



TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 November 2020

REPORT TITLE:	LIBRARY STRATEGY AND NEW LIBRARY MODEL
REPORT OF:	NICOLA BUTTERWORTH: DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report proposes a way forward for Wirral Council's Library Service to deliver a new model that will drive the delivery of the Library Strategy.

The key focus of the draft strategy is to provide library services that address increased service take-up in areas of greatest need by providing attractive and relevant facilities and services, thus reducing inequalities around literacy, skills for work, digital inclusion, health and community cohesion. An effective library service has the capacity to support the delivery of every one of the council's priorities for 2025.

The Plan for 2025 sets out how we will create a partnership with local people, being more collaborative and working in a new way with local people. '*Where they can get involved more, we will encourage and empower them*' – we want local people to get involved, to be at the heart of the library service and to support the delivery of the library strategy.

The new model for the library service sets out an ambitious plan to work with local residents, community groups, partner organisations and stakeholders to co-design and co-deliver the library service. We will work with them to determine the best option for each library to provide an attractive, relevant, modern and flexible library service that they will want to use and that belongs to them. This will mean that each library will deliver services and activities that are focussed on addressing local needs. Our ambition is to create vibrant community facilities that are well-used and that local residents truly value.

In response to Covid our library buildings were closed, but our online offer has continued to grow in take-up as well as in range. Our library service is thus available 24/7 and we will continue to explore partnership arrangements and innovations such as developing our Home Reader Service and Order and Collect offer to extend the service more widely, which will lay the foundations for our new library model. There is also the potential for Order and Collect and other library services to be available in a broader range of sites.

This is a key decision which affects all Wards within the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1. The Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee is requested to note the new draft Library Strategy and model outlined in this report.
2. To authorise the Director of Neighbourhood Services to commence consultation on the proposals contained in the draft Library Strategy and model, with residents, service users and stakeholders in order to design and deliver a modern and sustainable service that meets the needs of different communities across Wirral and report back to a future meeting of the Committee the outcome of that consultation.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

- 1.1. Wirral Council has a statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service and over recent years Wirral's Library Service has been subject to a number of reviews and service changes, all aimed at delivering an integrated portfolio of services that better meet local needs. However, these initiatives have done little to address the variation in library usage seen across the Wirral, or to encourage those with higher levels of need to make better use of the services available.
- 1.2. Many of our libraries, particularly those in areas of greatest need, are underused, with an average cost per visit in the worst performing library as high as £11.94 whilst the average cost per book issue reached £31.99. A summary of the performance of each library in 2019 is outlined in the pen pictures at appendix 1.
- 1.3. Persistent funding reductions in budget year on year have led to a lack of investment in the library buildings, resulting in old fashioned spaces, a lack of modern facilities such as coffee areas and interactive facilities, an outdated and clunky IT offer, and a book stock fund that struggles to adequately resource 24 libraries including 4 central libraries. Some of our libraries are in the wrong places and some are in buildings that are unsuited to delivering the services needed by today's communities and the communities of the future. Condition surveys of the library buildings carried out in 2016 indicated that almost £4.5million would need to be invested just to keep the buildings safe and weatherproof, modernising the facilities to provide more flexible space would require further capital funding.

Developing our strategic aims

- 1.4 Wirral's Library Service is not alone in facing these challenges, and the Government established a Libraries Taskforce to implement the DCMS Independent Library Report for England (2014). In their report 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public

Libraries in England', the Libraries Taskforce identified seven outcomes that libraries contribute to:

- Cultural and creative enrichment
- Increased reading and literacy
- Improved digital access and literacy
- Helping everyone achieve their full potential
- Healthier and happier lives
- Greater prosperity
- Stronger, more resilient communities

- 1.5 Recognising that Local Authorities were struggling to interpret their statutory requirement and had concerns around challenge and judicial review, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provided guidance to councils considering changes to their library offer, advising that they should develop their library services using 7 common design principles, so that they:
- meet legal requirements
 - are shaped by local needs
 - focus on public benefit and deliver a high-quality user experience
 - make decisions informed by evidence, building on success
 - support delivery of consistent England-wide core offers
 - promote partnership working, innovation and enterprise
 - use public funds effectively and efficiently
- 1.6 It states that, at a local level, councils need to take a strategic, long-term approach to transforming their library service to strengthen their organisational and financial resilience. Decisions should be made based on an assessment of need, and actively managed with the community and library professionals. These proposals for a new library model have been developed using this approach.
- 1.7 Libraries Connected is a charity that has evolved from the Society of Chief Librarians and is funded by the Arts Council as the Sector Support Organisation for libraries. As such it has developed a set of Universal Library Offers - the key areas that library stakeholders see as essential to a 21st century library service. These are:
- reading
 - information and digital
 - culture and creativity, and
 - health and wellbeing.
- 1.8 Our draft library strategy (Appendix 2) is shaped around these four key deliverables, and outlines an ambition to deliver a library service that supports the Council to deliver on its priorities, reducing inequalities in these areas by focussing resources on areas of highest identified need.
- 1.9 The Covid pandemic has regrettably highlighted some of the inequalities that the draft 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 draft library strategy addresses these issues and outlines how it will offer relevant services and support through engagement and partnership arrangements.

