

Further information: Consultation on the proposal to close the Poverest Centre building

September 2026

Bromley Council is consulting on a proposal to close the Poverest Centre building in Orpington, and to deliver adult education services through a hub and spoke model instead, using a range of different buildings and locations across the borough.

The Council's preferred option is to close the Poverest Centre building and move to a hub and spoke model of service delivery. However, at this time no final decision has yet been made. The purpose of this consultation is to understand the views of residents, learners, carers and other stakeholders before any future decision is taken.

The closure of the Poverest Centre building is proposed as part of a transformation of adult education, which would lead to increased availability of courses across the borough. It would mean that more places in the borough would host adult education classes to reach more people. The Kentwood Centre would remain as the adult education hub, with adult education courses continuing to take place there.

In January 2025, the Executive approved a proposal which included closure of the Poverest Centre building. However, that decision was subsequently quashed by the Court of Appeal in July 2026. The Council is therefore consulting on the proposal before making a fresh decision.

The consultation period runs from Monday 7 September 2026 to Sunday 18 October 2026.

Background to the proposal

The purpose of this document is to explain how the proposal arose, why the Council currently prefers it, the alternatives that were considered and to identify the main factors that the Council currently considers should be taken into account before any future decision is made.

Council review of its operational estate

2022 - Operational Property Review:

In 2022 the Council undertook an initial strategic corporate review of its operational estate. The outcome of this work is set out in the committee report titled 'Operational Property Review' considered at a meeting on 30 November 2022.

This report is available to view here: [20221118 OPR Executive FINAL.pdf](#).

At the same meeting two other reports were considered in relation to capital receipts from the disposal of property and the future of the Council's headquarters. These reports as a collective show the strategic approach the Council was taking to its property portfolio at that time.

These reports are available to view here: [20221116 Part 1 Executive Disposals FINAL.pdf](#) and [20221116 Future Council HQ Options Nov Executive Part 1 FINAL.pdf](#)

As shown in the report, officers had identified that the Council needed to spend up to £164.4m (para 3.2) to deal with the repair and maintenance of the estate. The costs of repairing the estate were in part meant to be funded through capital receipts - the sale of sites surplus to operational need. This Report included an estimate of £7.3m at that time (para 3.40) to refurbish the two adult education centres – Kentwood and Poverest. As set out in the report a goal at this time was to rationalise the Council's estate to reduce the cost of maintaining such a large portfolio of buildings (para 3.25).

On 30 November 2022, the recommendations in the report were agreed by the Executive. There was discussion at this meeting about the estate being fit for purpose in today's world, given the changing needs of residents, and the Council's tightening budget, given that the Council's ageing estate had not been reviewed as a whole or seen significant change for many years. In the minutes the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management is recorded as having emphasised that *"Bromley Council had been continuously operating and providing services since 1964. However, during that time services and the way they were provided had changed and it was only appropriate assets were reviewed to ensure the Council was in a strong position to continue to provide services"*. There was a commitment by both officers and councillors at this time to take a strategic view of the Council's estate and modernise to ensure that services which met current resident's needs could continue.

Changes since the 2022 review

November 2023 - Operational Property Repair Update Report:

On 29 November 2023, a further 'Operational Property Repair Programme Update' report was taken to the Executive.

This report is available to view here: [Operational Property Review Programme Update](#)

There is reference to the adult education centres - Kentwood and Poverest - in the report in the table at para 3.17, showing that the estimated budget for their repair was now £7.853m as part of a now agreed total repair programme of £84.81m.

As a comparison the budget allocated as required to repair 11 of the borough's libraries as part of the Operational Property Review was £11.12m as also shown at para 3.17. Approximately 33,000 people use the Bromley libraries - c10% of the borough's population.

The Executive agreed the procurement of consultancy services to take the works programme forward. Following the decision, it remained a priority for the Council to further rationalise the

estate to reduce the cost of maintaining such a large portfolio of buildings. It was known that there were many buildings that were empty or had empty areas for many hours over the course of each week, and that therefore there was plenty of scope to co-locate services into fewer buildings without reducing the services. For example, youth centre services tend to only operate in the evening and at weekends, when many other services are closed. Significant savings continue to need to be found to balance the Council's budget. The higher the savings are that are generated through reducing the Council's estate, the fewer cuts ultimately need to be made to services.

