WIRRAL

Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee
January 18th 2022

REPORT TITLE:	LIBRARY STRATEGY AND FUTURE OPERATING MODEL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides the outcomes of the Library Strategy consultation and emerging Library Strategy for approval. Three options (including a preferred) for a new operating model have also been presented for approval to take to consultation.

The Library Strategy and preferred option strives to provide a balanced, modern, and fit for purpose Library Service in Wirral which will ensure that all residents have access to a comprehensive and efficient service. It is intended that the supporting information, detail, and data within this report provides sufficient justification for the preferred option whilst ensuring that the service is relevant, based on need, and financially sustainable.

Most importantly, the preferred option will not disadvantage any one or more area of borough, ensuring that everyone has access to the library service they need, when they need it. This report outlines how Wirral's Library Service will safeguard this vital provision now and for future generations.

RECOMMENDATION/S

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

a) note the key outcomes, themes, and findings from the Library Strategy consultation as set out in paras 2.1 to 2.14;
b) approve the emerging Libraries Strategy in Appendix 1 pending the determination of the Final Strategy following the consultation referred to in c);
c) approve submitting Options 1 to 3 (preferred) for public consultation and engagement with service users, staff, key stakeholders and their representatives during February and March with the outcome to be reported to the first meeting of this Committee in the new municipal year

1.1	Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 the Council has a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all people working, living or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it. Councils also have the power to offer wider library services beyond the statutory service to other user groups. At a national level, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have a statutory duty to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities.

1.2	Maintaining the current provision 'as is' is not a viable option. The service is expensive, many libraries are underused, staffing is stretched and there is a shortage of funding for books, IT facilities, building maintenance and modernisation. The impacts of the pandemic and the associated temporary closure of libraries has demonstrated that to an extent a library service can be delivered independently of current library buildings. There has been a significant increase in the take up of the e-book and e-audio offer and library activities such as reading groups and story times have been delivered online.

1.3	At the time of writing (November 2021) Wirral is now in receipt of an external assurance review undertaken by CIPFA and Ada Burns (finance and governance review respectively) on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). In it, the challenges and impacts on available Council resources and financial position is clear, reviewed against the ask for exceptional financial support. In line with a Council wide mandate, the Library Service must now respond to the outcomes of this review in supporting the Council to develop a forward plan and statement of intent whilst continuing to develop a new operating model. The report makes explicit recommendations and statements relating to Libraries with the following:

- *'…there has only been very limited asset rationalisation in these building types to date. Both Leisure centres and Libraires are currently subject to a strategic review, which may impact on the volume of assets required in future'.*

- *'…the Council will need to develop a more realistic asset disposal strategy, focusing on reducing the number of libraries, leisure centres, golf clubs, and public conveniences'.*

- *'…acknowledged the relatively high provision available – including libraries, leisure centres and golf courses'.*

1.4	The external assurance review weighs heavily on assets, condition, and financial sustainability but this must be balanced against the Council's statutory duty under the 1964 Act. This report and development of a future operating model has been cognisant of the findings of this report and the broader challenges facing the council whilst ensuring the risks associated with any future proposal are appropriately assessed, mitigated (if applicable), and would stand scrutiny against external/judicial review.

1.5   The challenge facing the library service is to continue to deliver sustainable services in accordance with its statutory duties at a time of significant pressures on available resources. It is anticipated that the preferred option for a future operating model detailed in this report will enable the Council to continue to deliver a service which is compliant with the Act, based on current and future need, and will be cost efficient and sustainable.

1.6   This is an opportunity for the service to positively adapt and react to ensure that continuous improvement in provision is at the forefront of everything the Council does and supports the delivery of the Wirral Plan objectives.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

2.0   REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

Outcomes of Libraries Strategy Consultation

2.1   This section provides members with a high-level overview the outcomes of the recent consultation. For full detail and results please see Appendix 1.

2.2   The Library Strategy consultation was designed to obtain the views and ideas of residents and stakeholders to inform the development of the new Library Strategy and options future operating model.

2.3   The public consultation focused on several different themes. Information was requested about current libraries to find out what facilities and services worked for residents, and which do not. People were asked what would improve the service including things such as better book collections, more eBooks and eAudio availability, event space, dedicated work and study pods or digital creative spaces for video editing or gaming suites. Residents were also asked about delivery models and whether they and/or a community organisation would be interested in supporting the service.

2.4   All feedback has been used to develop the emerging Library Strategy for the next five years and help the council develop a sustainable offer that meets the needs of the community both now, and for future generations.

Methodology

2.5   The public consultation was predominantly carried out using Wirral Council's 'Have Your Say' consultation portal at www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk.

2.6   To inform people about the engagement key documents were published on the webpage and were available for download. These included an overview of the consultation and a set of Frequently Asked Questions, the Draft Library Strategy, and an easy read version of the survey.

2.7 The questionnaire was published on the website to allow residents to answer the questions online. To ensure accessibility respondents were able to request paper copies of the survey and an easy read version. Paper copies were made available in different venues and any groups could request a set of copies as required. In addition, people could contact the team directly and submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the Have Your Say site.

2.8 An ideas board was available online where participants could both submit their own ideas and interact with other people's ideas by 'liking' and commenting on them.

2.9 In addition to these tools a series of events and key stakeholder sessions were offered and held to allow people to talk directly to Library Staff, get their questions answered and feedback their views and comments. This included sessions in the community, in schools, with Council staff and at specific stakeholder meetings. A list of community engagement session is provided below (see **Table 1**):

Table 1: Community Engagement Events

Location	Date
Pyramids Shopping Centre, Birkenhead	09/09/2021
Cherry Tree Shopping Centre, Liscard	31/08/2021
Little Beechwood Centre	20/08/2021
St James Centre, Birkenhead	20/08/2021
Heswall (outside library)	19/08/2021
Seacombe Children's Centre	23/08/2021
Heart of Egremont	24/08/2021
Pensby - Kylemore Community Centre	06/09/2021
Leasowe Leisure Centre	28/08/2021
Irby - St Chad's Church	03/09/2021
Moreton - Lingham Park	04/09/2021
Hoylake - Melrose Hall	08/09/2021
Upton - Victory Hall	17/09/2021
Noctorum - St Andrews Church	13/09/2021

2.10 At six week and nine-week periods during the consultation the responses received were analysed in relation to the demographics of responses at those time points. Following this analysis communications were reviewed and targeted to specific areas and through different communication methods to different age groups. The aim was to maximise the reach of the engagement and ensure that all residents interested in providing feedback would be able to engage.

2.11 Library Officers were in contact with the DCMS. Two meetings took place with the DCMS on 21st May 2021and 18th June 2021 to update on activity and to provide an informal check on the approach and methodology to the consultation.

