



TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE

Thursday, 22 June 2023

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

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides members of the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee (TCCL) with a progress update on the implementation plan for the Wirral's public library service (New Model).

At the TCCL Committee on 25th October 2022, it was resolved that the proposed New Library Model be developed. A progress update was last presented to Committee on 9th March 2023.

The Model delivers against the Safer and Pleasant Communities theme of the Wirral Plan 2021-26

This is not a key decision and affects all wards.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee is recommended to support the proposed approach, work to date and the ongoing implementation plan.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

1.1 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.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 The implementation of the New Model & Strategy was approved at the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee on 23rd November 2020 so no other options considered.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 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. Progress against each theme is summarised below.

3.2 New extended opening hours as part of the New Model were introduced from early March 2023. Performance data below outlines books or other materials issued and number of IT Log-Ins for the month of April 2023 in comparison with April 2022 and pre-Covid lockdowns in 2019.

Book Issues

LIBRARY	APRIL 2019	APRIL 2022	APRIL 2023	% change 2022 to 2023
Bebington Central	6869	4922	5355	+8.8%
Birkenhead Central	5136	4169	3860	-7.4%
Eastham	2174	818	1219	+49.0%
Greasby	2682	1632	2548	+56.1%
Heswall	3840	0	1987	N/A
Moreton	3373	1112	1249	+12.3%
Rock Ferry	980	272	433	+59.2%
Upton	3122	1263	1353	+7.1%
Wallasey Central	9671	6201	6104	-1.6%
West Kirby	7759	7602	7006	-7.8%

Computer Use (IT Log-Ins)

LIBRARY	APRIL 2019	APRIL 2022	APRIL 2023	% change 2022 to 2023
Bebington Central	840	320	340	+6.2%
Birkenhead Central	1208	516	551	+6.8%
Eastham	455	60	67	+11.7%
Greasby	251	69	98	+42.0%
Heswall	430	0	94	N/A
Moreton	749	155	118	-23.9%
Rock Ferry	851	114	182	+59.7%
Upton	125	42	61	+45.2%
Wallasey Central	1017	314	480	+52.9%
West Kirby	841	226	374	+65.5%

The extended opening hours which form part of the New Model have had a positive impact particularly on this computer usage with percentage increases in all except one library. As these new hours “bed in” it is anticipated that there will be a positive trend over the coming months in both book issues and computer usage.

Workforce and Assets

- 3.3 The agreed new operating model proposed that five of the Council’s Librarians at Beechwood, Leasowe, Ridgeway, St James and Seacombe, would be unstaffed operate with kiosk loan systems and where appropriate managed and operated by volunteers. These sites have been rebranded as “Community Partner Libraries” and individual Service Level Agreements for each of the sites are being drawn up with partner groups which clearly outline obligations for both parties and provide a day-to-day operational framework as this library offer is developed. These libraries will be staffed by community volunteers employed by the Trust / Community organisation and new self-service RFID kiosks (Remote Frequency Identification Device) have been / will be purchased to support delivery of the service. This model is similar to the “Library Express” offer delivered in a number of libraries pre-March 2020. This service commenced in St James Library on 1st May 2023 and Leasowe Library will follow on 1st June 2023. A library offer has been delivered from Seacombe Children’s Centre since February 2022 with a larger, refurbished library proposed as part of the development of the Centre with a community café and soft play area. This site may also be considered for future development as part of the Seacombe Masterplan regeneration programme. Discussions with community groups and the Council’s Facilities Management section will determine the best location for a library offer for the communities of Beechwood and Noctorum (Ridgeway Library).
- 3.4 At Moreton Library / Youth Hub a new multi-service use community facility for all ages is progressing as part of a Wirral Growth Company plan. The existing interior will be refurbished with the required facilities for a Library and Youth offer. The new development will also lift the look of the building. The front and side facades will be revamped with colourful and bright cladding and glazing. New rendering on side

elevations to create a more welcoming and inviting building will also be implemented. Work on this project is expected to commence in summer 2023 for completion spring 2024.