Review of options for Council buildings

Extended Property Review – 2024:

Therefore, in 2024 a further detailed review of the Council's operational estate was undertaken, with 53 buildings assessed as to whether they were required or if the services could be delivered from other Council buildings, with services co-located.

In relation to the Poverest Centre the review identified that many of the courses delivered from the Poverest Centre could be delivered effectively from a variety of buildings, as in many cases essentially a 'classroom' style setting is required. More specialist courses that require different facilities can also be facilitated at other Council buildings, for example there are buildings with outdoor space that could host horticulture classes e.g. Southborough Library, buildings with large rooms/halls that could host music and drama e.g. West Wickham Library, and the Kentwood Centre has capacity and specialist facilities for catering courses.

As a result, a further report titled 'Extended Operational Property Review' was presented to the Executive on 22 January 2025.

The report is available to view here - [Extended Operational Property Review](#) .

This report focussed on the reduction of the Council's estate through the co-location of services, making better use of the Council's buildings. Paras 3.21 and 3.22 specifically refer to Adult Education provision. The report's recommendations were all agreed at the meeting, with 11 buildings identified as surplus to operational need. In all cases the Executive decided that the actual disposal would not happen until the service had in place an operational plan and was ready to move their service. The operational plan would be informed by user engagement. The speed at which operational plans were anticipated to be in place was expected to be different for each site.

Why is the Council consulting?

In January 2025, the Executive approved a proposal which included closure of the Poverest Centre building and the future delivery of Adult Education services through a hub and spoke model using a range of locations across the borough. However, that decision was subsequently quashed by the Court of Appeal in July 2026 and no longer stands.

The Council is, therefore, consulting before making a fresh decision. The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on the proposal to close the Poverest Centre building, deliver Adult Education through a hub and spoke model, and the implications of those proposals for service users and other stakeholders. The consultation responses will be considered before any future decision is taken.

The Council's financial position

The Council is facing unprecedented financial pressures, and reducing the number of buildings it operates is an opportunity to make financial savings but not reduce services. There are many Council buildings that are empty for long periods of time (e.g. youth centres that are only used in the evening) and the Council has made a strategic decision to bring services together (co-locate) into fewer buildings where possible. This saves money on business rates, utilities, insurance, and maintenance, without reducing the service. The Poverest building costs about £120k a year to run. If the Council does not make these financial savings the savings will have to be found elsewhere, as the Council is legally required to have a balanced budget.

At the time of writing this document, the most recent financial report was published in June 2026. The report titled 'Provisional Final Accounts 2025/26' sets out the provisional final accounts for 2025/26.

The report can be viewed here - [Provisional Final Accounts 2025/26](#).

This report shows that the Council's income in 2025/26 was not sufficient given the demands on its services. It shows that there was an overspend of £9.558m (this is summarised in para 5.3 and explained in more detail in paras 13.1 to 13.9) which had to be met from Council reserves.

The Council's financial resources are depleting. This is due to a number of factors, including the need to subsidise the Council's revenue budget, and the high cost of works required to the Council's buildings to ensure they are fit for purpose. Without action to address the budget gap in future years the Council could potentially fully exhaust all its revenue reserves within the next few years and continue to have a significant budget gap which is not sustainable.

Further detail on the project budget gaps in future years can be found in this finance report titled 'Draft Budget Report and update on the Council's Financial Strategy 2027/28 to 2028/29' from January 2026.

The report can be viewed here -

[Draft Budget report 2026-27 final.pdf](#).

This report states in para 4.2.4 that even if general fund reserves, which are "one-off" in nature (i.e. once they are spent they are spent, and not available again in future years), were used to balance the budget in 2026/27, the future year's budget gap is projected to increase to £61.1m per annum by 2028/29. Without any action to address the budget gap in future years additional

reserves will need to be used with the risk of the budget gap increasing in future years and being unsustainable.

The Council is, therefore, undertaking an extensive transformation programme to reduce the ongoing costs and to reduce the growth pressures in housing, children's social care, and particularly adult social care. Reducing the number of buildings in the Council's estate is part of the transformation programme. It is a way of producing savings as it costs money to run and maintain buildings, therefore the smaller the Council's estate the lower the costs of business rates, utility bills, insurance, etc. This is preferable to reducing service provision to residents, with priority being given to maintaining delivery of statutory services.

