently being reviewed at libraries to create more seating areas, and a better mix of activities • All Libraries welcome people with autism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of library will affect local children’s literacy and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community hubs with their longer opening hours offer more support for young people, with more library assistant and librarians that can offer help with homework enquiries

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a far wider volume and range of stock • The Outreach and Partnership Team provide expert advice on literacy, books and reading to schools and the early year's sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of ICT facilities – PCs, internet access and printing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT at Thomas Aveling library is limited compared to other libraries. Greater offer at nearby community hubs, including more staff support to help people get on-line
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport / parking – convenience and cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community hubs are 10-12 minutes by car; 15-26 minutes by bus; 34-50 minutes by foot. • e-services can substitute for some visits, e.g. book renewals by phone and online; eBook and eAudiobook download • A number of branch libraries are able to provide free parking and details can be provided
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative hub activities often booked up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and events at Thomas Aveling are not well supported. • They are popular at other libraries but there is equal chance to book onto them • An increase in activities at other venues is possible if there is demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not found the mobile service a good alternative as you have to wait outdoors and the visit time is restricted • Can the mobiles meet the needs of wheelchair users? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile library service offers a service commensurate with a small branch; the stock is up to date, and changed regularly • Customer feedback is positive • The driver is an experienced Library assistant • The mobile has a satellite IT link so staff can check the online catalogue, reserve books etc. for customers • The mobiles have a lift that can accommodate many sizes of wheelchair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could the council consider the use of volunteers at Thomas Aveling? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing staff with volunteers does not address the concerns about the rigidity of opening hours and the consequent lack of opportunity to improve the service • Volunteers already add value to the service in a number of ways (e.g. at events and activities; home library service couriers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could the council consider income generating activities including commercial hirers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scope to do this is very limited both on the school site and on the current opening hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could the council use the building more intensively with schools, community groups and churches? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are limitations on what can be expanded at the library, recognising and respecting the school's use of the library for a range of day time learning activities

	alongside the library use. But this type of approach is what happens at other libraries where activities are more easily accommodated within longer and more flexible opening hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could the council move to another building, possibly sharing with another service or partners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new building could address the opening hours issue but these longer opening hours would lead to higher cost, not currently affordable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has Thomas Aveling been promoted enough locally? Could that be piloted? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Aveling has been equally promoted, but has not had as large a range of events and activities to promote due to the opening hours. Author events tend to take place at the Hubs where customer demand for seats can be met

4.8 Conclusions from consultation

- Consultation has shown that a large majority of the 151 respondents - 87% - are against closure. The majority view expressed at the consultation drop-ins was also against closure.
- Given that the proposal to examine the future of Thomas Aveling was drawn to the attention of recent users, the 16% response to the survey and 40 attendees at the drop-ins could be regarded as low.
- To some extent that response rate may reflect the fact that nearly 4 out of 10 current users already make use of other libraries, particularly community hubs with their larger service offer.
- The greatest concern at closure has been expressed by those local and regular users, visiting the library daily, weekly or fortnightly (84 current users, 58% of Thomas Aveling user respondents)
- It has to be acknowledged that the closure of Thomas Aveling would represent a loss of a local and convenient service to these regular library users. Some have indicated that the costs of public transport and car parking will either exclude them or discourage them from visiting any alternative library on as regular a basis.
- The survey also showed that the popular times for visiting the library are Saturday morning and early afternoon, and between 3.00-5.00 on weekdays. Whilst the Saturday findings mirror the general library experience that morning through to mid-afternoon is most popular, the late afternoon preference is surprising. This may reflect the current habit for accessing local library services.
- Current use of online facilities is low, but there is a preparedness of around a third of library users to consider trying these other facilities.

- A number of positive suggestions were made by questionnaire respondents and those that attended the drop-in sessions: to increase partnership working with community, church and other local groups; to use volunteers; to have more events; and to promote all of those things more. All of those proposals are key features in the programming at other libraries where those activities are accommodated as they are spread over more hours, fitting in with local demands and the availability of organisations, groups and volunteers. Within the constraints of the Thomas Aveling hours it has not been possible to generate the attendance at events that we see in other comparable branch libraries, despite the exhaustive effort of the local staff.

5. Analysis and consideration of mitigations

- 5.1 Officers' conclusion from their initial consideration of the use and performance of Thomas Aveling library was that it was not meeting the needs of the community. Furthermore, Thomas Aveling could not be developed to do so due to the restricted opening hours. Opening the library at 3.00pm in the afternoon during the week is the wrong time to attempt to offer the modern library experience – a place where users can access books for pleasure; where business can be carried out with the council online, and where users can access information on council services and anything else. The council's library offer has changed fundamentally since it took up the option to move into the school site, and so has the demand and expectation of most of the public.
- 5.2 The dialogue through the consultation period has not produced a solution to this fundamental opening hours issue that hampers attempts to re-invigorate the offer and attract more users.
- 5.3 Prior to taking a decision on the future of the library, Members need to consider the impact of closure and consider whether a number of mitigation measures would make a closure decision a reasonable decision to take. The consultation document, as it had indicated a preferred option, outlined four broad areas of mitigation to enable respondents to reflect on their merit and reasonableness. They are outlined in 3.11 above and in brief they were to visit a community hub; provide a stop from the Mobile Library; market the on-line services; and seek to contact older residents, care homes and residential homes to offer the assisted services and increase older people's take-up of the service.
- 5.4 Members will have noted that four out of ten Thomas Aveling users are already electing to use other libraries, particularly the community hubs. Members could reasonably conclude that the remaining comprehensive library service, and particularly the community hubs at Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham and Strood, constitute a sufficient mitigation to all users. Noting that 32% of survey respondents are using Thomas Aveling on an at least monthly basis, they may further conclude that the level of inconvenience for those users and other less frequent users is modest and manageable. As acknowledged in 4.8 above, very local users of the library will most feel the effect of closure; some have expressed concern at travel and parking costs. Many residents do not have the convenience of living particularly close to a

local library or community hub and maintain good reading and library visit habits.

