

Wiltshire Libraries and the Covid-19 pandemic

The Library Service response to the pandemic

- The library service closed its buildings on 20 March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic
- Provision moved online with daily rhymetimes, author talks, reading groups, along with other events and activities to support people's mental health and help overcome loneliness
- Additional stock was supplied to boost the existing eBook, eAudio and eMagazine service
- New customers were also able to join online
- Library staff were seconded to other departments and worked on the Wellbeing helpline, whilst others provided the Home Library Service direct to those most vulnerable customers

Reopening the library service

- The prison library reopened in May 2020 operating an Order & Collect service and the remaining libraries followed in a phased approach from August 2020 onwards
- Bookable sessions on the public computer were also offered to those without IT provision at home and are now available to all on a drop-in basis
- A browsing service with social distancing in place was reintroduced when government regulations allowed in July 2021 and this continues to the present
- 30 of 31 branches and all 3 mobile libraries are now operating
- Opening hours are now at 75% of pre-pandemic levels
- Recruitment to vacancies continues and will allow the service to expand the opening hours further as posts are filled

Market Lavington

- Market Lavington library remains the only library still closed due to building issues which worsened during the pandemic
- Following an innovative partnership with the Parish Council, Market Lavington library will move next month to a new location
- Sharing space in the Parish Council owned community hall the library will be able to expand it's activities, with the volunteers who operate this library keen to introduce activities such as rhymetimes and a reading group

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

- In September the DCMS contacted all library services in England asking to be notified of their plans to get back to normal provision
- Wiltshire Libraries replied to say the aim is to achieve a normal service by April 2022.
- Regular cleaning of high touch surfaces means some libraries with fewer staff currently close at lunchtimes to facilitate this
- The service is also experiencing a high number of staff vacancies and not all volunteers who operate the smallest libraries have returned to their roles yet
- We are currently recruiting and supporting volunteers to return. However with the social distancing and additional cleaning policies likely to continue until spring 2022 it is expected our full opening hours may not be offered at all our libraries until 1 April 2022

Performance trends

	Apr – Sep 2021	Apr – Sep 2019	% change	Comments
Issues	535,939	926,286	-42%	Includes 17,505 eBook issues (+7.7%) & 18,319 eMagazine issues (+340%) on previous year
Visits	202,940	833,309	-75%	1m social distancing is limiting the number of partner activities and library operated events being held, this is impacting on visitor numbers. A large number of more vulnerable customers haven't returned yet as they continue to isolate
Members	145,098	178,138	-23%	Library cards require renewing every 3 years so people will automatically be deleted if they've not renewed. As people return their cards are renewed
	Apr 2021	Sept 2021	% change	Notes
No. of computer sessions per month	1,014	2,863	182%	A drop-in system is in operation