Key Findings

- A total of 1,562 survey responses were received, 1,073 online responses to the survey, 459 paper copies and 30 Easy Read forms. All the responses have been amalgamated and are reported in entirety.
- 90.8% of respondents stated that they were Wirral residents.
- The libraries that are most used by respondents are:
  - West Kirby Library (11.8%)
  - Wallasey Central (11.6%)
  - Bebington (11.2%)
  - Birkenhead Central (10.9%)
- The most common frequency to use the library is once a month (40.4%) followed by once a week (33.8%).
- The most prevalent reason by far to visit the library is to borrow and return books (89.9%).
- The majority of respondents, 73.2% of respondents felt positively about the service provided by Wirral Libraries.
- Reading (reading groups/Challenges/books) was deemed the most important service, gaining an average rank of 1.51 (where 1 is most important and 4 is least important).
- The type of library that most respondents felt would be most suitable for the library that they use the most is a Neighbourhood Library (48.8%). Conversely, under 16s preferred the Central Library option (42.1%).
- Respondents predominantly thought that community groups (58.9%) and Volunteers (56.1%) could support the council to deliver the library service.
- 71 contributors submitted or commented on 66 ideas to the ideas board tool. Visitors to the board were able to 'vote' for ideas that they liked. Common themes amongst the ideas were:
  - Events (41 Ideas) – respondents suggested events they wanted at libraries including: children's events, more courses, guest speakers / authors
  - Facilities (17 ideas) – café facilities, agile workspaces, and to improve computer access and support
  - Staffing (13 ideas) – use some volunteers, paid staff needed
  - Open libraries (10 ideas) – open libraries after the Covid-19 closures, keep libraries open in general, local libraries needed
  - Community hub (10 ideas) – libraries should be community hubs
  - Books (9 ideas) – greater variety of books needed, concentrate on books, rotate books.

2.12 As well the broad findings in the consultation report the data has been broken down by ward and library level to support local need-based decision making. This has been achieved using a PowerBI dashboard that has been provided to the strategic library team. Although this doesn't lend itself to being provided as a supporting document, an example of the dashboard has been provided in Appendix 2.

Constraints

2.13   The consultation was undertaken during a period of moving restrictions, with the approach having to evolve with emerging COVID guidance. It was recognised from project inception that it wasn't optimal for maximising responses and representation, without mitigation. Therefore, the service took an iterative approach to managing the consultation, constantly evolving its method of delivery to suit. The survey was offered online, via paper format in open libraries, socially distanced community events in areas with no access to a library, targeted social media marketing in areas of low uptake, and broad physical and digital marketing of the consultation. The consultation was also included within Home Reader Service packs and easy read versions were available on request. The consultation was also promoted via various partnership forums and meetings to extend its reach further.

2.14   The outcome of the consultation is just one part of a suite of evidence and information that have been used to support the development of options for a future operating model.

Update on Development of Libraries Strategy

Library Strategy Part I

2.15   In response to the 2019 Libraries Connected review of the Universal Offers, Wirral Libraries decided to refresh its library strategy and take the opportunity to align to the then Wirral Council Plan 2025. Partly funded by Arts Council England (ACE), Libraries Connected is the sector support organisation for libraries. The Universal Offers were initially launched in 2013 to demonstrate the power of public libraries to enrich the lives of individuals and their communities. The offers and outcomes outlined by Libraries Connected provide a robust framework that aims to support the core public library offer and stimulate innovation and development. Furthermore, the strategy has incorporated the recommendations of the national Libraries Taskforce published in "Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021"[1].

2.16   Supported by the Universal Offers framework and the Libraries Taskforce's library service outcomes, a set of four key priorities have been designed that underpin the strategy.

- Reading
  - Engage, Imagine, Discover
- Information and Digital
  - Inform, Inspire, Innovate
- Culture and Creativity
  - Explore, Create, Participate
- Health and Wellbeing
  - Healthier, Happier, Connected

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[1] Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

2.17 These priorities form the strategic outline for the library service's 5-year plan and are designed to ensure a sustainable modern library service which will respond to the Wirral Council Plan 2026. In 2021 we also completed an internal consultation, a 12-week Wirral Libraries public consultation and needs assessment. This has given us further insight and demonstrates those services people value the most and would like to access from the library service, whilst meeting local need in the context of available resources. This evidence has strengthened our proposed strategy, whilst delivering a sustainable service in challenging circumstances.

2.18 For the full Libraries Strategy please see Appendix 3.

Library Strategy Part II

2.19 The proposals as set out in this report will be subject to full consultation with residents and interested parties. The outcome of that consultation holds potential to influence decision making and the scope of the preferred option. Therefore, post-consultation and subsequent agreement of the preferred option, the Library Service will ensure that the prevailing Library Strategy reflect the direction of the service and will be reviewed considering any emerging operating model.

Comprehensive and efficient

2.20 To effectively review and develop a future operating model for Libraries in Wirral it is important to define and agree what 'comprehensive and efficient' means in the context of Wirral's geography, population, need and available resources. Equally, in a borough of such extreme socio-economic contrast, the definition must reflect the needs at a local level. With a view of how other authorities have approached their definitions of the 1964 Act it is important that it represents the priorities and direction of the service, whilst balancing this against other influencing factors. It is also key that the definition remains flexible and scalable to respond to the changing trends in how people access literature, services, and information, which has been inarguably transformed with advancements and access to technology and digital media. What once represented a comprehensive and efficient service may not reflect modern need and it is Wirral's priority to ensure that we continue to deliver excellent and valuable services for residents both now and for future generations. Future sustainability is also a key thread, ensuring that available council resources enable the service to operate and function effectively.

2.21 Wirral's library offer provides a range of services beyond the provision of free access to books and other printed material/information and is committed to serving areas of greatest need. In creating a definition for Wirral, outcomes from the recent Libraries consultation and subsequent strategy have been used and supplemented with a needs assessment and socio-economic profiles against each Library to ensure decisions are influenced at a local level, for local people and communities.

2.22 For Wirral, a "comprehensive and efficient" library service will ensure that the four key priorities in the Library Strategy 2020-25 will be met. This modernised library service will deliver resources and activities to build literacy skills, support digital skills learning, support an increase in cultural and creative experiences and provide

access to trusted health information and resources. There will be a focus on these priorities and the most effective and efficient method of delivery within available resources following the outcome of the public consultation on Options 1 to 3.

2.23 The Department of Culture Media and Sport select Committee (2012) states that:

"A 'comprehensive and efficient' library service represents the balance to be struck by each local authority in meeting local needs within the context of available resources in a way which is appropriate to the identified needs of the communities they serve. The 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act does not seek to be overly prescriptive but instead anchors the delivery of a local service to the needs of the local community. The closure of one or even a number of library branches does not necessarily signify a breach of the 1964 Act."

Balancing Need and Available Resources

2.24 Below are several rulings from other Local Authority Library Service reviews that inform the balancing of need and available resources:

"… it has been made clear in the recent London Borough of Brent Judicial Review (2011) that the Section 7 duty of the 1964 Act cannot be exempt or divorced from resource issues and cannot in law escape the reductions which have been rendered inevitable in the light of the financial crisis engulfing the country."

"Legislation does not state a minimum number of libraries. A High Court judgement (2014 Lincolnshire County Council) stated that comprehensive and efficient is to be interpreted in the context of the availability of resources, and that a comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library."

"High Court made it clear that a comprehensive and efficient service is, in itself, not an absolute concept, but rather must be understood in the context of the budget available (2015 Sheffield City Council)."

Options for a New Operating Model

2.25 Whilst developing a suite of options and determining a preferred, the fundamental test has been whether that option would allow the Council to meet its statutory duty of providing a comprehensive and efficient service as per Wirral's definition, enabling it to deliver on the vision and priorities of the Library Strategy. This is also an opportunity to reinforce what Wirral's library service is and should be in order to provide a modern, fit for purpose library service that is accessible to everyone in Wirral that wishes to use it. Furthermore, this is a chance to focus resources and define a service, building on the fantastic work, partnerships and programmes that have been developed over many years.

