# LIBRARY SERVICE
## STRATEGY 2020-2025 (DRAFT)

WIRRAL

# Contents

# Foreword

Public libraries are trusted, free to enter and open to all, they are safe spaces and are gateways to information, knowledge, and opportunities. Public libraries play a crucial role in ensuring the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities. They help jobseekers find opportunities, offer courses and digital skills training, provide essential support to people applying for welfare benefits, and provide spaces in which people can be creative. They can act as venues for concerts, exhibitions, or performances, and enable groups with shared interests to meet. Public libraries can provide information about health and health services, and reading well programmes, as well as being neutral spaces for third sector organisations to provide information and advice. Our new Wirral Council Plan 2025 sets out what we will do to make Wirral a place that residents are proud of. We aim to deliver better outcomes for local people. We want to work together with partners across the public sector to target our resources to promote and protect wellbeing for all; working with communities to co-design services that will make a real impact, listening and involving the community in decisions that affect their lives and neighbourhoods.

Wirral Libraries are central to this, and we have plans to modernise our libraries to ensure that they meet today's needs, targeting our resources to promote and protect wellbeing for all. We want to ensure that we deliver best value through pooling resources across the public and voluntary sector wherever possible. We will create community hubs where the library plays a key role, working with our public service partners, communities, and other partner organisations. We want to explore co-locations, volunteer run, and volunteer supported libraries; a mixed approach working with local communities addressing local needs. Through the delivery of community hubs, with libraries as an integral part, services for our communities will be enhanced and resident's lives enriched.

The Covid pandemic has regrettably opened up some of the inequalities that the library service strategy seeks to address. The ability to access and navigate online tools and services has meant that many residents and businesses have been able to continue to work, shop, do business and socialise online. Those without the skills or tools to get online have been disadvantaged. Likewise, it is anticipated that educational attainment gaps will also have widened between those children who can access resources and support at home and those who cannot. In many cases the crisis has strengthened communities and informal support networks, however there have been those who have felt very isolated, and anxiety and a lack of social interactions are likely to have led to an increase in mental health issues among adults and children. Many employees, especially those in hospitality and asset-based trades, will have been made redundant and will be looking for support to develop new skills for work, whilst others may be prompted to start their own businesses and need support in doing so.

The library strategy addresses these issues and outlines how it will offer relevant services and support through engagement and partnership arrangements.

**We are proud of our library service and our new strategy reflects our ambition and commitment to delivering a modern and sustainable service.**

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# 1. Introduction

**1.1**   In response to the Libraries Connected review of the Universal Offers in 2019, we have refreshed our library strategy and taken the opportunity to align it to the Wirral Council Plan 2025. This new strategy will ensure that the service continues to provide relevant services that meet the needs of local people and support the council to deliver its priorities.

**1.2**   In 2017 we carried out significant research and developed a detailed needs analysis and strategic analysis. It provided us with local evidence and insight to help shape our previous strategy. We also recognised that many of our libraries were vibrant community facilities but others were underutilised and in need of investment and revitalisation. Wirral's libraries, like many others across the UK, have seen a decline in the traditional usage of book issues and visits, whilst e-lending has increased.

**1.3**   Increasing access to the services, facilities and opportunities on offer at our libraries is a key part of improving outcomes, particularly amongst some of our most vulnerable communities and groups. As previously noted, variety in resident usage of libraries across Wirral persists. To deliver the outcomes we want to achieve, we need to do things differently; adapting what we do to meet the needs of different communities in Wirral and modernising the way in which we work to reflect the impact of COVID-19 and the changing world in which we live in.

**1.4**   Over recent years we have developed our partnership and community networks. We want to build upon those relationships to encourage increased participation in the delivery of the service. This will support the development of an increasingly strategic and responsive library service, with local communities having more of a voice and a greater role in developing the library offer, whilst working closely with our public sector partners (including youth, health and culture). This means listening more carefully, and using data and intelligence in more sophisticated ways to deliver improved outcomes and opportunities for residents.

