



Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee

25th October 2022

REPORT TITLE:	LIBRARIES – IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW OPERATING MODEL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Committee with a progress update for members following decisions made at Committee on 16th June 2022 on the New Model for Wirral’s public library service.

This report details how, through the implementation of the new model, the service will continue to deliver a comprehensive, efficient, and accessible service to Wirral residents as per the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, and to deliver the aims, outcomes, and objectives of the Council’s Library Strategy 2021-2026 and the Wirral Plan (“safe and vibrant communities”) through its New Model.

Members are asked to note that in response to the emerging cost of living crisis within Wirral, the Library service, along with all Council services is currently considering its position, both financially and operationally, in how it can provide a valuable contribution to supporting residents and any emerging financial pressures.

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

RECOMMENDATION/S

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

Note and consider the proposed New Model Implementation Plan and the progress made since the Committee in June 2022.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 This New Model will evolve over a period of years and achieve a transformational change in how our libraries will look in order to meet the needs of local residents and provide a better service whilst generating savings, cost efficiencies across the service and meeting statutory requirement to provide a comprehensive and efficient service

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 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 Library Strategy 2021-26 which seeks to reduce inequality across the borough.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The New Model is the mechanism to drive the delivery of The Library Strategy 2021-26. Together these products strive to provide a balanced, sustainable, modern, and fit for purpose Library Service in Wirral which will ensure that all residents have access to a comprehensive and efficient service.
- 3.2 The New Model is also the method of delivering a comprehensive and efficient library service not based on the quantity of physical locations but on the right service being provided where it needs to be, adopting a 'needs-based' approach. The Library Service will collaborate with partner organisations and local people to determine the best option for providing a modern and flexible library service to communities focussed on addressing local needs.
- 3.3 The New Model is designed to focus on the key areas of: Workforce and Assets, the Library Strategy 2021-26, Technology, Communication and Engagement, Information and Advice and Service Planning and Improvement.

Workforce and Assets

- 3.4 Following the outcomes of a comprehensive consultation, a number of staffing structures and operating days/hours are being explored and will be subject to a formal consultation with staff and the Trade Unions for a minimum period of 45 days. The outcome of the consultation will determine the preferred optional model for the service and is scheduled for end-October 2022. The service will continue to provide regular and transparent communications with staff and Trade Unions throughout this process.
- 3.5 In terms of service points the New Model consists of: Central libraries (staffed), community libraries (staffed), co-located RFID only sites (unstaffed), an online library and Home Reader Service and the potential for a new mobile library. This configuration 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.

- 3.6 Full-service delivery will continue in the nine sites identified for closure until 31st October 2022. The future use of these former library buildings is being considered under the Community Asset Transfer process. Note, Community Asset Transfer is being delivered as a separate project under its own governance and decision-making process. The Library Service will facilitate, and support asset transfers as required. A separate report on Community Asset Transfer will be presented to this Committee in October 2022.
- 3.7 A team of Librarians will be stock editing in eight libraries excluding New Ferry Library which has no recently purchased stock. The annual Book fund was carried over to 2021/22 so that service wide purchasing was unaffected, and we have used our Stock Management software to ensure the best use of stock with the current operating model. We will utilise our Stock Management policy, Library Management System and Collection Management system to ensure the best use of the stock resource going forward. The service is also working with Asset Management and other corporate colleagues to produce an inventory for each site which includes multi-functional devices, I.T. and other technology equipment, utilities, service contracts and other relevant assets. Decanting and mothball will commence once all affected Libraries have closed post-31st October. This will be led by a separate project led by the Programme Office and Asset Management.
- 3.8 The Schools Library Service is a service managed by Wirral Library Service primarily for primary schools although other schools can access on request. The Service offers books and artefacts for loan for use by pupils and to promote a reading culture. Staff also advise schools and provide training on developing their own school libraries to ensure that literacy requirements are supported. This Service will continue to operate under the New Model.
- 3.9 The New Model has co-location of Council services as an underlying principle to better deliver a transformative and connected offer. This has been included in the design principles of the “unstaffed” libraries offer and other opportunities for co-location will be explored by the Service as they arise and in alignment with the Wirral plan priorities. This approach has already been demonstrated with the move of Seacombe Library into the Children’s Centre in February 2022 and will be an integral part of the new community hub as the Children’s Services development is introduced. This demonstrates stronger partnership working and represents an aspiration to invest in and enhance the Library Service in an area of greatest need to achieve the strategic objectives of children’s attainment and literacy and wider community digital exclusion. Similar strategic objectives will be addressed with the project to create at Moreton Youth Hub and Library, a multi service use community facility for all ages.

