

WIRRAL LIBRARIES – A NEW CHAPTER

WIRRAL LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY DOCUMENT 2012 – 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategy document details how the Wirral Council Library Service will face the many challenges it and all other Library Services face in respect of changes in technology, usage, and the overwhelming support Wirral Libraries enjoy from the public. Libraries in Wirral will provide both the traditional environment that so many want to continue to enjoy, and will develop a range of services within the stringent financial times that every area of public service now faces

This document will be periodically reviewed to ensure it remain relevant and focused on the challenges Libraries face to provide a high quality service.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A review was undertaken of the Library service on Wirral in 2008/09 and the decisions made were subject to a review requested by the then Secretary of State. Wirral is now investing in its Library network and linking them with the network of One Stop Shops while an outcome of that review was that a Library Strategy or Plan was required which would set out the way forward and provide the base upon which its future decisions would be made. This is that document.

1.1.2 The Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport quotes a decline in the number of visits to library premises of around 25% over a 16 year period, and a steady decline in the loans of adults' books over the decade prior to 2008/9 by more than a third. This may be attributed to a number of reasons, the most significant of which are:

- Information and knowledge that was historically only available in library buildings is now increasingly available electronically via the web.
- Books – especially paperbacks - have become significantly cheaper to buy and more people are using the web to both download and buy books.
- Reference information provision is also in decline via hard copy although locally it is well used and popular but with a growing trend to utilise our on-line resources which also reflects the national picture.
- Loans to Children nationally continue to rise and locally the Summer Reading Challenge sees an annual rise in numbers involved.

1.1.3 However, whilst the traditional role of lending books and providing resources is in decline, and nationally visitor numbers and book issues are falling year on

year, in Wirral we have seen book issues increase and little significant change in visit levels. Public resistance to the planned library closures in 2009 showed that Wirral residents still highly value their library service. Wirral's Library Service plays a vital community role in each of its sites and this will continue to be the cornerstone of how the service moves forward, reflecting local requirements as well as the many technological advances that are now available.

1.1.4 Council Members have determined that there will be no library closures and have committed to the development of an integrated Library and One Stop Shop service, with generic staff delivering a library service and access to other council and partner services. In addition funding has been made available to modernise the service with the provision of wi-fi, e-books and customer information screens, supported by the development of linked One Stop Shops and Libraries alongside on off funding for a major publicity campaign (More than Books).

1.1.5 The current economic climate will inevitably impact on the resources available to the library service, however the integration of the library and one stop shop services presents an opportunity to be innovative in how we think about the services, and how we develop and deliver them.

1.2 **Customer Insight**

1.2.1 Research carried out nationally by the Shared Intelligence and IPSOS MORI (2010) on behalf of the Museum Libraries and Archive Council (MLA) – 'What do the public want from libraries?' presented an insight into what motivates people to use libraries. Their findings are based on a survey of 1,102 adults nationally and a series of focus groups. The key messages from this report are that the public see libraries' core purpose as being about reading, learning (particularly children's education) and finding information. The report highlighted that:

- Libraries are loved and trusted – but awareness of the library offer is low
- The public thinks that libraries are principally about books and reading
- Customer service and book stock are the most important elements of a good library service

1.2.2 When we compare our own customer insight with what the public is saying nationally about libraries, there are some common themes. A study undertaken by consultants Torkildsen Barclay 'Wirral Library Stakeholder Review – Engagement with Stakeholders' revealed that, whilst Wirral libraries are viewed by many as being the 'hub' of the Community, and are safe, known, trusted, respected and comfortable, they are also seen as 'dated' and not having not moved with the times.

1.2.3 It is clear that Wirral's library service needs to be developed sympathetically, retaining and building upon the elements that are valued, whilst ensuring that the service is modern, relevant and accessible to all, and responsive to resident needs.