**1.5**   This strategy sets out our priorities and objectives for the service, outlining the key elements for residents and partners.

# 2. What we know

### 2.1 Data

Wirral Libraries is a statutory service of 23 libraries and a home reader service.

Benchmarking data provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) shows that Wirral's library service has an above average cost per head of population and has more service points per head of population than the national average, whilst Wirral's opening hours at the busiest library are below the national average. Visits per annum at the busiest service point are also below the average visits per annum figure at the busiest service points nationally. Wirral's library service has an above-average number of active library borrowers.

## KEY FACTS FOR APRIL 2019 TO MARCH 2020

**23**
LIBRARIES

**33,440**
OPENING HOURS

**762,761**
BOOK ISSUES

**110,663**
WEBSITE SESSIONS

**52,891**
E-LENDING DOWNLOADS

**6,942**
TALKING BOOK ISSUES

**37,631**
ACTIVE BORROWERS
(minimum one item in the year)

**323**
PEOPLE USING THE
HOME READER SERVICE

**11.6%**
OF WIRRAL RESIDENTS
ARE ACTIVE BORROWERS

**6,400**
LIBRARY EVENTS HELD

**933,369**
PHYSICAL VISITS TO A
WIRRAL LIBRARY

**180**
VOLUNTEERS

The Covid pandemic crisis and the associated closure of libraries has lead to a significant increase in the take-up of our online offer, including e-lending and our online activities such as storytimes and bounce and rhyme sessions.

# THE COVID RESPONSE

## E-LEARNING SERVICES
### 18.03.20−30.09.20

**28,037**
E-BOOK ISSUED

**14,499**
E-AUDIO BOOKS ISSUED

**42,536**
E-LENDING ITEMS ISSUED

**2,056**
NEW ONLINE LIBRARY MEMBERS

**+71%**
E-LENDING ISSUES

**+117%**
ACTIVE USERS BORROWBOX
(E-Lending service)

**+50%**
ACTIVE USERS OVERDRIVE
(E-Lending service)

*% increases are compared to the same period in 2019*

## SUMMER ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN
### 20.07.20−31.08.20

**23,000**
FACEBOOK REACH OF ONLINE ACTIVITIES

**6,000**
FACEBOOK VIEWS OF ONLINE ACTIVITIES

**40**
ONLINE ACTIVITIES SESSIONS FOR CHILDREN

### Children's Online Summer Reading Challenge 2020
Wirral Libraries compared to other NW authorities

**5TH**
FOR ACTIVE USERS

**5TH**
FOR PARTICIPATION

**2ND**
FOR COMPLETERS

### 2.2 Context

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to deliver a public library service. The main obligation is to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service available to everyone, to promote this service, and to lend books and other written materials free of charge.

The national development agency for libraries is Arts Council England (ACE) and Libraries Connected provides strategic support to the library sector. In 2013 Libraries Connected launched The Universal Offers to demonstrate the power of public libraries and their ability to enrich the lives of individuals and the communities they serve. Furthermore in 2016, the national Libraries Taskforce published "Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021" in which it set out the strategic vision and commitment for public libraries in England, recognising the challenge councils face running library services, calling for a different way of thinking and acting to transform library services. The Universal Offers were reviewed in 2019 and relaunched to create a new framework. In addition, "The Children's Promise" developed with The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) underpins the Universal Offers, with Libraries Connected also developing the "Six Steps Promise" with RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and Share the Vision to ensure libraries support people with reduced vision.

The new Universal Library Offers are outlined in the second column of the diagram below:

Together the outcomes and offers outlined by Libraries Connected provide a robust framework for the development of an efficient and strategic library service that is relevant and accessible.