- 5.5 A further mitigation for customers using Thomas Aveling more frequently will be to provide a local visit from the community mobile library, maintaining a local face to face option. There is currently a fortnightly mobile slot available late morning on a Thursday. There is some scope, albeit limited, for there to be some experimentation with both the location and the timing of that stop. The mobile does already stop in some other local places, and all of these can be advertised to the current users.
- 5.6 The Library service offers a range of on-line services – catalogue search; book reservation and renewal; download of eBooks and eAudio books; accessing other online resources. There is little use made of these services by the current users, but the survey revealed some preparedness to use these services in the future. There could also be an offer to come and sample the online services with the support of a library member of staff.
- 5.7 A further mitigation to ease a transition period will be to provide existing users with a menu of library services and details of events and activities at different hubs and branch libraries.
- 5.8 The analysis of current users indicated a surprisingly low number of older users and more marketing of the library service will take place to draw attention to this important group of the range of services that are available. For those older people with any particular challenges, the Outreach and Partnership team will make contact with care home and residential homes and increase awareness of the home library service.
- 5.9 Members will note that young people who currently use the service and go to Thomas Aveling School will continue to have access to school library facilities during the day. These users constituted 273 (30%) of the 910 recent borrowers.
- 5.10 Taken together, officers believe that the impact of the closure of Thomas Aveling library can be effectively mitigated. In the case of older people there is the prospect of increased use. A priority area is to support parents of very young children to hold onto their library habit. The service already works with a number of local schools and will channel its efforts through existing and new contacts.

6. Options

- 6.1 The Cabinet has the following options:
 - (a) To keep Thomas Aveling library open, and ask officers to investigate other means of generating similar savings, both from Thomas Aveling and more widely across the Library service
 - (b) To close Thomas Aveling library, implementing the mitigations outlined above or as directed by Cabinet. The council made clear in the consultation document that this was its preferred option

- 6.2 Option (a) is effectively a do nothing option. It will provide a status quo service for a relatively small number of loyal library customers. It will not address the fundamental issue of the rigid opening hours that is preventing Thomas Aveling from developing along the path of other branch libraries. Officers are not recommending this option.
- 6.3 Option (b) is recommended. It addresses the fundamental hours issue, and there are a range of mitigations that can cushion the impact of closure on local users as well as introduce them to the better and wider range of services available elsewhere.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 Thomas Aveling Public Library costs £36,100 per annum to run - £6,500 rent for use of the building; staffing £29,600. In a full year this expenditure will be saved. In the current year, if closure were to go ahead in late July/August, the saving would be £21-24,000. The Library service will seek to make up the shortfall on the full year saving by managing other budgets through the rest of the year.
- 7.2 No staff redundancies or costs will result from the implementation of closure, nor will any staff lose the contracted hours that they work at Thomas Aveling School. Vacant posts have provided the service with the opportunity to re-provide staff with those hours at other libraries. This will be the subject of individual and local arrangements.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The Council's duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who wish to make use of it is not compromised by the decision to close Thomas Aveling Library. The remaining 15 libraries, the 2 mobile libraries and the on-line service clearly constitute a comprehensive service.
- 8.2 This report and the Diversity Impact Assessment (Appendix 4) sets out proposed actions for different types of users and these will mitigate the impact of closure.
- 8.3 The obligation on Thomas Aveling School to facilitate a community library was secured via a Section 106 agreement, as part of a wider application to develop the site. The agreement provides for the library scheme to be reviewed in conjunction with the council. If the Cabinet decides to close the library so that the need for it is no longer required, the S106 can be varied to reflect this situation. That would require a report to the Planning Committee.

9. Risk management

- 9.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Earlier comment has set out the proposed mitigations to the closure option and they are briefly summarised here.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating (after mitigations)
Budget pressure	Council fails to take action to limit expenditure to available resources, or there is delay in implementation.	Robust project management of the Cabinet's decision, allied to the careful management of the Library service budget.	C III
Young children and teenagers reduce their use of the library service	The support that Libraries provide to reading as a foundational activity for a successful education is reduced.	Provide information directly on alternative libraries and the on-line services to all our known younger readers and their families, of routes to community hubs, and details of their activities.	D IV
Adults reduce their use of the library service		Provide information directly on alternative libraries and the on-line services, of routes to community hubs, and details of their activities.	D IV

10. Recommendation

10.1 The Committee is asked to consider the outcome of consultation on the future of Thomas Aveling Library and to forward any comments to Cabinet.

Lead officer contact

Chris White, Head of Libraries, Business Support and Community Hubs, Gun Wharf
01634 334379 christopher.white@medway.gov.uk

Appendices:

1. Update note on community hub opening times and Grain volunteers project
2. Consultation Document and Survey
3. Consultation Findings
4. Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers: None