1.3 Setting the Context: Wirral – the Place and People

1.3.1 Wirral comprises a mix of distinct and discreet communities, encompassing urban and rural, affluent and deprived. There is a growing ageing population and a high number of blue badge holders, indicating a high level of reduced mobility. Whilst, the total number of residents who consider themselves to be from ethnic minority groups is low, there is a small percentage of residents who do not speak English as a first language. The most common first languages spoken on Wirral other than English are Bengali and Polish.

1.3.2 Unemployment levels are high in many areas of the Wirral, and poverty is a very real issue to many households. Health indicators such as obesity and cigarette, drug and alcohol dependency are high in some areas, whilst the life expectancy differs by as much as 10 years between the most affluent and the most deprived areas.

1.3.3 Wirral Council's corporate plan, which was developed as a direct result of its consultation exercise 'Wirral's future – be part of it' outlines the Council's goals and how they will be delivered. There are four themes in the plan:

- Your Family
- Your Neighbourhood
- Your Economy, and
- Your Council

1.3.4 The development of Wirral's libraries is a key element of the 'Your Neighbourhood' theme. However the provision of library services will also contribute to the other themes, providing activities for families, and a hub for information, working to support learning and the development of new skills, as well as providing job clubs and information about taxes and benefits, and encouraging residents to get involved in their communities.

2. WIRRAL'S LIBRARIES

2.1 There are 24 libraries across Wirral, and the political position remains that there is no intention to close any. However it is clear that with reducing budgets and customer expectations, a more strategic approach to service delivery is required. The current expectation for all services is to maximise effectiveness (doing the right thing) and efficiency (doing it in the right way) and Wirral's Library Service also works to these principles.

2.2 We have listened to what our customers are telling us and will continue to do so. We have considered current library usage, and propose to provide the following service across the Borough.

2.3 There will be four main libraries at Birkenhead, Wallasey, Bebington and West Kirby. We propose that these libraries will be open from Monday to Saturday and will be open during weekday evenings.

- 2.4 Our customers tell us that they want their libraries to be open on Wednesdays, and analysis of visitor figures shows that the number of evening users is very low. Therefore we propose that the remaining libraries will be open from Monday to Saturday, but will not be open in the evenings. We believe that this offering provides a strategic response to the conflicting pressures of customer demands and budgetary constraints.
- 2.5 At the heart of these changes will be the link between Libraries and One Stop Shops that Wirral Council is committed to which will allow both services to be available at all sites and maximise both service efficiency and effectiveness for the better ongoing provision of quality services.
- 2.6 We will pilot both this linkage and these opening times at Heswall and Eastham Libraries, and will listen carefully to our customers' views on these arrangements before deciding whether this model should be rolled out to the other sites.
- 2.7 24/7 access to library services is available via the internet, which we will continue to develop to respond to this increasing service demand. Reservations, renewals and catalogue searches can all be made on-line, and we will soon be introducing e-books so that book issues will also be available remotely.
- 2.8 For those without internet access a telephone service will be available during the evenings, providing a reservation, renewal and enquiry service.
- 2.9 In addition to the core library facilities available at all Wirral libraries, which is detailed in 4.9 below, our central libraries will also offer:
- reference facilities
 - an audio visual library
 - an exhibition space
 - meeting room
 - study area, and
 - a coffee area.
- 2.10 We plan to introduce a café facility at those sites where there is space and an anticipated customer demand. We are working with partners to develop a facility aimed at providing vulnerable adults with skills and training with a view to getting them into regular work.
- 2.11 We will introduce RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) self service facilities in our busier libraries or where a business case can be made. This will create efficiencies in the long term, although there is a significant initial investment to be made.

3. OUR VISION FOR THE WIRRAL LIBRARY SERVICE

- 3.1 The 'Wirral Library Service Review' identified that within Wirral, there are two quite clear perceptions of libraries:

- The Library as a “Place”, and
- The Library as a “Service”

It suggested that a potential definition or vision for the library could be

- 3.2 “A Wirral library is a friendly, accessible place that provides a safe, trusted and welcoming resource aimed at meeting the needs of the local community. Its focus is on providing information, knowledge and reading for self improvement and enjoyment”.