## Universal Library Offer Framework

**What societal needs do libraries meet - mission**

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**What societal needs do libraries meet - mission**

Connecting communities, improving wellbeing and promoting equality through learning, literacy and cultural participation

Reading

Information and Digital

Culture and Creativity

Health and Wellbeing

Improve digital access and literacy

Helping everyone acheive their full potential

Healthier and happier lives

Cultural and creative enrichment

Greater prosperity

Increased reading and literacy

Stronger and more resilient communities

# 3. The Strategy

### 3.1 Our vision

"Our vision is to provide first-rate reading, digital, learning and cultural opportunities for our residents; creating vibrant community hubs to inspire and enrich our residents' lives and enhance community belonging and wellbeing"

### 3.2 Our values

Wirral Council staff work to a clear set of values. Our values define how we work with each other, how we work with members and residents, and how we go about our daily business to give Wirral residents the best possible service.

**We are:**
- **Customer focused** - We put our customers' needs first and listen to their views to make informed decisions
- **Accountable** - We are answerable for our actions and the actions of our team and will be accountable for the delivery of this strategy
- **Ambitious** - We strive to innovate and focus on the best ideas to deliver exciting, relevant and varied programmes and services that raise the aspirations of our users
- **Professional** - We are open, honest and respectful with our colleagues, customers and stakeholders. We are enthusiastic and optimistic about our service.

### 3.3  Our design principles

In developing our future library service, we will use the following design principles so that it:

- is designed with residents and partners
- makes best use of available resources and community assets
- promotes partnership working, innovation and enterprise
- maximises funding to ensure best value for money
- is sustainable
- targets those residents whose library needs are greatest and reflects local priorities

# 4. Strategic Priorities

**A set of four key priorities underpin this strategy.** They are designed to ensure a modernised library service which seeks to respond and align to the Wirral Council Plan 2025 and the Council's emerging target operating model. Taking account of our differing community needs across the Borough, we will work with public service partners (such as health, youth and culture), third sector partners and residents to co-design our modernised library service and target our outreach services at those residents whose library needs are greatest.

# 4.1 Strategic priority one
## Reading

**Engage, Imagine, Discover**

We will deliver resources and activities to build literacy skills at all levels and ages and promote a love of reading within libraries, community settings and via online platforms.

We know that lacking vital literacy skills holds a person back at every stage of their life, and we want our service to support children and adults to develop reading skills for school, leisure and work.

Research also suggests that children and adults who read are healthier, happier and more confident than those who do not, whilst reading for pleasure has been found to be important for children's cognitive development.

**CASE STUDY**

### Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Scheme was created by The Reading Agency to help children avoid falling into the summer holiday literacy dip. The Summer Reading Challenge involves children reading 6 books during the summer holidays and is supported by a programme of activities and events. In 2019, 4062 children across Wirral took part, with nearly 64000 books being issued to children during the challenge period.

**Feedback from Wirral participants**

"I thought as he had no homework over summer… it was a great idea. Great concept and really got Harrison excited to read, plus we joined the library for the first time"

"I wouldn't have read anything this summer if I hadn't entered"

"My boys loved the challenge. They do like reading, but often, they tend to end up on video games! The challenge however, excited them to read more to complete the challenge"

"The challenge stimulated our 8-year-old to read to both her siblings and the 4-year-old copied by reading to the 2-year-old. The 2-year-old made up stories as she read"

"The Summer Reading Challenge is fantastic; it keeps my child reading over the summer and she tells me she reads big books now!

**Objective: Offer children of all ages an opportunity to read and discover**

**Actions:**

- Provide affordable and engaging interactive sessions and resources for pre-school children aimed at ensuring school readiness and reducing geographical developmental attainment gaps
- Work in partnership with schools, focusing on areas where uptake and attainment levels are lower, to demonstrate the value of creative reading activities and supported programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge to impact on literacy attainment and wellbeing to reduce geographical variations
- Design, develop and review, with key partners, diverse and inclusive literacy resources, supported programmes of work virtually, within libraries and community settings, with a specific focus on targeted audiences

**Objective: Provide affordable and engaging resources and activities to promote and celebrate reading for pleasure for adults**

**Actions:**

- Use national and regional initiatives to promote reading for pleasure
- Work with volunteers and reader development organisations to grow reading for pleasure activities and initiatives in accessible community places, ensuring they are appealing and relevant, whilst supporting resident led groups and community adhesion
- Support resident led reading and creative writing groups to be resilient within libraries and community settings