2.26 It's important to note that the delivery of a comprehensive and efficient service is not based on quantity of physical locations, rather on the right service being provided where it needs to be. For this, the service has used a wide range of supporting information and data drawn from the recent consultation, the priorities within the

Library Strategy as well as a suite of socio-economic profiles, usage and performance data and a community needs assessment relating to each library. Consideration has been given to the following (not exhaustive):

- Existing provision, usage, and performance data
- Costs of existing service provision
- Geographic spread and accessibility
- Existing community services
- Co-located service and opportunities
- Socio demographic profiling and local needs assessment

2.27   Under the Act the Council is also required to determine how they manage their libraries through consultation with their communities. The library service is committed to ensuring all residents can have their say on options for a new operating model and will undertake a full consultation as included within this recommendation.

2.28   A meeting with the DCMS held on 23rd November 2021 confirmed that any emerging option for a future operating model will be judged and assessed based on the appropriate level and nature of service being provided rather than physical location or method of delivery. The Council must evidence that any option has been developed using a needs-based approach. Local need must remain as the golden thread throughout this, but that need does not have to be met by proximity to physically located libraries if it can be fulfilled by other means. However, it is important to reinforce the financial challenges the Council is facing, and any option must be a balance between duty, need, and available resource.

2.29   In support of the Councils mandate to evidence a forward plan and statement of intent towards delivering a balanced budget and the ask for exceptional financial support, it is pertinent for the service to assess and present the cost and any associated savings relating to the options for a future operating model. The cost of mitigation and/or change has been built in where appropriate.

2.30   With consideration of all the information contained in this report and supporting documents members are asked to consider the following options and approve the three options (including preferred) for full consultation. For proportionality, Option 1 and 2 are presented in summary and Option 3 (preferred) is presented with its detail, supporting information and justification as 'preferred'.

> ***Option 1*** *– One Central Library, Online Library, Home Reader Service, and New Mobile Library (See Appendix 9 for definitions of the services to be provided at each of these facilities)*
>
> **Reason for non-recommendation as preferred:**
> May not provide an adequately accessible service as per the Council's statutory duty for those who want to use it notwithstanding the facilities in support of the Central Library, and risks not meeting our statutory duty. This option carries a risk of call in/inquiry from DCMS.

2.31   This option considered and modelled the delivery of the service with one Central library (Birkenhead Library) and the closure of the remaining library sites. The online library and Home Reader Service would be retained as well as investment in a new mobile library service to mitigate loss of physical provision.

2.32   **Table 2** details the proposed opening hours for this option (584-hour reduction in staffed hours from pre-COVID offer). Note, the online library offers 24/7 access and the mobile library hours offered are subject to the emerging programme although it's anticipated that this will add significant access to residents:

Table 2: Option 1 Opening Hours

Opening Hours	Days	Opening Hours	Total Hour
Centrals	Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu	9am-1pm & 2pm-7pm	50 hours
	Fri & Sat	9am-1pm & 2pm-5pm	
		Total	50 hours a week to the public

2.33   This represents a full consolidation of the library asset portfolio to realign and focus resources into one excellent service point for the borough. This would allow the service to streamline its processes and staffing structure and develop a comprehensive programme of outreach to supplement one site. This would be supported with an enhanced digital online offer, Home Reader Service, and the investment in a new mobile library service.

2.34   Although this would generate a significant saving for the Council (see **Table 5**) it risks not providing a comprehensive and efficient service on the grounds of accessibility and geographical coverage.

2.35   The geography of Wirral and socio-economic contrast across the borough make it difficult to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service from one site, even with the provision of a mobile library as a mitigating factor. This is due, in part, to the significant reduction in opening hours offered to the public and the varying level of need across the borough. In addition, geographic and social barriers might impede some areas of the borough from accessing a library service and often vital frontline information and advice on other Council services.

2.36   Furthermore, this option could disadvantage residents and families with no car, could fail to address the impact of the cost of public transport on low-income residents and families, might disadvantage those who are digitally isolated, and risks not maintaining parity in terms of the general requirements of children across the borough without sufficient mitigation. With this option, 24% of current active borrowers live within a two-mile buffer (straight line measurement) of the library with the remaining falling within approximately 6.5 miles.

2.37   This option would also require a comprehensive asset management plan which considered the future use and options for each site as well as the residual mothballing costs whilst this work was undertaken. There could also be substantial public challenge from community and representative groups on the disposal or alternative use of our libraries, although Hoylake Library is currently the only site successfully nominated on the list of 'Assets of Community Value'.

2.38   With consideration for the lessons learnt as part of the previous Library Service's Review and subsequent judicial review and inquiry (Charteris, 2009), this option is not preferred due to the risk of call-in by DCMS and risk of inquiry. This process would be lengthy, costly, and would ultimately impact on the deliverability of a new operating model.

Option 2 – *Four Central Libraries, Online Library, Home Reader Service, and New Mobile Library (See Appendix 9 for definitions of the services to be provided at each of these facilities)*

Reason for non-recommendation as preferred:
May not provide an adequate service as per the Council's statutory duty for those who want to use it notwithstanding the greater geographical spread of physical locations and the facilities in support of the four Central libraries. This option carries a risk of call in/inquiry from DCMS.

2.39   This option considered and modelled the delivery of a library service with four Central libraries (Birkenhead, Wallasey, West Kirby, and Bebington Libraries) and the closure of the remaining library sites. Much like Option 1, this option aims to consolidate and focus available resources with the aim of providing a better quality and defined service from fewer sites. This would be supported with an enhanced digital online offer, Home Reader Service, and the investment in a new mobile library service.

2.40   **Table 3** details the proposed opening hours for this option (434-hour reduction in staffed hours from pre-COVID offer). Note, the online library offers 24/7 access and the mobile library hours offered are subject to the emerging programme although it's anticipated that this will add significant access to residents:

Table 3: Option 2 Opening Hours

Opening Hours	Days	Opening Hours	Total Hour
Centrals	Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu	9am-1pm & 2pm-7pm	50 hours x 4 200 hours to public a week
	Fri & Sat	9am-1pm & 2pm-5pm	
		Total	200 hours a week to the public

2.41　This represents a consolidation of the library asset portfolio to realign and focus resources into four excellent service points for the borough. This would allow the service to streamline its processes and staffing structure and develop a comprehensive programme of outreach to supplement one site. This would be supported with and enhanced digital online offer, Home Reader Service, and the investment in a new mobile library service.

2.42　Much like Option 1 this option would generate significant savings for the Council (see **Table 5**) although still carries a risk of not delivering on the Councils statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service on geographic coverage and accessibility and reasons as stated in Option 1.

2.43　A greater area is served through four library sites with 64% of active borrowers within a two-mile buffer (straight line measurement) although areas in mid, central, south-east and south-west Wirral would be more distant from a physically located library so that geographic and social barriers might impede access to those locations.

2.44　With consideration for the lessons learnt as part of the previous Library Service's Review and subsequent judicial review and inquiry (Charteris, 2009), this option is not preferred due to the significant risk of call-in by DCMS and likely risk of an inquiry. This process would be lengthy, costly, and would ultimately impact on the deliverability of a new operating model.

> ***Option 3*** *– Four Central Libraries, Four Community Libraries, Co-Located RFID (Radio Frequency Identification Kiosk) Only Sites (Unstaffed), Online Library, Home Reader Service, and New Mobile Library (See Appendix 9 for definitions of the services to be provided at each of these facilities)*
>
> **Reason for recommendation as preferred option:**
> This option provides the most viable balance between delivering on the Council's statutory function of providing a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service in the context of available resources. This option also allows for the delivery of the vision and priorities within the emerging Library Strategy whilst not disadvantaging any one or more areas of the borough. Sufficient mitigation is offered to offset the loss of a physical Library where proposed and allows for an enhance programme of outreach to be developed and delivered.