4. THE LIBRARY AS A PLACE

- 4.1 *A Wirral library is a friendly, accessible place that provides a safe, trusted and welcoming resource aimed at meeting the needs of the local community.*

- 4.2 The review describes the library building as a place where most people feel comfortable and which people feel positive about. ‘The subtle association with free, non compulsory self improvement, information and learning is one of the reasons for this.’

- 4.3 There is a strong Council commitment to developing the library as a community hub. Our corporate plan states that:

‘We will encourage everyone to utilise their local facility as a safe, warm and secure social space with provision to access services, search for jobs and training , improve literacy levels or to meet and make friends.’

- 4.4 Residents will be able to go to a library to access books, computers and information, as well as Council and Partner services and locally specific information. Where possible, space will be made available to the Community for events and meetings.

- 4.5 Our One Stop Shops have a proven track record of working with service areas and partner organisations to deliver services and access to services in the heart of the community. We will build on this experience, and bring together the arrangements developed with partner organisations by both the library and one stop shop services to develop a more strategic offering. We will continue to work to develop the range of information and services available, ensuring that they reflect the needs of the community they serve, so that we can provide people with the information that they need from one convenient location.

- 4.6 To this end we have introduced a new job role in libraries and one stop shops. The new customer service assistants will provide general library services as well as offering first stage information and advice on all council and a range of partner services. This is a pivotal role in this new service, and it is vital that staff are well trained and that any changes/ new service are effectively communicated to all front line staff. Therefore a weekly training hour will be introduced to allow for meetings, training and updates. The ‘Customer Service Toolkit’ (an on-line database to support the delivery of services) will be

extended to include library services. A service level agreement will be developed to ensure that the library offering is delivered to an agreed standard.

- 4.7 Customer feedback and customer insight will inform service development, so that, whilst there will be consistency across all sites, the services will reflect the needs of the community they serve. The libraries will also be key to engaging in consultation with all Wirral communities to ensure that they are all able to make their voices heard and influence the way in which the wider Council does business.
- 4.8 We will work with colleagues to refresh the library 'brand' with a view to making them more welcoming and relevant to all.
- 4.9 All library buildings will be developed to respond to local needs. However they will all provide the following core library facilities:
- A wide variety of books
 - Internet access
 - Free access to key websites such as ancestry.co.uk, Encyclopaedia Britannica on-line, knowuk.com and newsuk.co.uk
 - Wi-fi provision
 - Photocopying and faxing service
 - Newspapers and magazines
 - A library service for children and young people
 - Activities and events, and
 - Provision for learning
- 4.10 Where space allows, provision will also be made for an exhibition space, meeting room and study area.
- 4.11 In addition every library building will provide a one stop shop service offering information and signposting for all Council services and a range of partner organisations. An enhanced one stop shop service will be offered at existing co-located sites, and will be introduced at other sites where the need is identified.

5. THE LIBRARY AS A SERVICE

- 5.1 *Its focus is on providing information, knowledge and reading for self improvement and enjoyment.*
- 5.2 The library service will be developed by library professionals as a coherent, cohesive and strategic provision, focussing on the priorities identified and outlined in this strategy, and utilising existing resources effectively to maximise desired outcomes.
- 5.3 The library service will not be confined to books and buildings, and will include a significant amount of outreach work. We will work closely with partner

organisations, using them as a strategic tool to form a part of the overall delivery of the library service. The strategic library team will work to define what library services are required, and will then work with partners to ensure that appropriate services are delivered – either directly, through partnerships, through outsourcing, enabling work or grant aid. The service will be structured around specified outcomes, which will be aligned to corporate and local priorities.

5.4 The library service will have the following clearly defined functions:

- Reading for Pleasure
- Information for study, research, self improvement and knowledge
- The development of individual literacy
- A source of local community information
- A source of public service information

5.5 Reading for Pleasure

5.5.1 Historically the provision of books has always been the most important library function of a library, and the provision of free, comprehensive and accessible resources for reading for pleasure is still one of the key roles of the library service.

