



Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee

16th June 2021

REPORT TITLE:	DRAFT LIBRARY STRAEGY AND NEW LIBRARY MODEL CONSULTATION UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the work currently being undertaken to deliver a public and stakeholder wide consultation on the draft Library Strategy and proposed new library model. In particular, the report details the development and delivery of internal engagement, subsequent outcomes and an outline of the plan and key milestones relating to the forthcoming public consultation. This includes an anticipated deadline for a final Library Strategy and supporting information including recommendations for the delivery of a modern, fit for purpose and sustainable library service in Wirral.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee is requested to:

- (1) note the action being undertaken to deliver the public consultation on the draft Library Strategy and proposed new model and approve the proposed date of June 28 2021 for start of the public consultation.
- (2) approve the proposed date for the Director to bring a report to Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee 17 November 2021 to present a Final Libraries Strategy with recommendations, and accompanying findings and outcomes of the public consultation.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 Members of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee are being asked to note the action being undertaken in respect of the draft Library Strategy, its vision and priorities, and the delivery of a fully inclusive and accessible public consultation to shape a new library model. The development of the consultation has been considerate of lessons learnt from previous consultation activities, most notably the review by Sue Charteris in September 2009 “A Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council” with focus on establishing need at a local level, ensuring we develop the right interventions at a local level for both Wirral residents and the Council.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Maintaining the current provision ‘as is’ is not a viable option if the Council wants to be able to deliver on the ambitions set out in our draft 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.
- 2.2 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.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 A report was previously presented to Committee on 23 November 2020 which proposed a ‘way forward’ for Wirral Council’s Library Service to deliver a new model that will drive the delivery of the Library Strategy.
- 3.2 The new model and vision for the Strategy was outlined as an ‘ambitious plan to work with residents, community groups, partner organisations and stakeholders to co-design and co-deliver the Library Service’. A commitment was made to work with residents 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 belongs to them.
- 3.3 The draft Library Strategy and aims of the consultation are directly aligned to strategic priorities, such as those contained within the Wirral Council Plan 2025. The development of a future, sustainable operating model for libraries will be fully considerate of these priorities and outcomes, most notably ‘**Safe and Pleasant**

Communities’ and **Brighter Futures**’ which are founded on ‘engaging with our communities’ and ‘investing in our children and young people and their futures’. Working closely with other Council services we will facilitate better access to information, advice, and support when and where it is needed most.

3.4 The Committee was asked to ‘note’ the new draft Library Strategy and 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.

3.5 This report represents a ‘checkpoint’ and progress update on the mandate given to proceed, providing an update to Committee on activities undertaken to deliver this consultation. For clarity, these have been broken down into the following areas:

- Project initiation
- Internal engagement with departmental managers and senior staff
- Internal engagement with library staff
- Have Your Say and forthcoming public consultation (launching June 28 2021)

Project Initiation

3.6 The consultation project was initiated in February 2021 with key strategic libraries staff, directed by Andrew McCartan (AD, Leisure, Libraries and Customer Engagement), Peter Aspinall (Strategy Library Manager), and Mark Payne (Operational Library Manager).

3.7 The scope of the consultation was established to include key internal and external stakeholders as well as a targeted and whole population approach to public consultation. The aims of the consultation were identified as:

- Explore the feasibility of the proposed new library models to meet the ambitions of the Library Strategy 2020-2025;
- Identify how the expectations of users, staff, public and stakeholders can be met with available resources;
- To explore opportunities for co-location with other Council services, partner organisations and community stakeholders;
- Define a comprehensive and efficient Library Service within the context of Wirral’s available resources, reflection national and local priorities and need; and,
- To maximise how the Library Service delivers/contributes to the Council’s priorities and desired outcomes.

3.8 The project timeline was developed with consideration for key COVID remobilisation dates, pre-election period, and other consultation activities being delivered across the Council. With contingency built in, this influenced delivery timescales and proposed end date as recommended in this report.

Internal Engagement – Departmental and Senior Service Management

3.9 A decision was taken to seek meaningful engagement specifically with departmental and senior management across relevant Council services to identify opportunities for alignment and partnership working. They were identified as:

- Regeneration and Place;
- Public Health;
- Adult Social Care;
- Children's Services;
- Resources; and,
- Neighbourhood Services.

3.10 A presentation was provided to each Departmental Management Team (DMT) outlining the key aims and objectives of the consultation as well as the priorities and vision of the draft Library Strategy. Participants were invited to engage in informal discussion on the libraries services as well as identifying key areas of opportunity. A survey was provided after each session as a means of capturing response for final review and assessment of all engagement and consultation outcomes. As a snapshot, the following statements are representative of some of the comments made during these sessions and as survey feedback.