2.45 This option would retain the four main Central Libraries and four smaller community libraries which are (please see Appendix 4 Figure 1 for reference of locations):

- Birkenhead Central, West Kirby, Wallasey Central, and Bebington Central
- Eastham, Moreton, Upton, and Heswall

2.46 Five additional sites would be established as unstaffed RFID sites giving residents a self-serviced library offer in a co-located venue. These are:

- Leasowe – Millennium Centre
- Beechwood – Co-located in community asset
- Ridgeway – In school area identified
- St James – St James Centre
- Seacombe – Seacombe Children's Centre

2.47 **Table 3** below details the proposed opening hours for this option (310-hour reduction in staffed hours from pre-COVID offer). Note, the online library offers 24/7 access and the mobile library hours offered are subject to the emerging programme although it's anticipated that this will add significant access to residents.

Table 4: Option 3 Opening Hours

Opening Hours	Days	Opening Hours	Total Hour
Centrals	Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat	9am-1pm & 2pm-5pm	46 hours x 4 184 hours to the pubic a week
	Tue & Thu	9am-1pm & 2pm-7pm	
Community Libraries	Mon-Fri	9am-1pm & 2pm-5pm	35 hours x 4 140 hours to the public a week
		Total	324 hours a week

2.48   In addition to the thirteen libraries listed above the Digital Library Service will continue to be developed; this gives 24/7 access and functionality to an e-library of 20,000 items, including large print, spoken word, access to online databases, family history and reference materials.

2.49   The Home Reader Service, delivering to housebound residents and those whose needs are greatest, will continue and opportunities to extend this service will be explored where current resources will allow. Appendix 4 Figure 3 demonstrates the scale of provision currently offered under the Home Reader Service.

2.50   A new EV (electric vehicle) mobile library offer will be established with a 3000-book capacity to provide a flexible service in areas of need, where people wish to access it, mitigate loss of physical services in areas of the borough and support/enhance existing community services. Additional scope of services will be explored such as printing and digital access and will be tailored as and when the need arises. It is anticipated that the mobile library will strengthen and enhance a programme of outreach work, supported by new and existing partnerships with communities, businesses, and public sector partners. The Strategic Librarian Team will continue to develop and build on a programme of work that meets and exceeds the priorities within the Library Strategy. Please see Appendix 8 for further detail on the mobile library provision. The locations for a mobile library will be determined initially based on areas where a library closure/community owned/managed is proposed and will develop naturally through requests and emerging need as the service is rolled out (Please see Appendix 4 Figure 1 for reference of locations).

2.51   This option represents the service consolidating its asset portfolio in support of realigning and focusing available resources to provide a quality, balanced, sustainable, and accessible service for all. Although the borough will lose a number of physical sites, the service is committed to ensuring a modernised and much improved service will remain. The service has been under resourced for many years, having an inevitable impact on service delivery. This will allow us to offer longer and consistent weekly opening hours at the remaining sites, provide investment in provision such as access to digital media and technology, and provides capacity to develop long term programmes of outreach and bring the service to the community via a mobile library. The unstaffed RFID sites will still benefit from outreach and events where appropriate, led by the Strategic Librarian Team. This option offers better value for money and supports the Councils overarching commitment of providing a balanced budget.

2.52   For all the remaining libraries that have not been retained, further engagement with communities will be undertaken as part of the proposed consultation to explore interest in community owned/managed libraries. The arrangement for a community owned/managed library must be robust and assessment of viability will need to be defined with support from legal and asset services. It is important that any residual demand on council resources under any arrangement must be proportionate and should not adversely impact on the financial or operational sustainability of the service. This will be a key success factor in the assessment of any proposal. It is proposed where there is no interest, or no viable solution for community owned/managed agreement is identified then the library service will continue with the

closure of that site with mitigation where necessary since these sites are not required for a comprehensive and efficient library service

2.53 This option would generate significant savings to the authority (see **Table 5**).

Schools Library Service

2.54 It's important to note that the Schools Library Service will continue to operate as a de-delegated service primarily for Primary Schools although other schools can access on request. The service is funded via the School's Forum, the equivalent of £8.78 per child from maintained schools (Academies can buy back as a service level agreement). The service has continued throughout the pandemic offering click and collect, and adapting their offer to supplement reading for pleasure, chess, artefact boxes and story boxes. This has been in response to the lack of access to libraries for many children and the impact on literacy levels. The service will continue to advise schools and provide training on managing and developing their own school libraries and teaching resources in schools, on teaching information literacy skills to enable children to become independent learners and to help schools create a reading culture. This service is vital in ensuring that literacy requirements of children are supported, and where possible attainment gaps are addressed. School's Library Service is a key vehicle to delivering on the priorities within the emerging Library Strategy and support the delivery of a comprehensive and efficient service.

Costs and Savings

2.55 The table below details the cost and associated savings for each of the options in this report against the current operating costs (baseline).

Table 5: Options costs and associated savings

	Current (Baseline)	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Staffing	£2,250,400	£886,122	£1,846,702	£1,965,935
Non-Staffing	£1,622,300	£1,039,300	£1,257,100	£1,397,400
Income	-£194,100	-£179,200	-£179,200	-£191,100
Recharge	£936,300	£936,300	£936,300	£936,300
Total	£4,614,900	£2,374,522	£3,552,902	£3,800,535
Saving	N/A	£2,240,378	£1,061,998	£814,365

2.56 As detailed above the savings will be achieved primarily through reduction in staffing and non-staffing costs (e.g. building running costs). At this stage, the cost of change (e.g. mothballing) has not been factored in due to a yet unknown level of interest in community asset transfer. Those sites where a closure / community asset/owned library will be explored have also been presented to asset management so an options appraisal on future use can be undertaken, pending the outcomes of a full consultation.

Recharges

2.57 Due to the current approach to how recharges are apportioned across Council services it has not been possible to model a commensurate saving on recharges in proportion to the proposed structural changes under each option. The Council is currently undertaking a review to establish a robust and defined approach to how central recharges are apportioned across its services. It is anticipated that there are additional significant savings to be made, and this will be reflected in future financial years.

Implementation Plan

2.58 If agreed for consultation, then the Library Service will consult on the above options and preferred Option 3. Pending the outcome of the consultation and subsequent agreement from Committee an implementation plan will be developed, outlining key timescales, milestones, cost of implementation, mitigation, and risk management approach. The plan will incorporate consideration of the Council's agreed corporate service design principles and will be delivered with support from other council services to ensure benefit realisation. This will be managed and reported back to Committee at an agreed frequency.

Needs Based Approach / Data Analysis and Profiles

2.59 This section will outline the data and information that was gathered and analysed to develop options for a future operating model and preferred Option 3.

2.60 An evidence base comprised of significant amounts of information and data has been gathered to support the development of the options as outlined in in this report. This includes data on usage and performance, costs, accessibility assessment and mapping, mapping of existing community services, socio-economic profiling, a needs assessment and ranking exercise, and benchmarking against LCR/Northwest library services.