The most recent 'Transforming Bromley 2024-28' report can be viewed here - [Transforming Bromley 2024-28](#).

The Council's four-year transformation programme encompasses a broad array of change initiatives that contribute to improving outcomes for residents, statutory demand management, increased productivity, and savings. These include an evaluation of all revenue and capital opportunities to maximise income and minimise expenditure. In certain areas this has inevitably led to service reductions or increases of fees and charges, whilst in other areas a key component of the programme has been a strategy of 'Growth reduction' and 'invest to-save' initiatives, which address inflationary pressures and help to reduce unit costs and client need over the longer term.

As set out in paras 3.19 and 3.20 the Council has a significant future budget gap (at the time the report was written the 2026-27 budget gap was £55.7m). This is due to a real reduction in core funding, demand growth pressure and inflationary costs.

Further information about the Council's capital funding can be found in the June 2026 'Capital Programme Outturn 2025/26' report which can be viewed here - [Capital Programme Outturn 2025/26](#).

The next finance and transformation reports are expected at the September 2026 committee cycle and will be available to view online before the Executive meeting on 16th September 2026.

Housing demand

There is a severe undersupply of affordable housing across the UK, including in Bromley. In Bromley alone there are approximately 4,300 households in housing need on the Council's Housing Register. There are also currently approximately 1,450 homeless households unsettled in temporary accommodation (including approximately 1,300 in more expensive nightly paid accommodation). The high cost of temporary accommodation is one of the Council's biggest financial pressures after social care. Therefore, the Council is building and purchasing affordable housing to move households out of temporary accommodation and meet the high level of housing need faced in the borough.

As set out in the Housing Strategy 2019 – 2029 a key action the Council is taking is to build more houses in the borough to provide secure housing for families in need.

The Housing Strategy can be viewed here –

[bromley-council-housing-strategy-2019-2029](#).

The Council's aim is to build or purchase 1,000 homes to reduce the number of households in unsuitable and expensive nightly paid accommodation. This Housing Strategy has been adopted by the Council and the Executive has regard to the priority need for more housing in their decision making. The Council has also adopted a Regeneration Strategy 2020 – 2030 which includes housing delivery as a priority.

This document can be viewed here - [Regeneration Strategy 2020 - 2030](#).

The most recent published statistics in relation to housing demand and temporary accommodation costs can be found here - [3. Portfolio Plan - HPR Operational KPIs 2026-27 Q1.pdf](#).

The Poverest site is suitable for family-sized homes, due in part to its proximity to the adjoining primary school. The Kentwood site is not suitable for housing. The Kentwood centre uses the same building as the Harris Primary Academy Kent House next door. This interconnection, and the layout of the building, means it is not suitable for conversion into viable flatted accommodation, and additionally it is not possible to demolish the building and build housing on the site instead.

The Poverest site is in a residential area and the site could accommodate much needed affordable family-sized homes. A proposed housing scheme for 42 affordable family sized homes on the Poverest Centre site has been submitted and considered through the planning process. Further information is contained in the Planning report which can be found here - [2505699FPA - Poverest Adult Education Centre.pdf](#). If a decision is taken in the future, following this consultation, to close the Poverest Centre building, the site could be used for affordable housing.

The Council has identified a preferred option following its review of the operational estate. That preferred option is described below alongside the alternative options that were considered. However, the purpose of this consultation is to seek views on the proposal and at this time no final decision has yet been made.

What options have been considered for the site and the future of adult education?

Nine options have been considered by the Council, and the move to a hub and spoke model for the adult education service is the preferred option. The closure of the Poverest Centre building is proposed as part of a transformation of adult education, which would lead to increased availability of courses in venues across the borough. It would mean that more places in the

borough would host adult education classes to reach more people in their local area. Under the proposal the Kentwood Centre would be the adult education hub, with adult education courses continuing to take place there.

A draft Equality Impact Assessment was produced in 2025 for the preferred hub and spoke option. This document supports the preferred approach on its ability to reach a wider audience. The assessment can be viewed here - [Appendix - Poverest EIA.pdf](#).

