

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 10 DECEMBER 2019

LIBRARIES STRATEGY

Summary

1. Library authorities (upper-tier local authorities) have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it (Section 7). Local authorities have the scope to offer wider library services beyond the statutory service to other user groups, and the Act allows for joint working between library authorities.
2. The Act does not try to define what a 'comprehensive and efficient Library service' is, but when considering how best to deliver the statutory duty, each library authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs and to deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources. The Department for Digital, Cultural, Media and Sport (DCMS) updated their guidance for library authorities earlier this year and is available on this link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service>
3. In fulfilling its duty under s7, a library authority shall, in particular, have regard to the desirability - amongst other things:
 - 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.
4. The general duty under s7(1) of the 1964 Act does not extend "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".
5. The Council currently meets its statutory duty through the services delivered via twenty-one static libraries, a mobile library and a range of digital services and digital content that are accessible on the Council's library web pages. In addition, there are two fully volunteer-run community library links based in village halls at

Welland and Martley and the library service also operates the prison library in HMP Hewell.

Next phase of transformation

6. The role of libraries within Worcestershire communities has been changing for over a decade and continues to evolve within a challenging financial environment. Traditional library services of book borrowing are now delivered alongside computer access, family activities, a comprehensive adult learning programme, targeted reading and literacy schemes, job clubs, job fairs, health and well-being services and a varied volunteering programme.

7. Considerable progress has been made over recent years in modernising Worcestershire's library services and ensuring value for money. Over £3.9m of efficiency savings has been achieved since 2011/12, when the Libraries Transformation Programme was first launched by Cabinet in May 2011. A range of transformational approaches have been implemented including: a comprehensive property re-modelling programme; a series of staff and management restructures; a reduction in the Mobile Library service; investment in self-service technology; introduction of consortium stock purchasing and direct book delivery.

8. In October 2018, the Council's Cabinet considered a report which outlined the next phase of Libraries Remodelling. This was set in the context of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, with the report also describing that decisions made by local authorities concerning libraries should be guided by a strategic review, that in turn is informed by a needs assessment. Therefore, the report in October 2018 presented the findings of Worcestershire's libraries' needs assessment and outlined a set of recommendations, to take out to formal public consultation, for the future delivery of front-line library provision. As a result, Cabinet agreed to launch a formal public consultation exercise.

9. In July 2019, Cabinet received a report summarising the feedback from the public consultation along with feedback from a Libraries-focused Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review that was held in May 2019. The report outlined proposals and recommendations for how to act on the findings of the consultation and Peer Review and clarified the position in relation to being on track to realise 2019/20 savings. Cabinet agreed to act upon the advice of the LGA Peer Review and take time to consolidate all of the feedback and learning gathered through the needs assessment and public consultation into a Libraries Strategy in order to set out the vision and ambition for the service over the medium to long-term. All future delivery changes would then be underpinned by the Strategy.

10. A report to December's Cabinet is being prepared to summarise the final stages of the libraries strategic review which will conclude in recommending to Cabinet the approval of Worcestershire's Libraries Strategy.

11. This report provides a summary of the content of the proposed Libraries Strategy in order to seek Corporate and Communities Scrutiny Panel's views on its content ahead of final approval by Cabinet.

Library Strategy – development

12. In early June 2019 the Council met with library policy advisors from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, who strongly reinforced the Peer Review recommendation that the county's library transformation proposals be underpinned by a library strategy that articulates the medium and long-term vision and ambition for the service. The strategy will also link libraries to the Council's corporate strategy; reflect local need as identified in Libraries' Needs Assessment and demonstrates how changes to service provision will reflect feedback from residents and communities.

13. Building on the feedback received from the extensive public consultation exercise carried out earlier on in 2019, a further public viewpoint engagement exercise has been carried out resulting in 1468 responses as well as a series of staff engagement exercises; visits to Leicestershire and Warwickshire Library Services with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, and Corporate and Community Scrutiny Panel Members; Service Manager discussions with Staffordshire and Cambridgeshire and a completion of a Libraries self-assessment review using the DCMS framework.

14. The visits to Leicestershire and Warwickshire were focused on learning from others in relation to two delivery models, Community Managed Libraries and 'Open Plus' Libraries. Community Managed Libraries, which is where the running of libraries has transferred to community organisations, have been implemented where there are high numbers of small libraries (Leicestershire 34, Staffordshire 27 and Warwickshire 13) and no existing community support (unlike current arrangements in Worcestershire). Authorities allowed for a long implementation lead time as the pace was driven by local communities and they also provided significant investment to secure the necessary deals. 'Open Plus' libraries have been implemented to extend opening hours as well as reduce staffing levels. Where implemented most successfully there has been high engagement with the community to promote and encourage ownership and use of the available space.

