

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 NOVEMBER 2023

LIBRARIES UNLOCKED IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities and the Assistant Director for Communities have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to the implementation of 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 on 20 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 allows Library Members to access Library facilities outside of staffed hours. A briefing paper on the implementation of Libraries Unlocked has been requested by the Panel following on from the more detailed report provided on the 8 June 2023 (see background papers).

Libraries Unlocked Implementation

5. In June 2022, Libraries Unlocked was successfully implemented in Droitwich and Stourport Libraries. Opening hours increased by 85% at both libraries, allowing community groups and library members to visit their local library outside of staffed opening hours. On the back of the success of the early adopter sites, a decision was made to commence feasibility work on introducing Libraries Unlocked at Malvern, Evesham, Redditch, Kidderminster, Wythall, Pershore, Bromsgrove, Hagley, Alvechurch, Rubery, Warndon and St John's Libraries.
6. A phased approach is being taken to both feasibility work and implementation, given the number of Libraries being considered and the complexity of building arrangements, co-located partners, leases and licences in places, as no two libraries are the same.

7. Libraries Unlocked is expected to be operational at **Evesham, Pershore, Rubery, St John's , Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Malvern** libraries in early 2024.

This is still subject to:

- closure of staff consultation
- successful outcome to negotiations with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over Job Centre Plus customer access during Libraries Unlocked opening hours
- identification of additional utilities costs and successful outcome to negotiations with Pershore Town Council
- satisfactory asbestos surveys at all sites
- receipt of Listed Building Consent for Malvern Library from Malvern Hills District Council.

8. Libraries Unlocked will be progressed at **Redditch** and **Warndon** libraries in 2024/25 or 2025/26 subject to the:

- re-location of Redditch Library to Redditch Town Hall
- identification of a satisfactory alternative location for Warndon Library in the Fairfield Centre
- progress of Fairfield Centre project.

9. Feasibility work will be progressed at **Wythall, Alvechurch, Hagley** libraries over the next 3-6 months. Implementation will be subject to:

- the successful outcome of negotiations with Hagley Parish Council, Woodrush High School, Alvechurch Middle School and Crown Meadow Nursery and Primary School
- identification of associated Private Finance Initiative (PFI) costs at Alvechurch Library
- the identification of additional utility costs at Wythall, Alvechurch and Hagley.

Libraries Unlocked Engagement

10. Worcestershire County Council's Library Service is committed to working with existing library members and local communities. Using the learning from the early adopter sites, local customer engagement sessions will be arranged once there is a confirmed go-live date for a site. The timing of these sessions is important in order to provide library members and local communities with clarity on how Libraries Unlocked will work at their library, and to be able to answer specific questions that may be raised.

11. A specific section of the County Council's website has been developed to provide more information on Libraries Unlocked and to answer any generic questions that individuals may have. The link to the relevant webpage is here: [Libraries Unlocked | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Purpose of the Meeting

12. The Panel is asked to:
- consider and comment on the information provided on Libraries Unlocked;
 - agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member, and

- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Contact Points

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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 the subject matter of this report:

- [Agenda and Minutes for Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8 June 2023](#)
- [Agenda and Minutes for Cabinet on 20 December 2019](#)

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