Library Strategy

- 3.10 The Library Strategy 2021–26 is shaped around key deliverables as set out by Libraries Connected (Libraries sector support body) in the four Universal Offers essential to a 21st century library service. These are: Reading, Information & Digital, Culture & Creativity and Health & Wellbeing and aim to connect communities, improve wellbeing, and promote equality through learning, literacy, and cultural activity.
- 3.11 The service vision as set out in the Library Strategy is to “provide first-rate reading, digital, learning and cultural opportunities for our residents; creating vibrant community hubs to inspire and enrich our residents’ lives and enhance community belonging and wellbeing”
- 3.12 A new Strategic Plan will be developed to focus on meeting the priorities within the Library Service Strategy. The Plan will consider differing community needs across the Borough and the Service will work with public service partners (such as health, youth and culture) third sector partners and residents to target outreach services and provide a modernised library service. This will set out and prioritise targeted interventions, activities, events and service led or co-delivered programmes of work, intended to address the needs and priorities of Wirral’s communities. This plan will develop each year and will be a means of evaluating and monitoring performance against strategic objectives and priorities. Specific performance measures will be incorporated into the plan design and will be reported on at an agreed frequency.
- 3.13 A Delivery Plan will also be developed and mapped out against short-, medium- and long-term phases which will detail a breakdown of priorities and actions relating to the remaining Library sites, including operational profiles. This will provide a detailed breakdown against the Visual Plan provided in this report (Appendix 1 – New Model Implementation Plan) and will be the guiding document for the service over the plan period and to keep the delivery of the New Model on track.
- 3.14 There will be additional investment in library buildings to ensure that they are welcoming, accessible spaces where residents can find a range of services and activities that meet their needs. There has already been investment in improving the appearance of Birkenhead Central Library with the creation of a new “Connect and Inspire Hub” with the old ICT suite refitted and branded as a modern digital hub. Further projects are planned for further development of a learning zone in Birkenhead Central with Town’s Deal funding and a refurbished multi service use community facility at Moreton Library / Youth Hub.
- 3.15 A Volunteer Strategy will be developed in consultation with Human Resources and Health, Safety and Resilience sections. This will enable the Library Service to supplement the final approved staffed hours (following formal consultation) with an offer using volunteers in both staffed and “unstaffed” libraries. This would potentially see volunteers supporting the service in delivering key functions (e.g., book circulation, and computer booking). Engagement with existing volunteers and relevant stakeholders will take place as part of this exercise.