Performance and Costs

2.61 Each year, Library Services provides performance data and comparators for national and regional benchmarking undertaken by the Charted Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). This allows Wirral to benchmark its performance against comparable authorities, selected as the most analogous to Wirral's geography and population. In summary the key outcomes of the CIPFA Public Libraries Profile 2020:

- Wirral have a higher-than-average number of service points (Wirral 24, average 14)
- Wirral has a lower-than-average visits per annum at its busiest service point (Wirral 146,731, average 231,748)
- Wirral has an average proportion of active borrowers per 1000 population (Wirral 116, average 118)

- Wirral's net expenditure per 1000 population is higher than average (Wirral £14,935, average £11,913, national average
- Wirral's total revenue income per 1000 population is below average (Wirral £456, average £949)
- Wirral has a slightly above average book issue per 1000 population (Wirral 2354, average 2119)

2.62 The total footfall in Wirral's libraries has decreased by 376,557 in the last five years representing a 28.7% drop. This is coupled with an almost 50% decline in active borrowers and a 57% decrease in book loans over the last decade (since 2012 and excluding COVID-19 impact). E-loans have increased by 2102% in the last decade experiencing a sharp rise in the last 18 months due to impacts of the COVID pandemic. Book loans and e-lending is more prevalent in the west of the borough.

2.63 There are clear trends that suggest that the library service must realign its service offer to represent a more modern, fit for purpose need that still provides and supports those who want to experience a traditional offer. The decline in library access and engagement can be attributed, in part, to the way that people now access information and media as well as the accessibility and affordability of technology. Since 2012, smartphone usage amongst adults aged 65+ population has increased from just 3% to 65%, with almost 90% of all other adult age groups reporting that they personally use a smartphone[2]. Additionally, 96% of households in Britain have internet access, up from 57% in 2006 when the ONS began keeping comparable records. Internet access in adults ages 65+ is now 80% in Great Britain[3].

Accessibility and Coverage

2.64 To assess accessibility and coverage several exercises have been undertaken including:

- Mapping of preferred Option 3 sites against catchment of active borrowers
- Mapping of preferred Option 3 sites against population of Wirral, IMD and car ownership
- Mapping drive, cycle and waking 10-minute reachability catchments[4]
- Mapping of public transport network (active bus stops)
- Accessibility assessment for libraries where closure/community owned/managed libraries are proposed

2.65 The car ownership data was derived from the 2011 census and represents the best and most complete data set available. The 'Library Standards' as adopted until 2008 used 2 mile or 3.2km buffers for their catchment areas which has been adopted for purposes of determining a catchment area for this exercise.

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[2] Ofcom Personal Smartphone Usage – 2012-2021
[3] Office for National Statistics – Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2020
[4] Travel time catchments derived from GIS OpenRouteSource (ORS) – travel times in excess of this average will occur due to variation in conditions, day and times.

2.66 Data from the National Transport Survey (NTS) 2019 has been used to identify average travel journey for different trip purposes (see **Table 6**)[5]. These relate to average travel times meaning travel times can and will occur in excess of this average.

Table 6: Average travel times for different trip purposes (NTS 2019)

Purpose	Travel Time (mins)
Commuting	31
Business	42
Education	21
Escort education	14
Shopping	16
Other escort	17
Personal business	19
Visiting friends at private home	27
Visiting friends elsewhere	22
Entertainment / public activity	22
Sport: participate	21
Holiday: base	79
Day trip	35
Other including just walk	22
All purposes	23

2.67 **Table 6** shows that average travel times range from 14 minutes (Escort education) to 79 minutes (Holiday: base). Most travel times range from 21-23 with an all-purpose travel time of 23 minutes.

2.68 Of particular relevance to libraries is 'Personal business' as it specifically refers to libraries. This is defined as:

*'**Personal business** - visits to services, e.g. hairdressers, launderettes, dry-cleaners, betting shops, solicitors, banks, estate agents, **libraries**, churches; or for medical consultations or treatment; or for eating and drinking, unless the main purpose was entertainment or social.'[6]*

2.69 The average travel time for Personal business is 19 minutes. Coupled with the all-purpose average of 23 minutes it's reasonable to suggest that a target time of 19-23 minutes travel time for the majority of Library users is acceptable. This has been considered when considering accessibility impact of the new model and when mapping accessibility across three transport modes (driving, cycling, and walking).

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[5] Methodology and approach adopted from East Sussex Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy – Accessibility Analysis 2017

[6] National Travel Survey 2018 Notes and Definitions (publishing.service.gov.uk)

2.70 To note, the Library Strategy consultation identified walking as the primary mode of transport (65%) followed by car (44%) (see **Figure 1**). This is an unsurprising result given the density of library provision in Wirral within such a relatively small area (i.e. opportunity exists rather than being the only mode of transport available). This does not suggest that active borrowers could not access a library provision via other means and has been considered with other socio-economic indicators to assess accessibility (e.g. car ownership, availability of public transport, IMD).
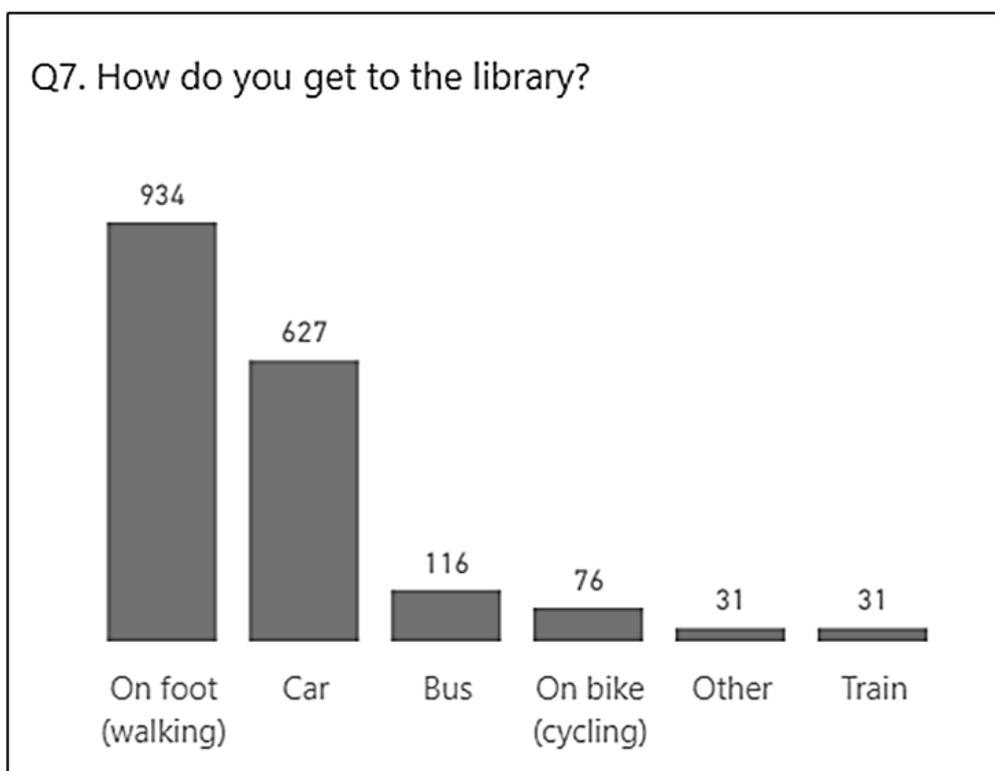

Figure 1: Library Strategy consultation Q7. Response (mode of transport)

2.71 All outputs from the accessibility mapping can be found in Appendix 4. The key findings are as follows:

- The sites under the preferred Option 3 are well situated and located to provide sufficient geographic coverage across Wirral whilst taking into consideration areas of greatest need and/or those impacted by multiple barriers to access (e.g. car ownership, low income, deprivation)
- All residents are within reasonable travel times as determined via the National Transport Survey (2019) for 'Personal business' either via car or public transport see section 2.69
- 98% of active borrowers are within a 2 mile (3.2km) straight-line buffer of the preferred Option 3 sites
- 99% of active borrowers and Wirral residents live within a 10-minute car journey of preferred Option 3 sites