**Objective: Provide an engaging and diverse book stock and reading focused materials for all ages and abilities**

**Actions:**

- Encourage resident involvement in the book selection for their library and ensure that the book stock is managed effectively to ensure greatest value and evolves to reflect local community need
- Provide access (physically and remotely) to a range of inclusive and diverse books in accessible formats to allow engagement with reading, and work with partners to support adults to engage in reading
- Implement inspiring, imaginative book and reading-focused promotions within our libraries and community settings, whilst employing complementary social media campaigns

# 4.2 Strategic priority two
## Information and Digital

**Inform, Inspire and Innovate**

We will support digital skills learning and deliver activities and resources to ensure that all residents have access to quality information and digital services.

Information literacy has relevance for everyday life, citizenship, health, education and the workplace and libraries have a key role to play in supporting individuals to access accurate and unbiased information.

As individuals increasingly use digital devices and the internet, not all individuals will be able to go online. Some may also lack the skills, confidence and motivation to use such devices. Libraries can break down some of these barriers to increase digital inclusion, by increasing awareness, improving the design of its digital services and enable users to have the skills and motivation to confidently go online and unlock more opportunities.

**CASE STUDY**

### Code Club

Code Clubs are a worldwide network of volunteers, educators and partners who run free coding clubs aimed at children 9-13 years old, encouraging the next generation to have the opportunity to learn code and share their ideas.

Wirral Libraries currently has 3 successful Code Clubs run by volunteers at Wallasey Central and West Kirby library. On average 40 children a week attend the clubs, with Wirral Code Club receiving star club status. For one of the club activities, children participated in the Astro Pi Challenge which involved writing computer programs to run on Raspberry Pi computers for experiments aboard the International Space Station.

### Feedback from Wirral participants

"My son loves the Coding club. It's a great way to get him and his dad working together. The staff who run the club are excellent, supporting and getting the group engaged. It's giving my dyslexic son a reason to read.."

"Absolutely fantastic! The guys who run it are very helpful and friendly and my little girl has taken to it like a duck to water."

".. really impressed by Wirral Code Club, great way for our kids to learn new things."

**Objective: Provide a range of resources and activities that promote digital inclusion and support residents with their digital skills**

**Actions:**

- Use local and national programmes to offer digital activities to encourage digital inclusion, particularly in areas of identified need, using our network of staff, partners, volunteers and online resources
- Ensure that the library conducts outreach work in areas of identified need by working with partners and those that have an existing presence within communities, to provide inspiring learning offers
- Work in partnership with digital and technology providers to increase digital skills learning online and within libraries and community settings

**Objective: Provide access to quality information and digital services**

**Actions:**

- Develop and refine our online services to ensure they are relevant and accessible
- Work with partners and volunteers to provide excellent research support
- Develop and implement a digitisation programme to increase accessibility to Wirral Libraries local history collection
- Continue to develop an imaginative programme of workshops and exhibitions with other public services and partner organisations

# 4.3 Strategic priority three
## Culture and Creativity

**Explore, Create, Participate**

We will support an increase in cultural and creative experiences bringing culture to communities and inspire residents to connect with culture.

A recent report by Wirral Public Health (2019)  supported the case that engagement and participation in arts and culture supports health and wellbeing. Libraries can reach audiences from all backgrounds and ages and provide a focal point for cultural and creative activities within local communities, whilst also supporting the development of the local cultural economy.

**CASE STUDY**

### Make It!

Wirral Libraries received funding from Arts Council England, and part of a wider programme was to deliver four artists in residence for adults and young people aged 16-24 years old with low library and artistic engagement. Make It! encouraged participants to learn new artistic skills and practices through artist led workshops. Each resident artist was also asked to produce locally themed merchandise, either collaboratively with the group or by taking inspiration from the workshops and the local area. The Williamson Art Gallery and Museum held a launch event for the resulting pop-up exhibition tour.

### Feedback from Wirral participants

"in my country libraries are such serious places, you cannot talk or feel relaxed and safe. It is amazing to see it being used like this."

