

[NB: 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]

Library Strategy 2025 – 2030

Section 1 - Welcome from Ian Blair-Pilling

As Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure and Libraries I am delighted to introduce our new Wiltshire library strategy. It is an innovative framework that outlines the library service's vision, purpose, and key areas of focus for the next five years.

This ambitious strategy, developed through extensive dialogue with communities and partners across the county, follows a successful Local Government Association Peer Challenge. It highlights how our libraries serve as vital community spaces where residents can meet, borrow books, use computers, find information and attend events and activities. Our libraries can act as anchors for high street businesses, driving footfall and boosting the local economy. This, in turn improves literacy and health outcomes, employment opportunities, and life skills.

I believe the most successful library services are built on a long-term partnership between the library and its stakeholders. Over the next 5 years, I look forward to seeing our library service innovate and collaborate even more, developing services to support the health, wellbeing and social mobility of everyone who lives, works or studies in Wiltshire.

Section 2 - Introduction

In July 2023 Wiltshire Library Service undertook a Local Government Association Library Peer Challenge, funded by Arts Council England, to consider the future direction of the service after a period of rapid change. During the pandemic libraries developed new and innovative ways to deliver services; digitally, face to face and in the community. It is essential to continue with this new culture of innovation to meet the future needs of people living and working in Wiltshire.

Looking ahead to the potential for demographic, budgetary and environmental changes over the next five years the library service needs to guarantee its delivery is based on a clear analysis of customer needs. This will ensure the statutory requirements of the service are maintained and delivered in a cost effective way.

The Peer Challenge team highlighted the following key recommendations:

- 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

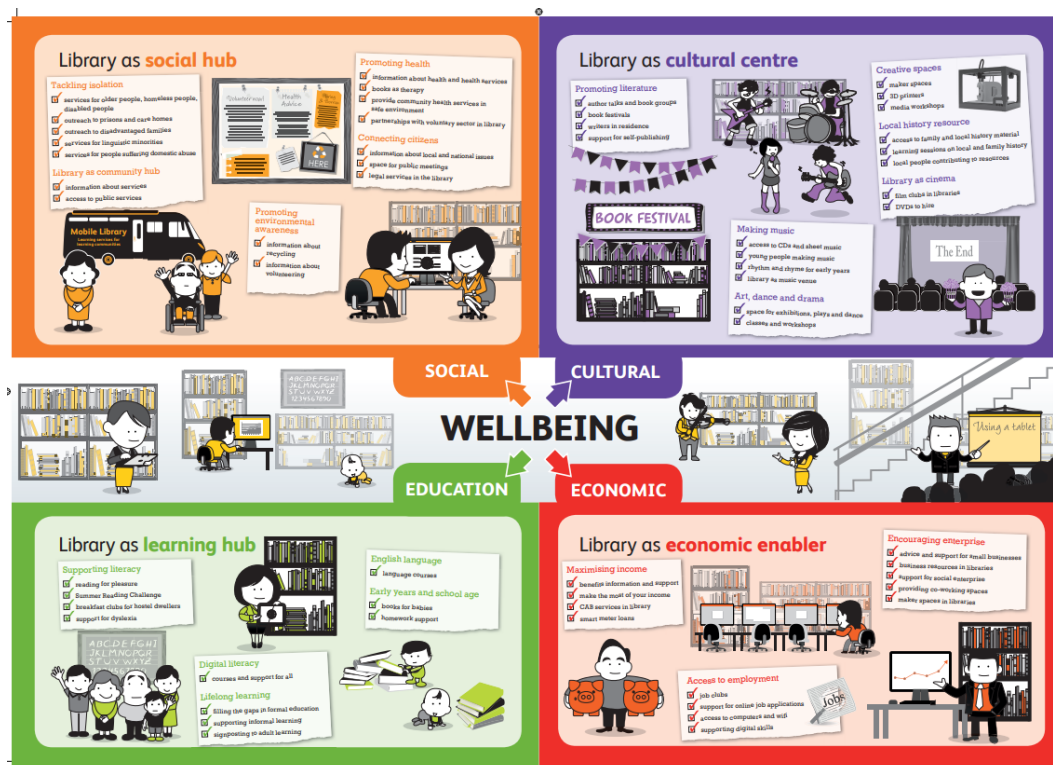
- Review and build on the success of the mixed model of delivery with three areas of focus – library buildings as community assets, online & digital provision and outreach services. Especially for those in rural or disadvantaged areas
- Embed the voice of communities in the strategy and its delivery, 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

“Libraries play such an important part in our lives, be that instilling a love of reading in childhood or encouraging economic, social and mental wellbeing throughout adulthood and into old age ... they are one of the most critical forms of social infrastructure we have” Baroness Sanderson, author of ‘An independent review of English public libraries’ (2024).