How could we improve our offer to begin supporting or better support your service in the future?
<i>Sharing/partnering of programmes of work.</i>
<i>Community learning facilities.</i>
<i>The Library Service does not operate in isolation, it is a fundamental part of every part of the Council so needs to be embedded in all that we do. It is effectively a community tool for us to engage with.</i>

Can you suggest any further opportunities for partnership working?
<i>Lending scheme, especially for children in care.</i>
<i>Youth Hubs and Clubs to be a partner within the new Youth Offer in 9 neighbourhoods</i>
<i>...we need to focus our services most where we know that lack of educational attainment is a block to future engagement and prosperity. Where we bring together a range of services with literacy and enjoyment of reading and learning at the core is when we get the biggest impact.</i>
<i>We could use the opportunity for Community Wealth building and to get more people interested in Community Asset Transfer and how to start up their own businesses.</i>

3.11 The key aim was to raise the profile and service offer from our Libraries provision and to be a material consideration in wider service strategic business planning across the Council. In addition to the immediate discussion and responses, these sessions led to follow on engagement with wider Council initiatives and external stakeholders/forums. For example, through this we have:

- Engaged with the development of the Heritage and Culture Strategy;
- Establishing networks with the Arts Council;
- Presented at numerous internal/external forums including Registered Providers, Wirral Systems Inequalities, and Domiciliary Care Forum
- Linked into internal initiative looking at an 'Adults Social Care' offer in Neighbourhood services;
- Department for Culture Media Sport (DCMS) (21 May 2021)

Internal Engagement – Library Staff

- 3.12 As well as Council services, a 'Live Event' was delivered to all Libraries Staff and Trade Unions on May 10 2021 with the aim of informing and engaging them of the public consultation, with opportunities to influence and make suggestions on its development.
- 3.13 Although this does not constitute 'formal consultation' there was an understanding that the public consultation and its outcomes will feed into a long-term delivery model that may have associated staff impact. Early engagement with staff was therefore necessary to ensure the scope of *this* consultation was clear as was the current thinking and direction of travel for the service as whole.
- 3.14 The Live Event was a success with 73 attendees (76% of libraries staff) and good engagement with numerous questions put forward. A recording of the event was made available for all libraries staff and a mailbox was set up to take any comments, suggestions, or general queries around the consultation from Libraries Staff. In addition, all staff will naturally get the opportunity to feed into the consultation once it goes live on 28 June 2021.

Have Your Say and Forthcoming Public Consultation (June 28 2021)

- 3.15 Subject to Committee approval, it is proposed that the public consultation will go live on the Council's 'Have Your Say' platform as of June 28 2021 for a period of 6-8 weeks. The questionnaire has been carefully designed with support across Libraries, Intelligence Team, and Communications Team officers.
- 3.16 The form has been reviewed iteratively during its development against its ability to deliver on the consultation aims and provide meaningful insight that will enable Library Services to design a fit for purpose and sustainable offer.
- 3.17 A comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise has been undertaken with widely accepted methodology to identify high interest, high influence stakeholders that will be targeted for workshops/focus groups should they wish to engage. These include stakeholders such as friends of groups and public sector partners with whom we share programmes of work, facilitate within our buildings, or engage with and support in any way.
- 3.18 A robust communications plan will ensure that the consultation is widely publicised and accessible, with easy-read versions available online and as paper copies across

the borough in our Libraries and other strategic venues. As part of this plan, we will also use targeted social media marketing across existing and external channels to ensure we get sufficient response and representation across our communities, businesses, and other organisations.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It is anticipated that the outcomes and intervention emerging as a result the Library Strategy, public consultation, and subsequent future operating model could result in annual savings as detail in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021/22-2025/26 (see **Table 1**). This may include, but is not limited to, rationalisation, reprovisioning and co-location of services, new operating models, lean ways of working, adopting new technologies, energy efficiencies, and new income.

Table 1: MTFP 2021-22/2025-26

Savings	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26
	(£m)	(£m)	(£m)	(£m)	(£m)
Library Strategy		(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)

5.0 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 consultation and its outcomes will support the development of an operating model and final Library Strategy which will ensure that our Library Service is not only comprehensive but also efficient, and that it is based on an assessment of local library needs.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 One of the aims of developing a 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.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The consultation project has been fully considerate of lessons learnt from previous attempts at reprovisioning the service. From early project inception an exercise of understanding all recommendations from the Charteris report (Sep 2009) was undertaken, with a risk matrix designed to ensure we address them. The recommendations from that report have shaped the approach and methodology, informing our 'needs-based' model approach when designing the questionnaire and ensuring we reach identified demographics with a robust and targeted communications plan, amongst others.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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 at a future date.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Details on engagement and consultation work done to date is outlined in Section 3.
- 8.2 In addition, a meeting took place with DCMS 21 May 2021 to update on our activity and to provide an update on our approach and methodology. A further meeting is scheduled for 18th June pre go-live to update on our approach.
- 8.3 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.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The draft Library Strategy and 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.
- 9.2 An equalities impact assessment was provided in support of the initial report presented to Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee 23 November 2020 and is relevant to all associated activities (see [HERE](#)).

10.0 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.
- 10.3 Where possible we will invest in environmentally friendly solutions and designs when we modernise our buildings to reduce their carbon footprint.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

'Library Strategy and New Library Model. Report of: Director of Neighbourhood Services'
(Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee – Monday 23 November 2020)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee	23.11.20