

# **CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 8 JUNE 2023**

## **LIBRARIES UNLOCKED**

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### **Summary**

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, the Assistant Director of Communities and the Head of Service for Libraries, Archive and Archaeology have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to Libraries Unlocked

### **Background**

2. A Library Strategy for Worcestershire was written in 2019/20 following formal public engagement, a Local Government Association Library Peer Challenge and the creation of a Library Needs Assessment.
3. The Strategy, which set out a medium-term vision for the service and a context for future service transformation, received Cabinet approval in December 2019 and included the implementation of an open library service delivery model (Libraries Unlocked), aimed at securing the future of Worcestershire's library network while providing opportunities to deliver efficiencies and meet the needs of Worcestershire residents
4. Libraries Unlocked introduces technology into Libraries that allow Library Members to access Library facilities outside of staffed hours. An update on the roll out of Libraries Unlocked has been requested by the Panel as part of its Work Programme.

### **Libraries Unlocked – Feedback from the ‘early adopters’**

5. Following a successful ‘early adopter’ implementation of an open library service delivery model in June 2022 at Droitwich and Stourport libraries, under Libraries Unlocked branding, a second phase of implementation has been planned.
6. Both early adopter sites saw opening hours increased by 85% while core staffing hours were reduced by 26% and 37% respectively at Droitwich and Stourport libraries. The response to Libraries Unlocked at Droitwich and Stourport libraries has been positive, both from customers and community organisations. The following list summarises data collected between 6 June 2022 and the end of March 2023:
  - 48% and 66% respectively of Droitwich and Stourport Library's active library members (16+) had signed up to Libraries Unlocked membership (2353 customers)

- There was a total of 10,854 library visits and 13,602 issues during Libraries Unlocked opening hours across both libraries, representing 8% of total visits for the two libraries and 11% of total library issues for the two libraries.
  - There were 2963 computer sessions during Libraries Unlocked opening times.
  - 17 regular partner-led events were introduced during Libraries Unlocked opening hours including: Adult Learning courses, Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) Business Breakfasts, Citizens Advice sessions, Police Community Support Officer sessions, Chess Club, Knit & Natter groups, Cancer Support groups, Repair Cafes, vaccination clinics and Ukraine Connections events.
  - Across the two libraries, the 65-74 age group accounted for 24% of Libraries Unlocked visitors, with 35-44, 55-64 and 75+ age groups each accounting for 17% and 45-54 making up 12% of visitors.
7. A survey of Libraries Unlocked customers was carried out in October 2022 which highlighted that the service is most popular with people who work, parents who work, people who like to visit the library when it is quieter and people who want to spend longer periods of time in the library. The survey also highlighted areas for improvement including communication, tailgating and changes to the customer induction.
8. In response to feedback new signage has been installed at Droitwich and Stourport Library entrances clarifying who can use Libraries Unlocked and how to become a member; induction content and protocols have been updated and relationships have been strengthened with local police Community Support Officer and Designing out Crime teams to lower the likelihood of disruptive behaviour that can arise from tailgating.
9. Tailgating is a common experience across library authorities who have implemented open library technology and mainly comprises library customers who believe the library is open and enter to borrow and return books or use library services. Feedback from Libraries Unlocked customers confirms this trend in Droitwich and Stourport Libraries. On the rare occasions that tailgating has led to disruptive behaviour, it has involved school aged children and the local Community Support Officer team have followed up successfully with schools and parents.

### **Introducing Libraries Unlocked across the wider network of Libraries**

10. Phase 2 of Libraries Unlocked implementation will seek to introduce the model in all remaining libraries except for:
- a) The Hive
  - b) libraries with low relative need (in accordance with the Libraries Needs Assessment – see supporting information)
  - c) libraries with a low return on open library investment.
11. While these criteria have guided decision making, consideration has also been given to local funding pressures.

12. Table 1 outlines the proposed plan for where Libraries Unlocked will and won't be introduced. There are three libraries where landlord approval is required, and work has commenced on seeking approval.

**Table 1 outlines the proposed plan where Libraries Unlocked is likely to be introduced.**

Libraries Unlocked Confirmed – will form part of Phase 2	Libraries Unlocked Maybe – subject to landlord approval	Libraries Unlocked Not proceeding with
Malvern	Wythall	The Hive
Evesham	Pershore	Tenbury
Redditch	Alvechurch	Upton
Kidderminster		Woodrow
Bromsgrove		Broadway
Hagley		Catshill
Rubery		Bewdley
St Johns		
Warndon		

13. Where Libraries Unlocked implementation goes ahead the reduction in staffed opening hours will align to relative library need, with higher need libraries seeing a lower reduction in staffed opening hours.
14. At libraries where Libraries Unlocked is not implemented a review will be undertaken to ensure that the distribution of staff resource across libraries broadly aligns to relative library need. Where there are substantial exceptions to this broad principle, adjustments to opening hours may be made.
15. A 30-day staff consultation on Phase 2, Stage 1 proposals is expected to commence in June 2023. The proposals will see reductions in frontline library staff. There are currently 20 vacant (10.2 fte) frontline library posts to mitigate the need for staff redundancies.
16. If Libraries Unlocked goes ahead at all in-scope libraries, an estimated £423k of capital investment will be required and an estimated £220k efficiencies will be delivered.
17. The scheduling of libraries for Phase 2 Libraries Unlocked implementation will prioritise library clusters where the Council own the freehold of library buildings and progress is not subject to negotiations with landlords or Private Finance Initiative (PFI) providers. Two stages of implementation have been identified on this basis.
- Stage 1 covers Bromsgrove, Rubery, Hagley, Kidderminster, Malvern and St John's libraries. Stage 1 libraries are expected to go live in Autumn 2023.
  - Stage 2; Redditch, Wythall, Alvechurch, Evesham, Pershore and Warndon libraries.

18. The timing for implementation at Redditch Library will depend on Cabinet's decision on the proposed relocation of Redditch Library to Redditch Town Hall and will be scheduled to minimise costs.

### **Purpose of the Meeting**

19. The Panel asked to:
- consider and comment on the contents of the report
  - agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member, and
  - determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

### **Supporting Information**

- Appendix 1 - Library Ranking by Need updated for 12 months to the end of January 2023

### **Contact Points**

#### Specific Contact Points for this report

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### **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer, in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance the following are background papers relating to this report:

[Agenda for Cabinet on Friday, 20th December, 2019](#)

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