The library strategy for Wiltshire sets out an ambitious direction of travel for the service and new provision in some areas is likely to require external funding in view of local government finances.

To ensure successful outcomes the library service will use a delivery model based on three key resources – the library buildings, a digital presence and outreach in communities – together with well trained staff and volunteers to provide the best service possible.

The impact a library service can have on its community is illustrated here in a graphic created by The Carnegie Trust.

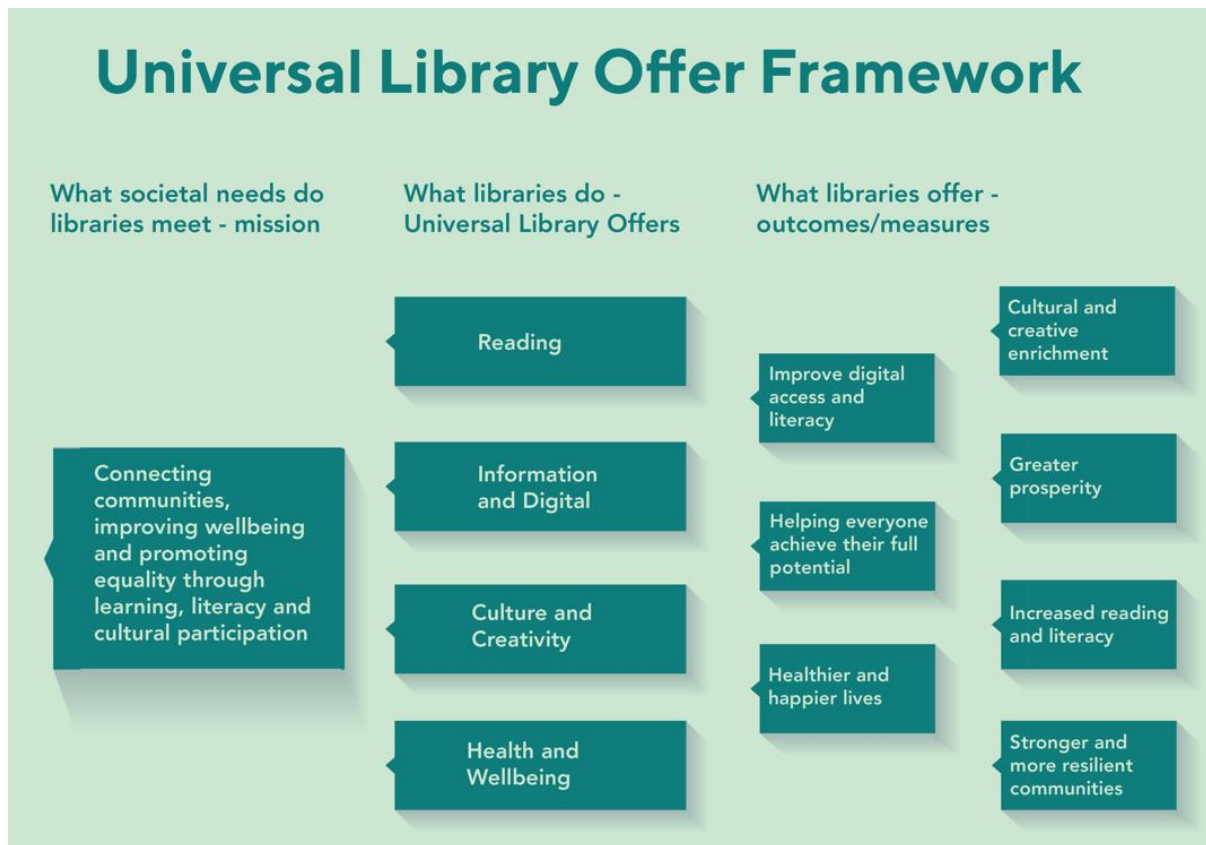


Carnegie Trust (2021)

Section 3 - Background

Wiltshire Council has a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library service' for all those who work, live or study in the county as described in the 1964 Libraries Act.