15. The most recent viewpoint survey was instigated to try and encourage feedback from non-library users. Out of the 1468 responses 29% (420) had not visited a library in the past 12 months. When asked what would most encourage non-users to visit a library in the future, the top three responses were improved awareness of library services; improved IT and longer opening hours. Responses also mentioned improved accessibility (parking, opening times, transport).

16. 59% of respondents had not accessed online services in 12 months. The factors most likely to encourage use of online services included access to e-resources; a Library App and the ability for online chat with library staff. When asked about getting involved in the running of the libraries 21% of all respondents stated they would be interested in having a say in the running of their local library (9% of non-users). There was highest interest from those in less-affluent socio-economic groups.

Proposed Library Strategy - Content

17. The proposed Strategy consolidates and builds on all the changes that have gone before. It centres around five strategic ambitions which articulate the vision for the Library Service over the next five years and aims to ensure libraries are positioned at the heart of the Council's corporate priorities and remain fit for the future. The five strategic ambitions are outlined in the diagram below.



18. The strategic ambitions consider the local, national and financial context described within the proposed Strategy. They have been shaped by 5803 responses from Worcestershire residents to three library consultation and engagement surveys which 23 public consultation meetings which were attended by a total of 800 residents. Specifically, there was strong support from the public of sharing library buildings making this the preferred transformation option. There were also low levels of support for fully Community Managed Libraries so, taking this and the learning from other areas, this option is no longer being considered.

19. The ambitions have also been shaped by feedback from library staff and Council service leads, recommendations identified in the Libraries' Needs Assessment; service improvements identified in a self-assessment review undertaken by the Library Service in October 2019 and learning from the transformation experiences of other library authorities.

20. In summary, the transformation plan for the proposed 5-year strategy for Worcestershire libraries will:

- promote the library service and its benefits more widely across the county to reach more residents
- establish libraries as the front door for Council and community services where appropriate
- establish libraries as community assets and increase community involvement through use of library space and volunteering opportunities
- tailor libraries' service offer to meet a wider range of council priorities and community needs, focusing on the most vulnerable and promoting independence
- seek to sustain our existing 21 public libraries, 2 library links and 1 mobile library, by:-
 - extending self-service technology to allow customers to access library services independently at times that are convenient to them
 - building on our successes at Broadway, Hagley and Upton to engage communities in sustaining and supporting libraries with lowest need (as defined by the local needs assessment), and
 - optimising library space by sharing it with other services to generate income
- enhance and provide new ways to access our digital library services
- right-size staffing resource to activity levels and need
- introduce an optimal library management structure that can deliver strategic ambitions for the service
- establish the Hive as a centre for service innovation and development for all county libraries
- invest in library resources to improve service quality and meet changing customer expectations
- manage libraries more efficiently through new approaches to funding
- explore opportunities for library service growth, in partnership with local communities, and in relation to significant housing developments in the county.

21. The proposed Libraries Strategy attached at Appendix 1 will provide the framework for achieving the remaining library savings. £196K permanent savings were realised in 2018/19 with £4K carried forward to 2019/20. The target for 2019/20 has been to save £395k (plus £4K carry forward) and is on track for delivery albeit only £310K are permanent savings with the remaining £89K being realised through one-off savings. This means the £89K will need to be carried over to next financial year. This leaves an additional £205K (Total £294K) to be delivered in 2020/21 and will be identified through securing income from renting space within libraries; introducing self-service technology, seeking further community support for libraries and right sizing frontline staff and management resource in accordance to need.

22. Subject to approval by Cabinet, work will commence on implementing the ambitions outlined in the Strategy.

23. Presentation are provided for the Panel and are attached at Appendix 2.

Purpose of the Meeting

The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to: comment on the content of the proposed Libraries Strategy ahead of approval by Cabinet.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Proposed Library Strategy

Appendix 2 – Presentation Slides

Specific Contact Points for this Report

Samantha Morris/Alison Spall Overview and Scrutiny Officers Tel: 01905 844963

Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and Minutes of the Cabinet on 18 October 2018 and 11 July 2019.

Agenda and Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 7 November 2018, 13 March 2019, 9 July 2019.

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)