A New Library Model

- 1.10 In its publication 'Delivering local solutions for public library services. A guide for councillors', the LGA states that:

'Libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them, people explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture. We know that people value the range of books, digital and other resources available, as well as the trained staff who help them. But how people use libraries is changing. If we want our services to continue to be at the heart of communities for generations to come libraries must change as well.'

'Library services can achieve more impact by working in partnership with other agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors, and the adoption of new service delivery models is helping many to reduce costs, share risks and generate new sources of income.' (LGA, August 2017)

Our new library model is based on a comprehensive assessment of the needs of residents, as well as an assessment of existing usage. A desktop analysis of residents' needs by Ward as well as of library service metrics was used as the basis for extensive engagement with key library service stakeholders. Benchmarking data and best practice and lessons learned by other authorities also guided our thinking.

- 1.11 We have consulted with Elected members, residents, partners and library users in 2017 and will do so again on approval of the recommendations, and we believe that this model provides a service that will meet the needs of local residents and deliver community hubs that provide access to a breadth and depth of services and support and operate as a gateway for physical and digital information with literacy and reading at the heart.
- 1.12 The crisis caused by the pandemic and the associated temporary closure of libraries has demonstrated that to some extent a library service can be delivered independent of the library buildings. There has been a significant increase in the take-up of our e-book offer, and library activities such as reading groups, story times and the Summer Reading Challenge have been delivered online. We are now exploring options for making our books and library activities available in

accessible community settings whilst our library buildings remain closed. This provides an early opportunity to test out and refine our new model.

- 1.13 The new library model proposes a programme of work with local residents and stakeholders to co-design and co-deliver a bespoke offer for each area making the best use of available Council and community assets. These conversations will be honest and unprejudiced and will explore alternative options for each library, including co-location with another community service and co-delivery. In this way we will develop a model for each area that is attractive and relevant to local people, building community capital and meeting residents' needs.
- 1.14 Our proposed model is outlined in the slide deck at appendix 3 - it proposes no service closures, while enabling the opportunity to consolidate council buildings, and builds on the excellent partnership work that has been developed over recent years to extend our library offer and join up our services.
- 1.15 The model incorporates an outreach service that will be focussed on needs and addressing inequalities, a comprehensive digital offer that builds on the take-up of the online library service, and a suite of library touchpoints where books, digital services, activities and advice can be accessed.
- 1.16 We will deliver a central library for Wirral in Birkenhead, and 8 neighbourhood libraries, aligned to the 9 Health neighbourhoods. These libraries will provide an enhanced library service and multi-use facilities to provide vibrant neighbourhood hubs with an offer that reflects local needs. We will work with Council colleagues to align these with the neighbourhood model. Our libraries will be accommodated in welcoming and accessible buildings in the heart of neighbourhoods, and we will ensure provision of flexible spaces that will meet current and future needs as well as facilities to meet emerging needs such as cycle storage facilities and lockers, charging points and coffee areas.
- 1.17 Our community libraries will be delivered differently and will reflect the needs of local residents. They may be co-located with appropriate partners in the area, making best use of the public estate and creating vibrant community facilities. They may be delivered by community organisations supported by library staff, building on arrangements already in place. We will work flexibly with local residents and communities to determine the best options, and will ensure that however they are delivered, our libraries remain welcoming and accessible to all.
- 1.18 Take-up of our e-book offer is increasing whilst traditional book-borrowing is reducing. The library today is about so much more than books, and our library spaces need to change to accommodate today's needs. There may be fewer book shelves and more space for creative and digital activities. We will design our libraries to be dementia-friendly, a place where people can spend time without having to spend money; they will be our indoor public spaces reducing social isolation and inequalities.
- 1.19 The draft library strategy and model will support the Council's emerging target operating model where investment in preventative activities and services will reduce the requirement for more expensive and complex interventions further

down the line, thus reducing the costs of children's, adults' and health services in the longer term.