5.5.2 Wirral Library Service will develop a book stock strategy to ensure that the book stock at each library is varied, wide-ranging, contemporary and attractive, and is geared to local needs and preferences. We will use local knowledge (customer insight information) to ensure that specific groups are catered for locally (for example by making Polish books available in areas of high numbers of Polish residents).

5.5.3 This will be achieved by maximising the use of available tools such as SmartSM and other stock selection tools where appropriate. We will review suppliers and book ordering processes to ensure value for money is achieved.

5.5.4 We have introduced our e-book facility, which will offer improved value for money and will attract new users to the library service and we will now look to expand its use to complement and enhance our traditional lending facility.

5.5.5 We will ensure the delivery of a varied programme of story times, reading groups and events such as competitions, author visits and summer reading schemes, to encourage reading for pleasure and attract new library users. We will work with partners and colleagues to ensure that the offering is strategically developed to address national priorities and respond to local needs.

5.5.6 We will devise a programme to encourage hard to reach groups and non library users into reading for pleasure, working with partner organisations, such as 'Get into Reading', to ensure a strategic offering that focuses on areas of greatest need.

5.5.7 We will continue to provide our home readers' service and will review it to ensure that it continues to deliver value for money, and consider options for further outreach work to target those that cannot access libraries (eg care home residents).

5.5.8 We will continue to provide our audio visual service and will review it to ensure that it continues to offer value for money. We will review our stock supplier and keep abreast of technological advancements in the field. We will explore partnership working to reduce costs.

5.6. **Information for study, research, self improvement and knowledge**

5.6.1 Wirral's reference library facilities are still well used, especially by those researching local and family history. However there is a rapid increase in the use of IT to support research and learning. Wirral's reference library facility therefore needs to be modernised to respond to this change in emphasis and usage.

5.6.2 We will review our reference library provision with a view to developing a more modern and strategic offering. We will work to develop a reference library service that is accessible and comprehensive but also cost effective.

5.6.3 We will achieve this by reviewing alternative arrangements for making information and resources available (eg by exploiting IT functionality), and will look to utilise any available funding streams, partnership working and volunteers to support the reference facility.

5.6.4 We will also develop closer links with Wirral's Archive Service to provide a more cohesive and efficient local and family history reference facility and assist both services in providing the Council with the best value For Money in these closely linked service areas.

5.6.5 We will continue to provide a newspaper and magazine facility and will review our orders to ensure that they offer value for money and represent the needs and preferences of the local residents. Where alternatives are available (eg on-line) we will consider whether it is appropriate to continue to purchase paper copies.

5.6.6 We will provide access to our reference materials and will review our facility in liaison with local interest groups, partner agencies and the archive service that will develop a strategy for the storage and retrieval of original documents, which delivers efficiencies whilst retaining public accessibility.

5.6.7 We have expanded our wi-fi to all libraries which will improve easy on-line access to the library catalogue and allow our building to become even more a place to come to and use on line facilities.

5.6.8 We will review our public PC provision and develop a library public access IT strategy to ensure that public on-line access is able to be continued and provide a simple, safe and secure access structured around our corporate priorities.

5.6.9 This will incorporate a review of the number of public access PCs available at each library with a view to maximising utilisation and focussing available resources on the areas of greatest need. Where there is an identified need (ie areas of lowest average household income), but low levels of usage, we will work with the local communities to explore the reasons for this, and to develop a plan to overcome identified barriers.

5.6.10 It will also include a review of the IT courses and support provided by partner organisations, with a view to ensuring that such courses are offered in libraries and these focus on the areas of greatest identified need.

5.6.11 We will continue to provide free access to on-line resources such as newsuk, ancestry.co.uk etc, and will ensure that the provision offers value for money and meets the needs and preferences of the local community.

5.6.12 We will review all reading and self-improvement courses, activities and events provided by the library service as well as other partners and agencies, and develop a plan for the ongoing provision of a comprehensive, effectively targeted and strategic programme of activities aimed at meeting the needs of local communities and focussed on the areas of greatest need.

5.6.13 We will review the provision of homework clubs and educational support activities to develop a strategic programme focussed on the areas of greatest identified need.