"I haven't done "art" since leaving school at 15 years old, never mind have my artwork displayed in a gallery…. It has been fantastic doing something for myself and being able to say to my family "I did that". I feel so proud, thank you…."

**CASE STUDY**

### Get It Loud in Libraries

Get It Loud In Libraries (GILIL) is a unique award-winning project designed to give people who love music, the chance to see top-notch artists in their local library. Since 2018, Birkenhead Central Library has been a gig venue, with many events sold out. We also support the Get It Loud In Libraries Academy, which provides unique learning opportunities for young people to engage with live music through workshops, mentoring and work placements.

### Feedback from Wirral participants

"What a wonderful way to spend a Sunday afternoon, this is my kid's first gig and it won't be their last…. more gigs wanted asap!"

"That rocked the library, quality music in Birkenhead…. boss Sunday"

"… I have suffered with anxiety for the past 6 or 7 years… Once a frequent gig-goer I hadn't been to one for a while because of the fear of an attack… As a keen music lover and not wanting to be held back anymore by the fear of an attack, I cautiously agreed (to go). When the band came on, I was blown away by their sound and performance!  I still can't get over the fact that I was able to see such a first-rate band in a library! Attending (that) gig has had such an incredibly positive impact on me… GILIL has allowed me to embrace my love of live music again"

**Objective: Provide opportunities for residents to engage in inclusive cultural and creative experiences, amongst audiences of targeted need within local communities**

**Actions:**

- Work with partners and volunteers to develop new ways of engaging targeted groups through cultural and creative activities via online platforms and within libraries
- Develop a programme of works with volunteers and partners to create a comprehensive and inspiring living social archive
- Encourage opportunities which will support young people's participation and talent development

**Objective: Encourage the growth of local cultural groups and events to further enhance the use of library space for cultural and creative activities**

**Actions:**

- Provide and market resources and space within libraries to cultural groups, which will encourage participation in cultural and creative activities, with an emphasis on targeted need
- Support local cultural groups to grow by curating and promoting information about their cultural and creative community activities and events
- Engage with local artists and cultural groups to share programmes and understand how the service can best support them to deliver community based activities
- Develop a community maker space for local creative groups and residents

**Objective: Develop strong partnership working to deliver joined up working around culture and creativity**

**Actions:**

- Share programmes of work with key partners including Wirral's Culture team and Liverpool City Region library authorities to identify areas of collaboration
- Being aware of opportunities for Wirral Libraries to participate in national and regional cultural initiatives and identify and maximise external funding opportunities
- Forge new partnerships with health services, further and higher education, third sector organisations and technological and commercial industries to deliver new initiatives
- Identify success stories to promote Wirral Libraries locally and further afield and apply for awards to recognise achievements and best practice to support future funding applications and partnership working

# (i) 4.4 Strategic priority four
# Health and Wellbeing

**Healthier, Happier, Connected**

We will provide access to trusted health information and resources and will support the development of connected communities to improve wellbeing.

Libraries have long been a trusted destination for information, including information about health conditions, their treatment and prognosis. Keeping people well and supporting people to manage their illnesses through accessible information, signposting to additional support and reading for wellness & self-care, promotes healthy living and self-management.

Research from the Reading Agency has also found that the benefits of reading include, increased empathy, better relationships with others, reduced symptoms of depression and dementia, and improved well-being throughout life.  It is also widely recognised that social connection improves physical health and psychological well-being, with strong social connection leading to a 50% increased chance of longevity.

**CASE STUDY**

### Reminiscence Box Scheme and Memories Afternoons

A partnership with the Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Library and Knowledge Services Outreach team offers reminiscence boxes for loan to local care settings. Each box in our reminiscence box collection covers a different theme, including 'Washday memories', 'A man's world', 'School days' and 'Toys and games'. Items are specially selected to provide a sensory experience for the user, so as well as objects that stimulate the sense of touch (clothes brush, knitted baby clothes, Bakelite telephone), we also have items to evoke memories from smells (lavender, shoe polish, carbolic soap) and sounds (music CDs, school bell). In conjunction Memories Afternoons are hosted within our libraries and are supported by Dementia Together Wirral. Residential and nursing homes, as well as the general public are invited to share in refreshments, singing, and sometimes even dancing with music provided by local choirs.