- 3.5 The new “Connect & Inspire Hub”, a brand new fully equipped workspace, opened in Birkenhead Central Library on 6th March 2023. Wirral was just one of 25 authorities nationally that successfully applied for funding from the Libraries Improvement Fund from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport. The hub contains a soundproofed room that is available to hire by the hour, and a full timetable of courses delivered by Council partner and community organisations, such as Lifelong & Family Learning is now in place.
- 3.6 Birkenhead Central Library is also a “spoke” delivery partner for Wirral Metropolitan College’s Town Deal project and there will be substantial capital investment (£157,000) into the building, with the reprovisioning of the current workroom space into an employability training hub in partnership with Wirral Lifelong & Family Learning Service. There will also be opportunities to develop smaller spaces within the building to provide new purpose-built areas for the public and library staff. It is anticipated that the new facility will be operational in January 2024.
- 3.7 Activity to maintain good ventilation (fresh air supply) continues to be carried out across the authority. This includes numerous building surveys to assess the current condition of ventilation and reassess earlier ventilation surveys to ensure that statutory guidance is being followed – and that any recommended improvements that have been implemented. Building improvements i.e., repairs to windows, natural ventilators, passive and mechanical ventilation etc have already taken place across many sites. These improvement works include the installation of CO2 monitors at Birkenhead Central, West Kirby, Bebington and Wallasey Central libraries. Assessments are ongoing with monitors to be installed in other library sites in the near future. The easing of restrictions on maximum room capacities has enabled a significant number of activities to be offered across the Library Service. More details on activities provided at Library sites can be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.8 Recruitment: The Service had 8 FTE equivalent vacancies (as of 2nd May) and an extensive recruitment process was undertaken. In order to try to recruit a more diverse workforce this was done differently to the Council’s traditional processes. For the first time the process included dedicated Open Days to provide prospective recruits the opportunity for an informal chat with staff prior to formal interview. Other pre-interview arrangements included workplaces exercises involving specific tasks needed for the role and open discussions on library related topics.

Library Strategy

- 3.9 The Library Strategy 2021–26 is shaped around key deliverables (TCCL Committee 23rd November 2020) as set out by Libraries Connected, the four Universal Offers (“Libraries Connected – Universal Library Offers 2013”) 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.

- 3.10 An Implementation Plan has been devised to monitor progress against key strategic objectives.
- 3.11 With restrictions introduced during Covid 19 lifted and subsequent guidance around ventilation eased a variety of activities have been reintroduced in most libraries to meet the objectives of the Library Strategy. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the number and range of activities offered in April 2023.

Technology

- 3.12 Investment in innovative technology will be needed to provide a full self-service offer in the new Community Partner Libraries. Five new RFID kiosks are scheduled for delivery on 14th June 2023 and approval has been given by the Investment Change Board (ICB) to procure a further 10 kiosks in 2023-24.
- 3.13 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 has now been introduced into the 10 staffed libraries and is proving very popular with an average total of 705 printouts per month via WiFi. All libraries have now had the upgraded Aruba WiFi network installed.
- 3.14 Included in the successful Libraries Improvement Fund bid was the provision of six new “hublets” which are now available for customers to use in Birkenhead Central Library. These loanable tablets provide access to digital content to users who may not have their own devices or do not wish to be restricted to desktop computers. These tablets are controlled through a Smart Docking Station and dynamic user interface so providing digital inclusion for all. The take up of these devices will be assessed to determine whether a rollout of more devices in other locations with existing revenue funds should be developed.

Communication and Engagement

- 3.15 In the Wirral Council Libraries Consultation (February – April 2022) it was identified that communication was something our residents and service users said we could improve on:
- A social media working group has been established within the Library staff team with the aim to post updates on the Service offer, daily if needed. Posts are made on the Library Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms.
 - A new Staff Newsletter is being designed with the aim to inform all staff of Service developments on a regular basis.
 - The Service will also develop a long-term Communications/Marketing Plan in conjunction with the Council’s Communications Team that will promote activities within our Libraries.