Technology

- 3.16 Investment in innovative technology will be needed to provide a fully self-service offer in the new “unstaffed” libraries. The current RFID kiosks needed to provide book circulation and computer booking functions are all over ten years old, none are on maintenance contracts and running on old software and so are a potential security risk. The current SelfCheck 400 model kiosks will be replaced with new SelfCheck 1000 models, initially in the non-staffed sites.
- 3.17 Wireless Printing is currently being piloted in one library but there is an increasing demand from users to have the ability to print directly from their own devices rather than having to rely on using a library PC. A solution to include self-service functionality will be implemented initially in staffed libraries but then rolled out across all libraries once the proof of technology and demand has been reviewed.
- 3.18 A new Electric Vehicle mobile library offer is currently in scope 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 enhance existing community services. This will be a significant benefit to residents who have difficulty accessing public transport or find walking distances to their nearest library prohibitive with the closure of their nearest library. 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. Note, based on discussions with neighbouring authorities, there is a minimum of 12 months lead in time from procurement to delivery of an Electric Vehicle Mobile Library. This has been reflected in the implementation plan with contingency. It is anticipated that the Mobile Library could be ready for 24/25 financial year.
- 3.19 The Service will ensure that the New Model aligns to the Council Digital Strategy and that all opportunities for IT enhancements are explored provided that they can provide a “Digital First” approach. For example, a new “modern, fit for purpose Connect & Inspire Hub” funded by Arts Council Libraries Improvement Fund grant will open in Birkenhead Central Library in Autumn 2022 to deliver on our Information and Digital Strategic priority. In addition, the Town’s Deal “Education to Employment” project led by Wirral Metropolitan College will establish an outreach learning hub in Birkenhead Central Library as part of a multi-agency project designed to provide pathways to employment for vulnerable groups through employer-led education, careers advice, guidance and delivery.

Communication and Engagement

- 3.20 A Communications Plan will be developed in conjunction with the Council’s Communications Team to initially outline planned closures and the strands of this New Model as outlined in previous sections. In response to the recent public consultation, the service will also develop a long-term Communications/Marketing Plan that will promote activities within our Libraries, something our residents and service users said we could improve on.

- 3.21 Engagement with key stakeholders has already started with initial conversations with partners organisations including Wirral Development Trust (Leasowe), North Birkenhead Development Trust (St James) and Wirral Children's Services (Seacombe) to explain the New Model and what support could be given. The discussions have all focussed on the community help design how this new offer may look in each of the co-located buildings.
- 3.22 A potential new co-located venue for service delivery in Beechwood needs to be agreed through discussions with the local community.
- 3.23 For Ridgeway Library an area in the former City Learning Centre has been identified and relocation of the library space as a community venue will be developed.

Information and Advice

- 3.24 Information and Advice provision has always been a key function of the Library Service offer originally through the Council Information Point offer and more recently through a "merged service" with One Stop Shops. The New Model will therefore also include a re-designed information and advice offer. Library staff are already trained to provide "first level" information and advice on Council and partner services.
- 3.25 For a number of years, the One Stop Service has been steadily evolving and transitioning as a result of changing customer behaviour and the increased take up of online services which has been accelerated with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has provided us with the opportunity to improve the customer experience, aligning this with how our customers prefer to interact with us, providing a resilient offer to residents which has also generated savings necessary to support a sustainable budget. A new delivery model was presented and approved as a saving within the 'Budget 2022/23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan' report at Full Council February 28th 2022.
- 3.26 The service has introduced an appointment system to support targeted specialist help and advice. Customers wishing to book an appointment will ring a dedicated customer services helpline (0151-606-2005) with the enquiry being triaged by an experience customer services adviser. If the enquiry cannot be resolved over the phone an appointment will be made at a location convenient to the customer. This approach has ensured that demand for appointments is managed in line with available resources and need. This approach has been well received with customer feedback being overwhelmingly positive with 97% of surveyed customers rating the appointment booking process as either 'excellent' or 'good'.
- 3.27 In addition to this we have piloted a video calling booth at Birkenhead Central library. The video calling booth utilises modern video conferencing functionality and technology which will allow us to make more efficient use of our limited staff resources. Staff can service multiple sites from one remote location eliminating the need for staff travel time. When customers arrive for appointments library staff are on hand to welcome them and assist as necessary. Feedback from the public has

been very positive and the intention is to rollout this facility to additional sites late 2022.