Since undertaking this assessment, the Adult Education service has been considering an even greater use of spoke sites to deliver courses given the wider benefits, the extent of this will now depend on the decision on whether or not to close the Poverest Centre building.

Why is this the Council's preferred option?

Following its review, the Council's preferred option is Option 8: delivery of Adult Education through a hub and spoke model using a range of Council buildings across the borough, with the Poverest site used for affordable housing.

The Council currently prefers this option because it:

- allows Adult Education services to continue across the borough;
- enables greater geographical access with courses delivered from a greater number of locations;
- avoids significant capital investment in refurbishing the Poverest building;
- reduces ongoing running costs associated with the building;
- makes better use of existing Council buildings; and
- supports delivery of affordable family housing.

The alternative options considered, and the reasons they were not preferred, are set out below. However, at this time no final decision has yet been made and the purpose of this consultation is to seek views before any future decision is taken.

OPTION	NOTE
OPTION 1 Poverest building retained with only key health and safety repairs made.	This would keep the building operating in the short term, however further investment would be required to keep the building open long term. A temporary building closure would be required to undertake the repairs and therefore the adult education courses would have to relocate temporarily. This means that all service users attending courses at Poverest would experience a disruption to this pattern and would be required to attend courses at other sites during the

OPTION	NOTE
	period of works. The estimated cost of undertaking basic repairs is £1.7m. ¹ In the longer term additional capital investment would be required to maintain services at the Poverest Centre site. Additionally, the ongoing revenue cost of running the building (utilities etc) would remain at c£120k per annum.
OPTION 2 Poverest building fully refurbished	This option would require the building to close for one academic year for building works. The estimated cost of refurbishment is c.£3m. The cost of this is considered too expensive given that no other Council services require use of this building, and therefore usage of the site would not be maximised through any co-location of services. Adult education is a term time only non-statutory service which is used by a relatively low number of residents. The ongoing revenue cost of running the building (utilities etc) would remain at c£120k per annum.
OPTION 3 Poverest building is fully refurbished and the remaining land is used for housing	This option would require the Poverest building to close for one academic year for building works. The estimated cost of the Poverest building works is c.£3m. The cost of this is considered too expensive given that no other Council services require use of this building, and therefore usage of the site would not be maximised. The business case for a small housing scheme of family sized houses in that location is not considered financially viable. If the Poverest Centre remains as it is between 15 and 18 houses could be built on the remaining land. Due to the proximity of the site to the primary school family size housing is appropriate in this location rather than smaller one-bedroom flats for example.

¹ The estimated costs for works referenced in this table are based on condition surveys, the average square foot of refurbishing a building type, and the Council's historic experience of the cost of other building schemes. This is the same approach used for all capital works estimates and are generally shown to be accurate when capital schemes have been taken forward.

OPTION	NOTE
	The affordable housing grants received from the GLA do not increase in relation to the number of bedrooms. Therefore, generally for the building of larger family sized homes to be viable a larger quantum is needed. The wider benefits of the housing scheme, including the pedestrian access to the school site and extent of improvements to the local playgrounds would also not be realised.
OPTION 4 Poverest building is demolished and rebuilt alongside housing to optimise use of the site.	The estimated cost of building a new Poverest Centre is c.£5m. This would be a smaller building, but with brand new facilities that would be less expensive to maintain. The cost of building this is considered too expensive given the Council's financial position and because no other Council services require use of this building, and therefore usage of the site would not be maximised. Additionally, given there is capacity at other Council buildings for adult education courses through a hub and spoke model there is no business case to build a new facility for adult education. A larger number of family sized homes could be built on the site, perhaps c25 units, which would likely improve the viability of the housing scheme and enable pedestrian access to the school. However the extent of improvements to local playgrounds would be reduced in comparison to the 42 unit scheme due to how the play space contribution/extent is determined in relation to Planning and the GLA grant related design requirements.
OPTION 5 Poverest site is used for housing and the adult education service is moved to Churchill Court.	The estimated cost of making a new area of Churchill Court suitable for adult education is c.£6m. The cost of this is considered too expensive given that there is no co-location requirement and given the cost is higher than services remaining at Poverest. Additionally given there is capacity at other Council buildings for adult education courses through a hub and spoke model there is no business case to create a new facility for adult education.