- 27% of active borrowers lie within a 10-minute walking journey of preferred Option 3 sites (reduction of 23% from 50% of active borrowers for current library sites).
- Wirral has a strong network of public transport that corresponds to the network of libraries in the preferred Option 3 sites
- The preferred Option 3 sites are predominantly situated in areas with high densities of active borrowers with the exception of Greasby and Hoylake where sufficient provision exist within acceptable reach (Upton and West Kirby respectively)
- Areas with high proportion of households with no car are well served with library access under the preferred Option 3 and with the mitigation proposed (i.e. Mobile library and outreach provision initially for those sites where proposed closure/community owned/managed libraries are proposed)

2.72 Appendix 5 presents an accessibility assessment for those sites where a closure/community owned/managed library has been proposed under Option 3. This determined the residual access to a Library service for communities/active users who would normally use that Library. This has allowed for the identification of any adverse impacts to allow for an appropriate mitigation response. In summary, this assessment did not identify any residual adverse impact with mitigation due to sufficient provision existing within acceptable proximity through various modes of transport and/or the provision of a mobile library site to serve hard to reach communities where the needs are greatest and/or present a barrier to access (e.g., car access, low income).

Socio-economic Profiles and Needs Assessment

2.73 An assessment of need has been undertaken to support decision making when developing options for a future model. This data allows the service to undertake a 'needs based approach' when determining where and how the library service should be delivered. It also ensures that any future decisions taken do not disproportionately disadvantage areas already displaying poor outcomes or in need of targeted interventions.

2.74 The needs assessment lays the foundations for designing an approach in a way that meets the common design principles identified by the Libraries Taskforce[1] for developing and transforming library services, which are:

- Meeting legal requirements
- 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

2.75   The preferred Option 3 allows for available resources to be realigned and focused and allows capacity within the structure to develop a more targeted service based on need. For example, in areas where attainment gaps are more prevalent, shared programmed of work can be developed in targeted areas to support literacy and independent reading via enhanced reading challenges, class visits, storytelling, provision of technology, author visits, online resources, and reading activities/groups during holidays.

2.76   The assessment also allows the service to respond to emerging trends, taking a pro-active approach to how it can respond to future need across the borough.

2.77   The assessment utilises various socio-demographic indicators that have been carefully selected and mapped against the four strategic priorities of the Library Strategy and Universal Offers to ensure their relevance and justification when influencing future decisions.

2.78   Finally, the needs assessment represents the beginning of an iterative process that will inform service redesign and delivery in respect of local need, library users and non-library users. This resource is a key decision-making tool and will ensure that targeted interventions and services are developed to support the delivery of the emerging Library Strategy and its priorities, underpinned by the Universal Offers. Due to factors such as COVID-19 and external challenges such as reduction in available resources, any emerging future delivery model may impact local need and the indicators used within the assessment will be reviewed frequently to ensure they are relevant and will influence and drive future decision making.

2.79   The full need assessment can be found in Appendix 6.

Existing Community Services

2.80   Wirral Council maintains a gold standard gazetteer (Local Land and Property Gazetteer - BS7666) of all building assets in Wirral (amongst other assets such as parks, address data and building numbers). This data set was used and filtered accordingly to identify existing community assets in any given catchment. Where appropriate, MSOA geographic level has been used as a representative sample of the community any one library serves. This data outlines the existing provision and opportunities for residents in areas and allows for a balanced decision against a backdrop of need and other socio-economic outcomes. For example, where a community group may use a library as a meeting space, a community hall or centre may be able to accommodate such need. The following were filtered and identified (not exhaustive):

- Community Centres
- Church Halls and Places of Worship
- Doctors
- Children's Centres
- Schools
- Nurseries
- Outdoor/Recreational/Green spaces

- Public Services
- Gyms

See Appendix 4 Figure 16 for an example of a community service profile.

Regional Benchmarking

2.81   A high-level benchmarking exercise was undertaken to objectively assess Wirral's library offer against regional and north-west council library services. **Table 7** details the comparative data used in this exercise. This data allowed the service to compare provision and understand a regional precedent for what is and has been accepted as a 'comprehensive and efficient' service in other authorities. The most comparable authority to Wirral is Sefton, with a similar borough size, demographic and socio-economic divide which delivers its library service with six Libraries strategically placed across the borough to ensure broad accessibility and in areas of greatest need. **Table 7** also shows that Wirral has the same library site provision as Cheshire West and Chester which covers an area almost six times bigger than Wirral and has a mobile library service to supplement hard to reach rural areas. Whilst this is an objective view it has been balanced against the need in Wirral which will vary from neighbouring authorities.

Table 7: Regional/Northwest Library Service Provision Benchmarking

Council	Area (Km2)	Population	No. Libraries	Density (Lib/Area)	Library / Population Ratio	IMD Score	Population 65+*	Mobile Library	Online Library	Home Reader Service
Wirral	157	324011	24	0.15	14087	30	22%	N	Y	Y
Sefton	155	276410	6	0.04	46068	27	24%	N	Y	Y
Liverpool	112	498042	19	0.17	26213	42	15%	N	Y	Y
Halton	79	129410	4	0.05	32353	32	18%	N	Y	Y
Knowsley	87	150862	5	0.06	30172	43	17%	N	Y	Y
CWAC	916	343071	23	0.03	14916	18	22%	Y	Y	Y
Warrington	181	210014	12	0.07	17501	19	19%	N	Y	N

37% of Library Users (Needs Assessment – Appendix 3) and 41% of Library Consultation respondents were 65+ making it the most prevalent age group

2.82   The Council has developed a set of design principles that are to be applied to all services when undertaking significant change and transformation projects. This is to ensure a standard approach and alignment to broader strategic objectives and priorities and that all services strive for continuous improvement. The principles allow a service to assess their understanding, vision, and core service capabilities / competencies against the Wirral Plan priorities and to ensure that any forward planning is in line with the wider Council agenda. Appendix 7 details how the preferred option has considered these design principles during development.

Risk Management and Proposed Mitigation

2.83   The selection of the library sites under preferred Option 3 were based on geographic coverage, need and creating fair accessibility opportunities to all residents of Wirral. The service will still be provided above and beyond our statutory duty, striving for added value in the service and activities that libraries provide. This will be set against the four strategic priorities of the Interim Library Strategy and the development of a targeted programme of outreach and partnership work. The option in itself is a balance and mitigation to potential exclusion and disadvantaging any one or more areas of the borough. Using the methodology and approach as outlined in this report has provided a detailed evidence based on which decisions have been made.

2.84   Library Services with support from the Strategic Librarian Team would develop a comprehensive outreach programme, developing and strengthening public and private sector partnerships to deliver engagement, events and services that meets and exceeds the Councils statutory duty.

2.85   Library Services has committed to a significant investment in a mobile library that will offer an agile and flexible delivery model that could facilitate an ambitious outreach programme, engaging with hard-to-reach communities whilst providing new and exciting opportunities. This moves the focus away from the traditional 'bricks and mortar' model and places emphasis on the service being delivered, when and where it needs to be. As well as providing free access to books and printed materials, the scope of the offer will evolve with emerging need and demand, as will the locations it will visit. This could include digital provision (e.g., printing, copying).

Risk Management Approach – WBC Judicial Review

2.86   As referenced throughout this report, the Library Service has been cognizant of the findings of the Charteris report (2009) which found that Wirral council had acted unlawfully in the proposals put forward as part of the previous library review. During this process, the recommendations and findings as set out in that report have been iteratively reviewed. Balancing the Council's statutory duty to both set a balanced budget and provide 'comprehensive and efficient' Library Service has been a key ensure the right decisions are made for both the service and Council as a whole. **Table 8** below outlies how this process has addressed lessons learnt.