5.7 The development of individual literacy

5.7.1 The development of literacy across the Borough is a key focus of the library service which will work closely with colleagues and partner organisations to develop a literacy strategy aimed at identifying target groups, and setting some clearly defined actions and measurable outcomes for improving literacy levels.

5.7.2 The strategy will incorporate the following elements:

- We will continue to deliver an effective and efficient Bookstart programme, ensuring that the key anticipated outcomes are monitored and reported, and that action is taken to improve outcomes where appropriate.
- We will liaise with Wirral schools to encourage library usage and study skills among school age children.
- We will develop partnership links within the Council and with partner organisations to review the current offerings aimed at increasing literacy, and to develop a strategic literacy programme aimed at hard to reach groups, scheduled at times and places that are convenient to them.
- We will develop volunteers to support the literacy programme where appropriate and will deliver national reading initiatives as and when required.

5.8 A source of local community information

- 5.8.1 Wirral libraries have always provided a focal point for the communities they serve, and provision has traditionally been made for the display of posters and flyers for local events.
- 5.8.2 We will continue to be a source of local information for clubs, societies, events and attractions, and link in to work being done in other Council departments (such as 'TeenWirral', 'Wirral Well' and 'Family Information Service') to make available information for children, families and young people as well as vulnerable people.
- 5.8.3 We will develop criteria and a set of standards for the display of local and community information, and will work with local organisations and volunteers to ensure that it is accessible, comprehensive, contemporaneous and well maintained.

5.9 A source of public service information

- 5.9.1 Library and one stop shop managers will work with partners and colleagues to carry out a review of partnership working in line with the Council's overall objectives, and to develop a strategic public information service focussed on identified local and national priorities.

6. CORPORATE PLAN

- 6.1 The Library Service will play a key role in supporting a number of the key objectives outlined in the corporate plan as follows:

6.2 Your Family – Children and Young people

- 6.2.1 Wirral libraries are already well-used by children, and there are many national and local initiatives to encourage young people to visit libraries. These include:

- Book Start packs
- Bounce and Rhyme activities
- Craft and activity sessions
- School visits
- Story times and reading groups
- Summer reading challenge

- 6.2.2 In its Corporate Plan the council has identified that 'some children and young people experience real disadvantage, poverty, hardship and failure to achieve the results they should in school. Our work will be targeted at seeking to ensure that all of our young people grow up in safety and have the best possible start in life.'

- 6.2.2 In order to support these aims the library service will:

- Develop closer links with children centres to develop a strategic approach to activities and programmes which support families and

children, and to encourage children and their families to become active library users.

- Develop links with other services and organisations aimed at supporting children and families to ensure that the library service supports and compliments the initiatives and work that they do.
- Provide reading groups across the Borough, with a focus on target groups and in areas where literacy levels are lowest.
- Provide homework clubs in areas where educational achievement is lowest, to provide a quiet and supportive study area with the right resources (PCs, printers and access to reference materials).
- Provide information and signposting on further and higher education as well as job clubs with a focus on areas with highest levels of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

6.3 Your Family – Adult Social Services

6.3.1 A significant proportion of regular library users are elderly, and many use libraries to read newspapers, for social interaction and as a warm and safe place to visit. The library service already provides a comprehensive service for the elderly and vulnerable including:

- Adult learning classes
- Audio books
- Home Reader Service
- Reading groups for vulnerable groups

6.3.2 The Corporate Plan states that ‘A key priority for the Council is to improve the quality of services we deliver for vulnerable people’. We want to ‘make sure that people can enjoy a high quality of life with maximum independence’.

6.3.3 Wirral libraries can provide stimulation and learning experiences to the elderly and vulnerable to ensure that they enjoy a high quality of life and play an active part in society.