OPTION	NOTE
	However, this option was initially considered as it is a central location that is easy for many residents to access given Bromley town has very good public transport links.
OPTION 6 Poverest site is maximised with other Council services co-located on to the site to make better use of the building.	There are no Council services requiring new or additional space in that area of the borough that are not already accommodated. There would still be either a repair cost of c£1.7m or a refurbishment cost of c£3m as detailed above.
OPTION 7 The Poverest adult education service is moved to the Astley Day Centre site, and the Poverest site is used for affordable housing.	There are constraints on the Astley site. The building is locally listed, on green belt, and there are mature trees. This impacts on opportunities to extend the building, and there is already another service co-located there. Unless the building was extended at an estimated cost of £4m, the times of day that the Astley site is used would make it difficult to effectively co-locate the adult education service without reducing both services. There could be other opportunities for the Astley site with a viable business case and potential assimilation of land.
OPTION 8 Adult education is moved to be delivered from other Council buildings through a hub and spoke model and the Poverest site is used for affordable housing.	This is the preferred option. The Council recognises that long-term service users of the Poverest Centre may be adversely impacted by its closure, however in the balance of considerations the closure of the Poverest building, is the preferred option. The Kentwood Centre would be used as the adult education hub. Therefore, the cost of refurbishing this building would still be borne. A range of buildings across the borough, such as libraries, would be used as the spoke sites. This would mean that more places in the borough would host adult education classes to reach more people in their local area. This would maximise the Council's estate, using many different buildings. These buildings are being or

OPTION	NOTE
	have been refurbished and therefore there is no additional capital cost to the Council of using these buildings for adult education. If a Council building is used on a day it is normally closed there is likely to be an increase in utility costs. This could create a cost of c£4k per annum that would need to be factored in². In addition, some non-Council owned buildings could be used for certain courses to meet the needs of specific groups in specific areas of the borough. There would be a cost to renting these spaces for courses, which could potentially be £9k per annum, that would need to be factored in³. This option facilitates the optimal number of affordable housing units on the site. It requires no additional building investment and creates an annual saving of c£120k in relation to the running cost of the Poverest building. For those reasons, the Council currently considers it to be the strongest financial option.
OPTION 9 Adult education is solely delivered through the Kentwood Centre and the Poverest site is used for affordable housing.	This would lead to a small reduction in adult education courses, due to the number of classrooms available, and less flexibility in timetabling to meet the needs of service users. The Kentwood site will already be maximised as a number of other services are moving onto the site including Penge Library which is moving from a site the Council rents into Kentwood which the Council owns. This creates a saving for the library service as there will no longer be a rental cost as well as more stability. Having only one venue for adult education would significantly restrict access for people who do not have easy access to Penge, and is unlikely to be supported by an equality impact assessment.

² As an example, if on two days a week, over 38 weeks, Council buildings that are normally closed with utilities off are used, this could cost an additional £50 per day which totals £3,800.

³ As an example, if non-Council venues were used for 12 hours a week, at £20ph, for 38 weeks a year the total cost would be £9,120.

What would the hub and spoke model look like in practice?

If the Council decides to close the Poverest Centre, the preferred option is to move adult education to a hub and spoke model.

The Council has a large estate, comprising 14 libraries, buildings in parks and green spaces such as BEECH (Bromley Environmental Educational Centre High Elms), day centres, children and family centres, and other buildings. In total there are 28 Council buildings across the borough that have potential to host adult education classes, some have lots of capacity and others are more limited.

In addition, there are non-Council owned buildings which have potential to be used for adult education courses if there is a specific need in a specific geographical area. Examples of seven non-Council buildings that could be hired for adult education classes in the vicinity of the Poverest Centre site have also been mapped out.

See the locations of the council owned and non-council owned site – <https://www.bromley.gov.uk/poverestvenuesmaps/>

This demonstrates there is significant capacity in the borough to host adult education courses in a variety of locations and buildings to meet the needs of service users.

The hub and spoke model would allow much greater flexibility and geographical spread for course delivery, which will give service users a range of real options to discuss in relation to future timetabling.

The spoke sites all have different set ups, facilities and different availability for adult education programming and access, and there is plenty of scope to ensure that the programming of adult education does not negatively impact on the other services using the building.