Information and Advice

- 3.16 In person face to face appointments are being delivered at three key sites across the borough at Birkenhead Europa Pools, Wallasey Central Library and Bebington Central Library. A fourth site will go live at West Kirby Central Library week commencing 9th May 2023. To supplement this offer, video calling booths are

already located at Birkenhead Central Library, Eastham Library and Moreton Library. A further site will be rolled out over the coming weeks at Heswall Library with additional sites at Upton Library and Seacombe Children's Centre in the coming months. The video calling booths utilise modern video conferencing functionality and technology which allows 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.

- 3.17 The Customer Experience Strategy seeks to improve the customer experience for all client groups across all service areas. It will provide a clear framework to deliver the Council's value of 'being customer focused'. Libraries and One Stop Shops as two of the main public facing services will be involved in the delivery of this Strategy.

Service Planning and Improvement

- 3.18 The Library Service, supported by the Council's Organisation Development and Design team is engaging with all staff to address some of the feedback raised through recent staff consultations. Six key themes have been identified on how we work with staff to improve as a service and as colleagues. These are:

- Working together to deliver an outstanding service
- Work more effectively together
- Values, behaviours and roles
- Engagement
- Learning and Development
- Leadership

- 3.19 Workshops were held in Birkenhead Central Library on 18th and 20th April to look at the first two themes and were reviewed on completion. Further workshop sessions will be taking place with staff across the summer.

- 3.20 It has been identified that the current IT provision for staff and customers requires reviewing. The service is working with colleagues from Organisational Development and Design to identify improvements for staff, for example so that all staff have access to a laptop. Engagement will be needed with Digital Services to work on a longer-term digital strategy for libraries and what the public IT offer should look like to keep it relevant and cost effective.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It is anticipated that there will be financial benefits from the development of a mixed model of community and partner delivery, led and supported by the service, with strong outreach and digital elements.
- 4.2 The level of savings is dependent on the level of community support and colocations. The focus of this re-modelling is primarily to deliver a fit for purpose modern and future-proof library offer that delivers flexible accommodation to promote a range of uses.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 One of the aims of the new library model is to make best use of the public sector estate and reduce costs by sharing accommodation with relevant partner services. thus, reducing unnecessary costs as well as reducing its carbon footprint.
- 6.2 The library service offers access to essential IT for those who cannot afford it and support for those who need it. It is essential that this equipment is kept refreshed to ensure it is compatible with school and business IT software allowing young people homework facilities and adults access to facilities to search and apply for work.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The New Model is designed to ensure that a legal, comprehensive, and efficient library service is provided in Wirral. There have been regular communications with the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport to update on the progress of the implementation of the New Operating Model.
- 7.2 Failure to deliver the model could also have an impact on anticipated Medium Term Financial Plan 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.
- 7.3 The Community Partner Libraries may not be able to fulfil all their obligations as set out in the Service Level Agreement and so there would be a reputational risk to the Council.
- 7.4 The New Operating Model has identified the need for recruitment of additional staff to allow the Library Service to operate with new revised hours as above. Until this recruitment has been completed there is the potential of ad-hoc closures at short notice when pressures on existing staffing numbers dictate.
- 7.5 Additionally staffing resources are still being used to run the Community Partner sites at Beechwood and Seacombe libraries and until such time as the operational responsibility for these moves over to community organisations these will still need to be staffed. This will impact on overall available resources in this interim period.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 We have engaged with Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

Representatives on the New Model from an early stage and they are comfortable with our proposals. This dialogue with DCMS will continue at key review points.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

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

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

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

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 develop a shared programme of work with Long Life & Family Learning Service to provide Essential Digital Skills for those transitioning between careers or as an entry route to employment.
- 11.3 The Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) in Birkenhead Central Library is designed to provide any individual or business with specialist help and support. It offers 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 – Strategy Actions April 2023

The images in the appendix below may not be suitable to view for people with disabilities, users of assistive technology or mobile phone devices. Please contact peteraspinall@wirral.gov.uk if you would like these documents in an accessible format.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Libraries Connected – Universal Library Offers 2013
<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/universal-library-offers>

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee in accordance with Section (f) of its Terms of Reference, to undertake responsibility for the delivery of the authority's library services.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee	23rd November 2020
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee	25 th October 2022
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee	9 th March 2023