Table 8: Judicial review risk and actions/mitigation

Recommendations	Action/Mitigation
The Council was in breach of its statutory duties because it failed to make an assessment of local needs therefore it could not identify reasonable options to meet needs	12 weeks consultation on the Library Strategy and undertaken comprehensive needs assessment and socio-economic profiling of local communities to inform development of a preferred operating model. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.
The requirements for older and disabled people, unemployed and those living in deprived areas not considered	Socio-economic profiling of communities was undertaken to determine areas of high need and appropriate service. Consideration within Equalities Impact Assessment. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.
The Council was not able to demonstrate it had regard for meeting general requirements of children	Engagement with children and young people, Schools Library Service and Wirral Youth Collective as part of 12-week consultation. Specific indicators profiling attainment and literacy gathered as part of needs assessment. Schools Library Service continues to be a core provision. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.
The Council took a decision to close 11 libraries in the absence of a strategic plan for or review of the Library Service	Interim Library Strategy presented as part of this report. 12-week consultation to inform Strategy and vision. Further consultation on options for new model to be undertaken. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.
The decision was made without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services which are core, not add on	Clear approach to comprehensive and efficient and definition provided in this report. Core statutory function used as a key consideration throughout the process. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.
There was a further breach in relation to needs of deprived communities	Socio-economic profiling and mapping has been undertaken to identify areas of highest needs and/or those affected by one or more indices of deprivation. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.
The Council displayed a "lack of logic" around closure decisions	Clear methodology and approach as outlined in this report, using a suite of information and data to inform the development of a new operating model, including sites earmarked for closure and/or community asset transfer. Full consultation will be undertaken for new operating model.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Do Nothing Option

3.1 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.

3.2 Maintaining the current provision 'as is' is not a viable option if we want to be able to deliver on the vision and priorities as set out in the emerging Library Strategy which seeks to reduce inequality 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.

3.3 The preferred option (Option 3) presented in this report is the optimal balance between need and available resource and allows the Library Service to undertake vital service redesign and modernisation, divorcing itself from being just a physical location and focusing on the service delivered and innovative delivery models.

3.4 The Council also has a statutory duty to set a balanced budget and the Library Service must commit to delivering an efficient, sustainable and value for money service that represents the need of Wirral's residents and library users.

4.0   BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1   Wirral has 24 libraries which are supplemented by a Home Reader Service, an online Library, on site digital provision, IT suites and free Wi-Fi, which are aligned to the 4 Universal Library Offers and provide a statutory library offer.

Pre COVID offer

4.2   In addition to the above the service also offered a full calendar of activities and events (virtual and face to face) across the year at various sites. The service delivery was also supported on additional days by volunteers ("Library Express" offer) along with additional volunteer support at Wallasey Central Reference, Home Reader Service and some IT provision was supported with volunteers. The One Stop Shop service was also based in Heswall, Bebington, Eastham, Moreton, Rock Ferry and West Kirby libraries.

4.3   The weekly opening hours offered via library staff were:

Table 9: Pre-COVID Opening Hours

Library	Opening Hours
Bebington Central	55
Beechwood	18
Birkenhead Central	48
Bromborough	18
Eastham	46
Greasby	18
Heswall	46
Higher Bebington	18
Hoylake	18
Irby	18
Leasowe	14
Moreton	46
New Ferry	0
Pensby	18
Prenton	18
Ridgeway	0
Rock Ferry	46
Seacombe	18
St James	18
Upton	18
Wallasey Central	48
Wallasey Village	18
West Kirby	51
Woodchurch	18

4.4 In August 2020 following the change in Government guidelines two Central libraries (Birkenhead and West Kirby) reopened for an Order and Collect service only, with the remaining two Central libraries at Bebington and Wallasey opening in December 2020. Following the third lockdown the four Central Libraries reopened from May 2021 adding browsing.to the Order and Collect Service

4.5 From May to November 2021 a further eleven sites have reopened extending the service provision with all sites resuming the provision of IT facilities and the Reference service at Birkenhead Central Library.

4.6 As of November 2021, there were 15 Libraries open with Wallasey Central Library also providing a One Stop Shop presence one day per week on an appointment basis. Options are still being developed to determine in what capacity the One Stop Shop service will return. However, plans are currently progressing to provide a One Stop Shop service at a number of sites with the frequency of their presence also still to be decided.

4.7 The table below shows the current weekly hourly service provision via library staff along with those sites still to be mobilised as of November 2021:

Table 10: Current Opening Hours (as of December 2021)

Library	Opening Hours
Bebington Central	42
Beechwood	7/11 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened
Birkenhead Central	42
Bromborough	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Eastham	21/25 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Greasby	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Heswall	21/25 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened as currently in use as a Testing Centre
Higher Bebington	7/11 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Hoylake	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened
Irby	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Leasowe	7/11 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened
Moreton	21/25 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
New Ferry	0
Pensby	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Prenton	7/11 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened
Ridgeway	7/11 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened
Rock Ferry	21/25 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Seacombe	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)

Library	Opening Hours
	nb not yet reopened as currently in use as a Testing Centre
St James	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Upton	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
Wallasey Central	42
Wallasey Village	14/17 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays)
West Kirby	42
Woodchurch	7/11 (due to opening on alternate Saturdays) nb not yet reopened

4.8 With regards to library events and activities work is ongoing to safely reinstate these by considering advice from Asset Management, Public Health and Health and Safety colleagues, with regards to ventilation requirements which affects the numbers of attendees. Similarly, the service is looking to continue to engage with the volunteers that provided IT support, Reference Library (Wallasey Central), Home Reader Service, and Library Express so they can return in a safe manner.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council is legally required to provide a balanced, sustainable, and legal budget as set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The MTFP supports the delivery of the Wirral Plan and is key to ensuring the Council is financially sustainable. To support the setting of a balanced budget for 2021, the Council has had to apply to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for a capitalisation directive also known as 'Exceptional Financial Support'. In response, the Council must demonstrate what measures and interventions it will deliver to meet its statutory duty.

5.2 The Library Service currently costs the Council £4,614,900 (see **Table 5**) with a higher-than-average cost per head of the population when compared with comparable authorities. In addition, the asset portfolio for Libraries is variable and complex requiring significant investment. It is not sustainable, neither does it represent value for money to continue delivering the Library Service in its current model.

5.3 The preferred option (Option 3) currently represents the optimal balance between need and available resources whilst ensuring both the statutory duty to set a balanced budget and the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service is met. This option will generate a saving of £814,365 if approved, pending the outcomes of a full consultation.

6.0   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 states:

General duty of library authorities.

(1) It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, . . .
   Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

(2) In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—
   (a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and
   (b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and
   (c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.

6.2   In 2011, a court judgement (Bailey vs Brent) interprets the above as:

"A comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. 'Comprehensive' has therefore been taken to mean delivering a service that is accessible by all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on Council resources. Decisions about the Service must be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws upon evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the Borough."

6.3   Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 imposes a duty on the Council to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (the Best Value Duty).

6.4   To decide how to fulfil its Best Value Duty the Council must consult representatives of local taxpayers, users of the service in question and of persons who have an interest in the areas of the Borough likely to be affected by any proposed changes in policies and strategies underpinning the delivery of services to the public.