### Feedback from Wirral participants

"So lovely to see John join in with the singing. He struggles to hold a conversation but comes to life when the music starts"

"...our ladies' faces light up and their mood changes, whilst singing and talking about past memories from things found in the box, superb idea..."

**CASE STUDY**

### Health and Wellbeing marketplace

Every year, as part of Health and Wellbeing week, Wirral Libraries host a multi-agency health & wellbeing marketplace within one of its libraries. A variety of agencies, such as Age UK, Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Library and Knowledge Services Outreach team, Dementia Together Wirral, Healthwatch Wirral, Macmillan Community Wellbeing, Public Health nurses, Wirral Autistic Society and community pharmacies attend. The event provides visitors with the chance to access health information and support in a relaxed nonclinical environment. Feedback has shown great success with many referrals to support agencies.

### Feedback from Wirral participants

"I just had my blood pressure taken and the nurse advised on how it could be lowered, all done in my local library…. amazing"

"'Oh wow, I didn't know this existed (about Wirral Autistic Society support available) …."

**Objective: Promote access to trusted information on a range of health issues including specific medical conditions and public health issues and provide self-management support**

**Actions:**

- Innovate and share existing programmes that support physical and mental health, and develop new initiatives with volunteers, third sector and public health partners to deliver resources and services to people with physical and mental health conditions
- Continue to develop and provide accessible, high-quality health information and signpost and offer extended support for public health initiatives
- Work with key partners to provide staff and volunteers with relevant health training sessions

**Objective: Provide a range of reading opportunities and creative and social activities, within homes and accessible trusted spaces, which engage and connect communities, to reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing**

**Actions:**

- Work with partners and volunteers to increase the offer of creative and social activities for all ages, building capacity in areas with few community networks
- As part of the development of the social prescribing approach currently being developed, we will work with health partners to design an offer connected to libraries that supports health and wellbeing
- Recruit volunteers to our services, whilst proactively encouraging and supporting people with health and wellbeing needs
- Develop dementia friendly libraries when buildings are refurbished, and deliver autism friendly initiatives

# 5. What next and how will we know if we are getting it right?

**5.1** An implementation plan for the delivery of this strategy will be developed upon approval of this document. A set of measures will be included in the plan to monitor progress and success. The delivery will be overseen by our Management Board. The Board will receive quarterly reports to monitor our progress.

**5.2 Progress and success will be measured in several ways including:**

- **CIPFA key performance indicators**

- **Strategic priority 1 - Reading**
  - Support reading attainment in areas of identified need
  - Increase in community and resident led reading initiatives and activities in areas of identified need
  - Increase in book issues for targeted areas of stock (physical and electronic)

- **Strategic priority 2 - Information and Digital**
  - Increase of and attendance at digital activities and events in areas of identified need
  - Increase in uptake of library online services
  - Increase in the usage of the local history digitised collections
  - Increase in engagement satisfaction

- **Strategic priority 3 - Culture and Creativity**
  - Increase of and attendance at cultural and creative activities and events in areas of identified need
  - Increase in community usage of libraries by local cultural groups in areas of identified need
  - Increase in new partnerships and externally funded initiatives in areas of identified need

- **Strategic priority 4 - Health and Wellbeing**
  - Increase in health and wellbeing book issues
  - Increase in activities and events that have a health and wellbeing focus in areas of identified need
  - Increase in dementia and autism friendly facilities

**5.3** We will also see people benefiting from a joined-up Wirral Council offer aligned to the Wirral Council Plan 2025, in which we will work with other public services from youth, culture and health to secure the best opportunities and outcomes for residents whilst supporting the Council's emerging target operating model. We will do this by devising new ways to measure preventative activities and services and demonstrate the added value that the Library Service can bring.

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