- 3.28 The offer has considered the library model review which is currently underway. The one stop shop service has strong links with Libraries and library staff are trained to provide first stage information and advice on council and partner services. The model looks to provide the appointment-based service at four key sites across the borough. These sites are well placed geographically to serve the main areas of population. The four sites are as follows:
- Birkenhead Europa Pools (Operating since Dec 2020)
 - Wallasey Central Library (Operating since June 2021)
 - Bebington Central Library (Operating since August 2022)
 - West Kirby Concourse (pending the completion of ventilation remedial works)
- 3.29 To supplement this core offer, it is proposed to rollout an additional network of six video calling booths at other key Library locations in late 2022:

Service Planning and Improvement

- 3.30 The Council has committed to undertaking a service review of all its services over the next two years. A framework comprising a target operating model (TOM) and design principles for service reviews has been developed, with the intention that they are 'service led'. Building on the work already achieved through the New Model, a service review seeks to address continuous improvement and identification of additional opportunities. This work will build on the services vision and aspiration to be a modern and forward-thinking Library Service, building a vision for the future. The discovery and define phase for the service review will run parallel to the implementation of the new model and it is anticipated that the service review will be initiated once the new model is operational. This will have no material impact to the new model being implemented. The discovery phase is designed to identify key objectives and considerations for the service review including items such as (but not limited to): review of processes and policy, customer service, digital first opportunities, skills gap analysis, learning and development, resource management, commissioning, decision-making, use of assets, governance, service design, and culture. This work will be owned and managed by the service with support from OD and Change.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 During the previous year's budget setting process, a new library service model was proposed and agreed with an associated saving of £652K. This is on track to be achieved.
- 4.2 All savings are in addition to the saving of £267,000 that the Library Service made on staffing in 2020/21.
- 4.3 The budgetary savings associated with the One Stop Shop service for 2021/22 was £97,919 also made in relation to staffing.

- 4.4 Work to identify and implement co-location opportunities for Library services as a means by which to drive out the fixed revenue cost of assets will continue to evolve and will be brought to members attention for consideration as options where such an opportunity exists. Identifying and successfully delivering co-located sites in the right complementary locations will have multiple benefits, amongst which are reducing the financial burden related to the asset estate, reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions, maximisation of staff resource and increasing footfall.

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.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Arrangements will be made to recover ICT assets as appropriate from assets set for closure.
- 6.2 All the budget proposals involve either alterations to, closure, or decommissioning of Council assets. Additionally, there may be impact of the Council's asset portfolio through the implementation of CAT, which would depend upon the terms of any asset transfer, should they take place

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Failure to implement the New Model would have implications for the delivery of a legal, comprehensive, and efficient library service in Wirral. Failure to deliver would also have an impact on anticipated MTFP savings attached to the new model, creating budgetary pressures and a loss of confidence in the Council's ability to follow through on its budgetary and financial commitments.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Public consultations were undertaken on the Library Strategy between 28th June 2021 to 20th September 2021 and on the New Operating Model between 21st February 2022 and 18th April 2022. No further consultations are required.
- 8.2 The Library Service has maintained regular engagement with the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) who act as superintendent for Library Authorities in England. A total of six update meetings have taken place during the development of the new operating model, most recently 16th May 2022. The meetings provide DCMS with oversight, and act as a health check on the approach the Library Service has taken in developing a new operating model. This provides assurance that the Library Service will continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient service, and information on any forthcoming changes to the Library Service, whilst safeguarding

and/or mitigating against any potential future risks. This is an iterative dialogue, and the service will continue to engage with DCMS at all major milestones.

- 8.3 For these savings that have a staffing implication, consultation has been ongoing with trade unions and relevant staff groups as required and in accordance with section 188(1A) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act (TULRCA) 1992). All appropriate and required dialogue and consultation with Trade Unions will take place regularly throughout the process.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The environmental and climate implications of the New Model on 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 New 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.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – New Model Implementation Plan

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Library Strategy and Future Operating Model - Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure Committee - 18th January 2022

Leisure and Libraries Consultation Outcomes - Tourism Communities Culture and Leisure Committee - 16th June 2022

Budget 2022/23 and Medium Term Financial Plan - Policy and Resource Committee - 15th February 2022

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee	18 th January 2022
Policy and Resources Committee	15 th February 2022
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee	
Library Service Strategy 2021-26	16 th June 2022
Wirral Council Libraries Consultation 2022 (May 2022)	