For example, West Wickham library will be a venue available for adult education courses. This library is fully accessible with lift access and a Changing Places toilet. There is a private classroom which could be timetabled on any day of the week, or alternatively on Wednesdays the library is closed and therefore any space in the building could be used for teaching, including the garden. This building includes a café, maker space with equipment such as sewing machines, and a spacious event space too. The Link Youth Centre building potential for courses that require large spaces as it has a small hall, and Southborough Library has outdoor space that could be used for gardening.

Orpington Library which is close to Poverest (1.5 miles away, taking less than ten minutes by car) can be accessed by car, with nearby disabled parking pays on Lych Gate Road. The route from Lych Gate Road to the library is level and pedestrianised. There are also disabled bays and drop off spaces at the rear of the library building. Inside, there is an enclosed classroom at this library and lift access. This library building also has Children, Education and Family space on the second floor, including a sensory room.

These are just some examples of the range of facilities that exist in Council buildings throughout the borough.

Kentwood, as the proposed hub, is well located in the densely populated area of Penge, in one of the borough's areas of deprivation. Therefore, this is a very good hub location to meet the needs of many residents.

Where the Council has previously co-located services there has been an immense benefit to residents. For example, the Community Support Centre service (which supports residents with housing, employment and other advice) relocated to St Paul's Cray library and operates out of the site on a Monday and Wednesday when the library service is closed, as well as on a Tuesday alongside the library service.

The co-location of these services on to one site in August 2023 maximised the use of this building and allowed the Council to dispose of a nearby building that had been occupied by the support centre. Usage levels of the St Paul's Cray library building have increased significantly. Since the co-location of the two Council services, the issue of library items has increased by 35.3% and visits to the building have doubled, increasing by 104.7%. Libraries are very well placed to foster a wider range of interests and engagement with others, they are welcoming warm spaces with community programming, and familiarisation with libraries through attendance at the building for other services increases likelihood of engaging with all the libraries have to offer.

The Council's current view, subject to considering consultation responses, is that the transformation of adult education into a hub and spoke model would ultimately lead to better services, with more joined up opportunities through co-location. Using libraries in particular will open up new experiences for learners by fostering a new familiarity with library activities. Additionally, the Council's estate will work harder by ensuring that buildings are used throughout the day, rather than having long periods of empty rooms. This will deliver better value for money for residents.

Is there sufficient capacity elsewhere in the borough for Adult Education courses?

A high-level analysis reviewing Adult Education courses was undertaken in 2024/25 which looked at the number of learner spaces available at Kentwood. This analysis showed 827 learner spaces available across the week at Kentwood. There were 475 non-SEND learners and 213 SEND learners attending courses at Poverest, giving a total of 688 learners. On that basis, Kentwood had more than sufficient capacity to accommodate learners attending Poverest.

However, it was acknowledged that it was not as straight forward as this as the learning spaces were not necessarily in the required courses, and additionally there was insufficient capacity at Kentwood for all the SEND learners due to the nature of the separate timetable – ie learners from Poverest could not just slot into the spaces on the same courses at Kentwood as they had different bespoke courses. This was not a concern as it was expected that there would be a

preference for many of these courses to be run in the south of the borough utilising Council premises that would be available under the proposed hub and spoke approach.

Adult education used to be run from many different sites across the borough. This allowed more people to have easier access to courses in their local area. About 20 years ago this changed due to some venues not being accessible. However, many Council buildings are now accessible or are undergoing refurbishment works which will improve their accessibility, as set out in the background section of this document. Therefore, it is now a viable option to go back to the hub and spoke model.

To date many of the building works identified in the operational property reports detailed in the background section of this document have been completed or are underway, including many of the libraries which now have improved accessibility, including to their public toilets. Additionally, a number of sites have been sold to bring in capital receipts to contribute towards the cost of the refurbishments and improvements to date.

The overall anticipated outcome of this workstream is that a rationalised estate, which works hard to deliver Council services and activity, is refurbished to a good standard, will enable a better standard of service and reduce day to day ongoing maintenance costs to the public purse amidst current financial challenges. The preferred approach of the Council is that the Poverest Centre site is part of the estate rationalisation.

What happens next?

The consultation runs from 7 September 2026 to 18 October 2026. All responses will be considered before any future decision is taken regarding the proposal. Details of the Council's decision-making process will be published in due course.