- 1.20 The Council's recent Youth Review has also presented an opportunity to work with Children's Services to deliver a consistent branded youth offer across the Borough. Making use of the library accommodation and facilities we plan to work with Children's Services to deliver a modern and attractive offer that is relevant to both sets of users. This will include meeting spaces, activity spaces, coffee areas, IT facilities, quiet study zones and outdoor space where possible, all of which can be used by library users during the day and young people in the evenings.
- 1.21 This new library model will be affordable, modern, sustainable and relevant and will support the delivery of our draft library strategy as well as our corporate priority to reduce our estate; we will share resources where possible to reduce costs, improve sustainability and join up services.

2. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1. The library service has been in a state of continuous scrutiny since 2009 when library closures were proposed as a result of a strategic asset review. Since then a number of options have been considered including creating a leisure and culture community interest company or charity, which was discounted on the grounds that the library service should be re-modelled before consideration could be given to handing over delivery to an arm's length company.
- 2.2. We have carefully monitored the levels of success of other local authorities who are all struggling to provide an affordable library service with reducing usage and dwindling budgets. Some Councils have succeeded in handing over some libraries to community delivery, although this has generally been as an alternative to threatened closure. Others have joined together with partner organisations such as leisure centres or health centres to provide a joint facility to share costs.
- 2.3. Most Councils however have taken a more pragmatic approach, availing themselves of opportunities for co-locating, partnership working and re-providing as and when they have arisen. This has allowed them to work with communities to provide a more sustainable service.
- 2.4. Maintaining the current provision 'as is' is not a viable option if we want to be able to deliver on the ambitions set out in our draft library strategy to reduce inequalities across the Borough. The service is expensive, many libraries are underused, staffing is stretched and there is a shortage of funding for books, IT facilities and building maintenance and modernisation.
- 2.5. Library service closures are also not a viable option; the fundamental issue is that libraries in the areas of lowest needs tend to be the best-used, whilst those in areas of high need tend to be the least-used – especially in terms of book borrowing. This does not, however, preclude library services moving out of their current accommodation and into other community buildings.

- 2.6. Partnering with leisure and culture has been explored but not progressed. The two services have been brought together within the same area of the Council so that partnership opportunities can be exploited. Co-location works very well at West Kirby, providing a vibrant and well-used community hub, but is not feasible elsewhere. For example, in Bebington, the Oval Leisure Centre and Bebington Central Library could only be co-located with considerable investment and the closure or repurposing of one of the facilities. Opportunities to combine the library service with the Health offer have not presented themselves and would require considerable planning to deliver as a coherent offer across the Borough. Partnering the library offer and the youth offer has some merits, as both services require many of the same facilities such as a coffee / chillout / reading area, IT facilities, wifi, meeting rooms, activity space and an outdoor area, and use their facilities at different times (youth in the evenings and weekends, whilst the libraries are currently shut).
- 2.7. Increasing library income to offset against costs has been fully explored and, while there may be some opportunities to charge some business customers more for certain services, the premise of the library service is that it is a community asset and is free to use. The facilities are generally tired and are not serviced, so we cannot charge commercial rates for their use; investing in them would be very unlikely to provide a return on that investment.
- 2.8. Finally, an extensive piece of work was done to deliver a business case for creating an alternative delivery model for the library service such as a charity, which may benefit the service by rendering it eligible for some grant funding among other benefits. However the business case did not stack up, and the service has since been very successful in working with partners to secure supplementary funding, attracting additional income of over £54,000 over the last 3 years to be spent on library activities, resources and services.
- 2.9. What has been learned over this period is that one size does not fit all. Our libraries serve communities with differing needs, interests, and alternative community facilities. We want to work with those communities to complement the other services available to them, and to provide accessible local library services that they will use and that will enhance their lives and their neighbourhoods

3. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1. Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, every Local Authority is required to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all persons. It must do so in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available.
- 3.2. A Library Inquiry in 2009 of Wirral's plan to close 11 of its 24 libraries found that in making these proposals, the Council had 'failed to make an assessment of local needs in respect of library services'.
- 3.3. Guidance suggests this must be done:
- in consultation with their communities

- through analysis of evidence around local needs
- in accordance with their statutory duties