6.5   Consultation must in law be done at a formative stage of the process, must set out clearly what the proposals are and the reasons for them, must allow sufficient time for the consultees to respond. The responses must be conscientiously considered by the decision maker when it reaches a decision which in turn must take into account only relevant considerations, disregard irrelevant factors and be within the bounds of reasonableness and not perverse.

6.6   The Library Service must also be considerate of the following throughout the process of consulting on, developing, and delivering a new operating model:

- 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act
- 2010 Equality Act – Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149)
- 1998 Human Rights Act
- Best Value Duty 2011
- Localism Act 2011

6.7   **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

Staffing

Background and pre COVID

6.8   The library service has seen a reduction in staff numbers over a number of years without any accompanying site closures. In 2014/15 following the Future Council savings exercise there was a reduction in staff numbers linked to the reduction of opening hours across a number of libraries. However, this model still had, for example, all sites open on Saturday morning's and with the reduced staffing resource created an unrealistic expectation that all sites would be opened on a consistent basis.

6.9   Since 2014/15 smaller numbers of staff have left the service as part of EVR exercises linked to corporate savings requirements. During 2021/22, as part of the budget savings for Neighbourhoods, 7.2 FTE were released creating a saving of £256,000. There are currently a number of vacant posts in the service some of which predate COVID.

6.10   With the release of staff via EVR this financial year and vacancies not being filled the service has remobilised post Covid with a different interim operational model which utilises available staff resources to provide the best consistent service possible to users. This means that except for the Central Libraries where the offer has been amended to reflect a new six-day operation, the majority of smaller libraries are now open for a shorter duration during the week than they were previously. For example:

- Sites are now open alternate Saturday mornings rather than every Saturday morning
- Some libraries are open 3 days per week rather than 6 days
- Some libraries are open 1 day a week instead of 2

6.11   This approach ensures that a consistent service is offered to residents and greatly reduces the need for any ad hoc closures.

Options for a new model

6.12   There is a need to maintain sufficient staffing resource to try to provide resilience to the service i.e., to open and cover leave, training and sickness whilst also resourcing future development of the service and provide activities and events that are valued by residents. In an independent needs analysis carried out by Shared Intelligence in 2017 these issues were highlighted.

6.13   By reducing the number of libraries and making alternate provision such as a mobile/self-serviced library there will be an impact on staff resources and buildings required.

6.14   The preferred option (Option 3) would have the least impact as it would require a greater number of staff and buildings. The exact impact and structure of the model will be assessed when the preferred option has been agreed and consulted on. It needs to be highlighted that even with EVR there may be the need for redeployment or potentially compulsory redundancies. Consultation on the proposals will include staff and any changes involving staff will be managed in consultation with the staff and Trade Unions.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The following represent the key areas considered for potential risks during the development of a Library Strategy and options for a new operating model:

- The impact of the Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The possibility of judicial review on decisions that might be made by Members
- The risk of complaints to the Ombudsman
- Reputational risks to the Council
- Ensuring that contractual (including employment) provisions and requirements are adhered to
- The possibility of other legal proceedings, including employment tribunals

7.2 The above has influenced decision making when balancing need in the context of available resource. In addition, **Table 8** (Section 2) outlines how the recommendations from the previous judicial review have been considered.

7.3 The proposals presented in this report represents the single most significant change in the history of the Library Service. There is a risk and a challenge in affording sufficient Council resource to manage and deliver this change. Library Services are engaged with corporate design and transformation support and there will need to be a commitment for this to continue throughout the consultation period and emerging model.

7.4 A key mitigation is ongoing engagement with DCMS in their superintending role. A meeting is being held between Library Services and DCMS to discuss the library proposals (including preferred Option 3). Although DCMS cannot validate an option before formal procedure, this will provide critical feedback on our approach to date.

7.5 Based on the previous Library Services review and subsequent inquiry in 2009 there is a likely risk of call in and challenge against the proposals as detailed. The Council should expect delays occurring through formal process and assurance review from DCMS and the Secretary of State. This process is to allow 'minded to representations' for the secretary of state from library users or interested persons. Based on recent notices this period can vary significantly and is case by case dependant (few months to a year - indicative) (see Ministerial letters regarding representations made about local library services - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)).

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 As detailed in Section 6 (Legal Implications) the three options and preferred Option (Option 3) will be subject to a formal consultation with representatives of service users, residents, and stakeholders for an agreed and defined period. That period should not be less than 8 weeks or longer than 12 weeks. The outcomes of this consultation will inform and influence the preferred option and will be presented back to a meeting of this Committee at a future date.

8.2 Consultation with staff and Trade Unions will also take place to address staffing impact and ensure staff are fully supported throughout this period of change.

8.3 Engagement with the DCMS has been ongoing throughout the development of the emerging Library Strategy and development of options for a future operating model. A further meeting is being held with DCMS in January 2022.

8.4 To address the asset implications of the preferred option, Asset Management Services have been consulted throughout this process to ensure future options and use are fully considered.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The equality impact assessment for this report can be found here: https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments

9.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty upon the Council when discharging its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity for, and foster good relations with, persons who have protected characteristics which include age, disability, race ,religion and belief and gender.

9.3 The equality impact assessment seeks to identify any adverse impact of the proposals in options on persons with protected characteristics and to identify measures that can be taken to mitigate or eliminate such adverse impacts. The assessment will be refined following the public consultation on the options and will form part of the report which will be presented to the Committee before it reaches its final decision.

9.4 In particular, the Council in delivering Library services must not discriminate against those with protected characteristics and must make reasonable adjustments to remove disadvantages that are suffered by disabled persons in gaining access to the services.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The environmental and climate implications on an emerging preferred option (post-consultation) will be iteratively reviewed against its impact and opportunities for driving best practice and efficiencies. Some areas of consideration will be:

- Opportunities for external funding and investment for retrofit measure and interventions that increase the efficiency and sustainability of Libraries asset portfolio
- Ensuring libraries are a key consideration under the Councils climate agenda and decarbonisation programme
- Positive environmental impacts driven via digital efficiencies (e.g. reduced printing, increase access to digital media – online library)
- Implications on increased car travel from users as a result of a new operating model (driving behaviour change and ensuring sustainable transport modes are available and accessible)

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Under the Library Strategy and preferred operating model, libraries are seen as a key catalyst to physical development and opportunities for individuals and groups of residents in Wirral. This includes ensuring everyone has equal opportunities and skills to empower them from school readiness to employment and beyond.

11.2 The Library Service will look to develop a shared programme of work with Life Long Learning to provide Essential Digital Skills for those transitioning between careers or as an entry route to employment.

11.3 In addition, Birkenhead Library has just become an arm of the regional Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) which is designed to provide any individual or business with specialist help and support. They offer free to use databases which offer up to date business and market information, one-to-one business and intellectual property advice, dedicated workspaces, workshops and other events as well as access to a network of businesses and advisors.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Libraries Consultation Report
Appendix 2 – PowerBI Dashboard Example
Appendix 3 – Library Strategy
Appendix 4 – Mapped Figures
Appendix 5 – Libraries Accessibility Assessment
Appendix 6 – Libraries Needs Assessment
Appendix 7 – WBC Design Principles Assessment
Appendix 8 – Mobile Library Provision
Appendix 9 – Service Definitions

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Tourism, Communities, Cultures & Leisure Committee, Monday 23rd November 2020 – 'Library Strategy and New Library Model'

Tourism, Communities, Cultures & Leisure Committee, Wednesday 16th June 2020 – 'Draft Library Strategy And New Library Model Consultation Update'

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee	**Monday 23rd November 2020**
Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee	**Wednesday 16th June 2020**