6.3.4 In order to support these aims the library service will:

- Develop closer links to organisations and partners working with the elderly and vulnerable to ensure that the library service is meeting the needs of older and vulnerable citizens.
- Provide reading groups aimed at the elderly at times to suit them.
- Provide reading groups for other vulnerable groups at times and places to suit them (eg hospitals, care homes).
- Develop its volunteering scheme so that visitors to the library can become library volunteers and take a more active part in the library community if they wish to do so.
- Develop a strategic approach to activities and programmes for adult learning and self-improvement activities across the Borough by working with partners and agencies.
- Develop links with social enterprises to support the development of vulnerable adults.

6.4. Your Neighbourhood

6.4.1 The Corporate Plan places Wirral Libraries at the heart of the community, stating that 'We will...promote the service across all communities, with particular emphasis on the most hard to reach groups in our society'.

6.4.2 In order to support these aims the library service will:

- Work with hard to reach groups and their representatives to gain an understanding of the barriers to accessing the service.
- Develop closer links with partner organisations working with adult literacy to develop a strategic approach to adult literacy activities and programmes, focussing on areas with the lowest levels of adult literacy
- Develop programmes for those people for whom English is a second language (ESL), focussing resources on the areas with highest levels of ESL residents.
- Recognising that anti social behaviour in young people often stems from boredom and low self esteem, work with youth services to identify gaps in the current offering to young people, and provide activities and learning opportunities that are relevant and accessible to young people at times and places that suit them. We will focus on areas with highest levels of anti-social behaviour.
- Working closely with our One Stop Shop colleagues in provision of our jointly located services which will increase our place and role in the neighbourhoods and communities of Wirral.

6.5 Your Economy

6.5.1 Wirral's Corporate Plan aims to reduce economic inactivity and increase employment in all parts of the Borough.

6.5.2 In order to support these aims the library service will:

- Work with partner organisations to provide a strategic delivery of job clubs focussing on areas of highest unemployment.
- Provide WiFi, access to PCs, fax and photocopying facilities to support small businesses.
- Work to improve levels of IT literacy by offering classes and support in the use of PCs, focussing on areas of greatest deprivation.

6.6 Your Council

6.6.1 Wirral Council wants to ‘focus on increasing the involvement of the independent, voluntary and community, faith sectors in Council service delivery, and transfer more power to local Councillors and neighbourhoods.’

6.6.2 In order to support this, the library service will:

- Develop its volunteering scheme so that more support and activities can be offered within existing resources.
- Work with groups in the neighbourhood to ensure that the library service is responsive to local needs.

7. CREATING EFFICIENCIES

7.1 We want to ensure that as much of our budget as possible is spent on books and facilities, and is aligned to the Council's strategic priorities. To this end we will work to reduce overheads and increase income by:

- Exploring available external funding opportunities
- Developing partnership working and shared working wherever practical and if of an assistance to the provision of a Library service.
- Exploiting existing IT functionality and keeping abreast of developments to promote self service and automate administrative functions wherever possible.
- Review and rationalise library charges to appropriately and responsibly maximise income
- Explore opportunities for creating or increasing income streams

8. COMMUNICATION

8.1 It is clear that whilst our library service has a wide ranging offering of events, activities and facilities, many Wirral residents are not aware of what is on offer at their local library, and are equally unaware of the range of services available at our one stop shops. By bringing the two services together we anticipate that there will be an increase in take-up and usage of both service areas.

8.2 We will also develop a joint marketing plan aimed at raising awareness of the Council's library and one stop shop services, as well as a more targeted campaign to increase the take-up of library services among hard to reach groups.

8.3 User groups, volunteers and customer facing staff play a key role in communicating with the public, and processes will be developed to ensure that customers and staff feel they have a role in the further development of the library and one stop shop service.

9. **GOVERNANCE**

- 9.1 Once the strategy has been approved a plan will be developed to take these actions forward and then monitor and report upon them. This work will be overseen by the Head of Service and progress will be reported periodically to Executive Team and Members via the Director of Finance & Deputy Chief Executive.
- 9.2 A new set of performance indicators will be developed to monitor our progress against specified Library objectives, and these will be based on outcomes and help us improve the service. Where possible the reports will be automated and be scrutinised by the Library Management Team and reported to the Head of Service.