- 3.4. A comprehensive library needs analysis has been carried out and this has informed the development of our draft library strategy.
- 3.5. In 2013 six One Stop Shop services were co-located in libraries in a move to reduce management costs, increase footfall and provide local access to council and partner services.
- 3.6. Our libraries are currently delivered using a blend of approaches including direct delivery, volunteer run 'library light' sessions, colocation and partner run sessions and community led activities based in libraries to compliment the Council offer. Some libraries, such as Pensby Library, benefit from extensive volunteer and community-delivered services that local residents have developed around local needs and preferences. Other libraries such as Seacombe Library have developed an extensive range of services being delivered by partner and voluntary organisations – again based around local needs.
- 3.7. There are opportunities to further develop these partnership arrangements, exploring colocation, partner delivery and community delivery services to deliver accessible, joined-up, relevant and affordable services and facilities that local residents value and feel a part of. We will work with Children's and Adult Services as well as colleagues in Culture and Archives to deliver local responses to identified needs and to bring these offers into the heart of local communities.
- 3.8. The Council is currently exploring the development of neighbourhood hubs and it is anticipated that these would be aligned to our neighbourhood library model, thus reducing accommodation costs and contributing to the development of vibrant facilities that are well-used and accessible.
- 3.9. The recent Covid pandemic has led to an increase in the uptake of the library's digital offer and we intend to exploit this to enhance and promote our digital offer further, providing 24/7 library services. We will also be developing our Home Reader Service and Order and Collect offer as a response to the pandemic in providing a new way to access services

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. We anticipate that there will be financial benefits from the development of a mixed model of community and partner delivery, led and supported by the service, with strong outreach and digital elements.

The level of savings is dependent on the level of community support and colocations. The full financial implications will follow the development of the model and will be a consideration for the success of the model. The focus of this re-modelling is primarily to deliver a fit for purpose modern and future-proof library offer that delivers flexible accommodation to promote a range of uses.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council has a statutory obligation to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service available to everyone, to promote this service, and to lend books and other written materials free of charge. This model and draft strategy ensure that our library service is not only comprehensive but also efficient, and that it is based on an assessment of local library needs.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1. One of the aims of the new library model is to make best use of the public sector estate and reduce costs by sharing accommodation with relevant partner services thus reducing unnecessary costs as well as reducing its carbon footprint.
- 6.2. Over time it is anticipated that the new library model may lead to a reduction of staffing although initially any staff resources made available through sharing accommodation will be redirected to provide outreach services and build community capacity.
- 6.3. The library service offers access to essential IT for those who cannot afford it and support for those who need it. It is essential that this equipment is kept refreshed to ensure it is compatible with school and business IT software allowing young people homework facilities and adults access to facilities to search and apply for work.

7. RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1. There is a risk associated with community delivered libraries in that volunteer support may not be sustainable, leaving the council with no option but to step back in to provide the service.
- 7.2. There is a further risk that colocations could result in empty buildings; plans for their repurposing or disposal will need to be integrated into this project.

8. ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1. Significant stakeholder engagement has taken place using consultants from BWB, Shared Intelligence and C.Co to inform the needs assessment, the development of the draft library strategy and new model.
- 8.2. We have engaged with Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) representatives with whom we have shared our draft strategy and plans for the development of a new model, and who are comfortable with our proposals for taking the service forward.

- 8.3. Upon approval to progress the new library model, further engagement will take place at a community level to test out the findings of the generic engagement and needs analysis, and to build a further understanding the specific needs of each area and will follow four principles. The consultation will be at a time when proposals are at a formative stage; it will allow those consulted to give intelligent consideration and response; those consulted will be made aware of the factors that are of decisive relevance to any decision and adequate time will be given for consideration and response. This engagement will also be used to seek ideas and suggestions for partnership arrangements and colocation opportunities and to develop a network of community leaders and influencers to collaborate with to increase engagement with the service.
- 8.4. We will engage closely with local Ward councillors in the development and establishment of the locally preferred option for each library.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The draft Library Strategy and New Model are designed to increase participation and uptake from those groups that currently use the service least whilst having the highest needs. The draft strategy is aimed at reducing inequalities across the Borough and has been based on a full library needs assessment; it aims to increase participation in areas of greatest need where the take-up is currently low by providing services and activities that are relevant to and valued by those communities.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been provided.

10. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Modernising the libraries and sharing buildings will reduce the environmental impact whilst investment will result in more attractive buildings which will enhance the local townscape.
- 10.2 Keeping libraries within local communities and increasing our outreach service and online offer will all serve to minimise emissions from car usage. Our libraries will all have cycle storage and water fountains.
- 10.3 Where possible we will invest in environmentally friendly solutions and designs when we modernise our buildings to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 10.4 As a result of the initiatives outlined above, the content and recommendations contained within this report are expected to reduce emissions of Greenhouse Gases.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 - Library Pen Pictures
- Appendix 2 - Library Strategy (Final Draft) 2020-25
- Appendix 3 - Future Library Model
- Appendix 4 - Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- A Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (Sue Charteris; September 2009)
- Achieving a sustainable library service for Wirral: results of an independent needs assessment (Shared Intelligence; January 2017)
- Wirral Borough Council: Re-Imagining Libraries, Leisure, Parks and Cultural Services (Bates Wells Braithwaite; October 2017)
- Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport; updated September 2018)
- Universal Library Offer Handbook (Libraries Connected; September 2020)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date