

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

10 December 2024

Subject: Library Strategy 2025 - 2030

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling - Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, and Communities

Key Decision: Non-Key

Executive Summary

This report provides the background, implications and link to the Library Strategy 2025 – 2030 document for approval by Cabinet. Developed through conversations with communities, council and external partners across the county it provides a strategic direction for the service over the next five years.

Proposals

That Cabinet approve the Library Strategy 2025-30

Reason for Proposals

The results of a Local Government Association Peer Challenge in July 2023 recommended a strategy be developed so the library service could continue to innovate and adapt to meet the future needs of people living, working and studying in Wiltshire.

The potential impact of demographic, budgetary and environmental changes in the future means a clear framework is required to focus delivery and ensure the statutory requirements of the library service are maintained and delivered in a cost-effective way.

By articulating the vision, purpose and priorities of the library service over the next five years the strategy will ensure the service remains relevant and able to deliver on the national and local priorities a public library is there to support.

Parvis Khansari
Corporate Director - Place

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

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Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval to adopt the Wiltshire Library Strategy 2025 - 2030

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The Library Service in Wiltshire has 30 static libraries and three mobile libraries. The annual net controllable budget is £3.5m with IT, Fleet and Facilities Management costs controlled centrally. There are 190 employees (87 FTE). A total of 765 opening hours are delivered each week. The service has 753 volunteers, of which 36% provide 12,748 hours of their time annually to support 144 library opening hours each week. In addition, three libraries have an extra 140 hours of weekly self-service provision.
3. As a large council team the library service plays a key role in delivering against the missions, themes and corresponding priorities outlined in the Business Plan 2022 – 2032.
4. The following are a few examples of existing work focussed on delivering the council's guiding themes. The new library strategy offers further opportunities to develop these areas through the ambitions outlined in each focus area.

Prevention and early intervention

- Health and wellbeing offer: drop ins and workshops with partners supporting public health messaging and resources on mental health, nutrition and exercise to help residents adopt healthier lifestyles and prevent health issues
- Early literacy support: rhyme time sessions and other activities e.g. story times supporting early literacy and speech development for young children to foster a love of reading and learning from an early age, which can prevent future educational challenges
- Loaning Activity Trackers and Blood Pressure Monitors: allowing residents to borrow health monitoring devices to make informed choices, improving lifestyles and health outcomes.

Improving social mobility and tackling inequalities

- Digital inclusion: free access to computers and the internet, along with digital support sessions supported by staff and volunteers, to help bridge the digital divide and improve employment opportunities. Wi-Fi is also available in all library buildings

- ReadEasy Partnership: supporting those who struggle with literacy skills to improve their reading ability and life chances
- Volunteering Opportunities: developing transferable skills, including customer service, to support increased employment opportunities

Understanding communities

- Hosting Council community feedback events and providing information regarding statutory consultations
- Listening to customer feedback to understand the needs and preferences of different community groups, ensuring library services are tailored to meet local needs and support the creation of stronger communities
- Providing access to local history and genealogy resources to help residents connect with their heritage and foster a sense of place and community identity

Working together

- Operating as a community spoke for the Family Hub model with library staff to support early years development initiatives such as Bookstart and rhyme times, provide information for families, and engagement with books from an early age
- Partnerships with local organisations including schools, arts organisations and community groups to maximise the impact of cultural activity across the county
- Volunteering opportunities to help people develop life skills, meet new friends, make a difference in their community and overcome loneliness, whilst supporting the library service in their local community

5. The library service is committed to developing the service to ensure the core offer of books, information and computer provision deliver outcomes relating to the [Council's Business plan](#).

Background

6. Under the [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#) (PLMA) Wiltshire Council has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for people working, living or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it.
7. Over the past five years the library service has experienced significant change. This is due to the flexibility required during and after the pandemic, the impact of changes to physical and digital use and a conscious move to focus on providing library services and facilities to support the most vulnerable Wiltshire residents who would benefit from library use.
8. A strategy will help to maintain the momentum already developed and provide a clear direction to sustain and improve on this performance, particularly in the areas of health and wellbeing, economic regeneration, cultural activity and digital support.
9. In July 2023 an online Peer Challenge by the Local Government Association and Arts Council England was undertaken. Over 60 people were spoken to by the four person team and involved 15 meetings, the equivalent of one person spending nearly two weeks in Wiltshire Council and 70 hours were spent collectively by the team to determine their findings. The Executive Summary of the Peer Challenge can be found in Appendix 2.
10. The key recommendations were that the strategy should:

- Articulate the vision of the library service and create a strategy through engagement with internal and external stakeholders so everyone has ownership of it;
- Identify the core library offer, with due consideration to staffing capacity, and how future delivery can be expanded by increasing connections with partners and volunteers;
- Review and build on the success of the mixed model of delivery with three areas of focus – library buildings as community assets, online & digital provision and outreach services. Especially for those in rural or disadvantaged areas;
- Embed the voice of communities in the strategy and its delivery, especially those of young people, so they know how the council is working to ensure they develop their potential;
- Ensure the value and purpose of the library is clearly stated. It is a library first and foremost that delivers community support, information and signposting;
- At all levels of the organisation 'Think Library First' when considering how the library service can support council services with similar aims within the Council's Business Plan

Main Considerations for the Council

11. The library strategy document for approval by Cabinet can be found [here](#) and includes links to the Business Plan priorities.
12. Once approved the document will be re-designed as an engaging read for the public and other stakeholders by the Design and Print team and will include colourful graphics.
13. In developing the strategy consideration has been given to the budget. The strategy will be delivered from the future budget of the library service. It is expected funding bids to external organisations, including Arts Council England, will be required to deliver some of the ambitions highlighted in the report.
14. The library strategy considers the requirements of the budget and policy framework and ensures the delivery of the council's statutory requirements to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.
15. There is no requirement to formally consult on the library strategy. However, engagement with key stakeholders including library customers, council and external partners, non-users, library staff and volunteers has been undertaken and the results are reflected in the strategy document and key supporting evidence. Data used to inform the strategy can be found in Appendix 3.

Safeguarding Implications

16. The Library Service follows the Wiltshire Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership (SVPP) safeguarding policies and procedures of the Council and delivery of the strategy will sit within these responsibilities and processes.

Public Health Implications

17. The library strategy document shows how the library service aims to improve the health of Wiltshire's population and the impact on wellbeing levels. Key target groups are also identified in the document.

Procurement Implications

18. The library strategy has no immediate procurement implications, and any future needs identified will be developed as part of the project planning process with the involvement of the Procurement Team at the earliest stages.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

19. An Equality Impact assessment (EqIA), see Appendix 4, has been undertaken and an action plan created to mitigate risks including:

- Increase in the number of older people
- Decrease in library membership at specific ages
- Increase in the needs of those residents with disabilities, autism and SEND
- Staff and volunteers not reflecting the demographics of the communities they serve
- Impact of rural isolation
- Impact of low incomes
- Lack of engagement with hard to reach groups

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

20. The library strategy shows how the service aims to support the council's carbon neutral ambitions and any changes to current provision will form part of individual project plans with the involvement of the Climate team and other relevant partners at that stage.

Workforce Implications

21. Reviews of service structures and operating models will continue, ensuring they are fit for purpose and support the delivery of an effective and efficient library service.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

22. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport superintend and promote the improvement of local government's provision of public library services in England. They consider it good practice for library services to develop a sustainable library strategy to best meet the needs of local people and the communities they serve. Agreeing the Library Strategy will also deliver on the recommendations of the LGA Peer Challenge.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

23. The risks of agreeing and delivering the strategy lay in staff capacity and sufficient budgets, however this has been acknowledged and the ambitions are scalable to suit the resources available over the next five years.

Financial Implications

24. The expectation is that the strategy will be delivered from the library services existing base budgets.

Legal Implications

25. There is no legal requirement for a library strategy and all policies have been complied with and no consultation is required. Therefore, engagement with Legal Services has not been undertaken.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

26. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Environment Select Committee will receive a briefing on the Library Strategy on 5 December 2024.

Options Considered

27. The option not to create a library strategy would leave the service without a focus of direction for the future and may result in missed opportunities to innovate and meet the needs of communities in Wiltshire.

Conclusions

28. A library strategy is required to support the effective delivery of a comprehensive and efficient service to meet the needs of communities across Wiltshire over the next five years.

David Redfern - Director of Leisure, Culture & Communities

Report Author: Rebecca Bolton, Service Manager - Libraries,
rebecca.bolton@wiltshire.gov.uk, Tel: 01225 718557

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Library Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Peer Challenge Executive Summary
- Appendix 3 - Library Strategy engagement feedback
- Appendix 4 - Equalities Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None