This is delivered through a network of 30 static libraries and three mobile libraries enabling access to books, culture and creative activities, information and digital support, services delivering positive health and wellbeing outcomes and a specific offer for children and young people. All maintained by well trained staff and volunteers in accessible buildings and vehicles. The service also works with large numbers of internal and external partners to deliver shared aims around the health and wellbeing, education and social care agendas.



Libraries Connected (2020)

The library service offer is based on the national Universal Offers Framework of reading, information and digital, health and wellbeing and cultural activity. Developed by Libraries Connected, the sector support organisation for public libraries, the framework reflects the primary aims of library services to support people’s wellbeing, life skills and social mobility. Underpinning all aspects of provision is the need for services and facilities to be accessible to those who require additional help to make the most of library services and facilities.



The library service also delivers on the Council's mission, with a particular focus on ensuring residents get the best start in life, have the right skills to prosper, live well together and have vibrant well-connected communities.

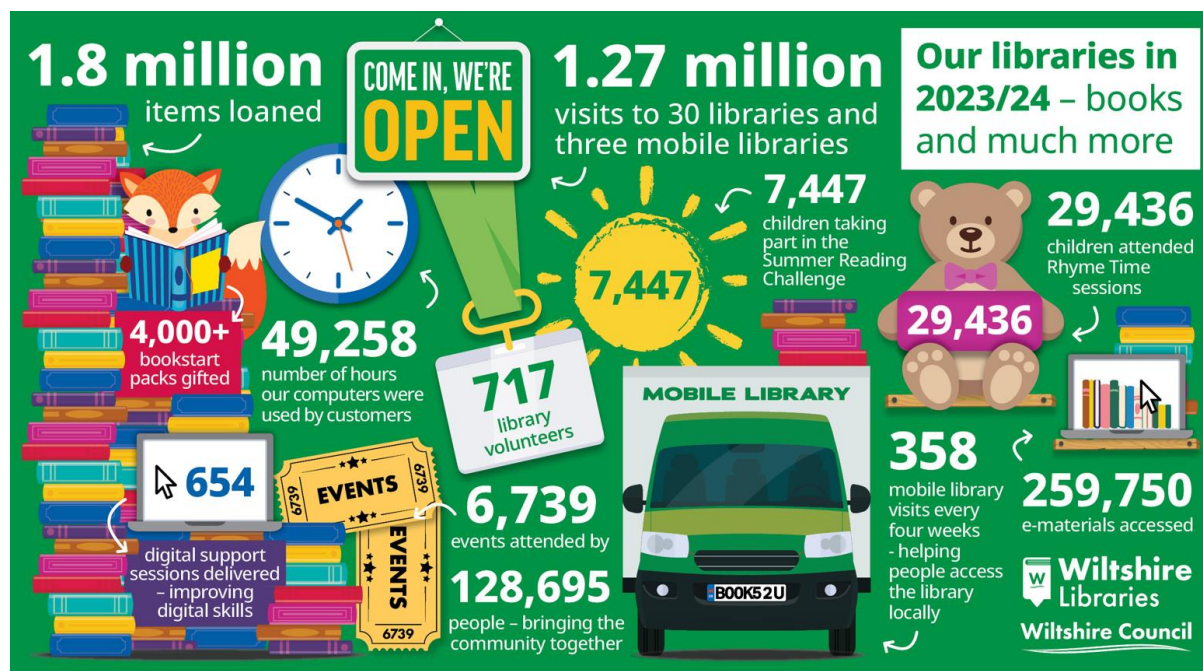
Successful recent partnership projects delivering in these areas have included:

- Loaning activity trackers watches and blood pressure monitors to help residents make informed choices and improve their health outcomes
- Free data SIM cards to ensure those impacted by the cost of living crisis are helped to bridge the digital divide
- Hosting Council consultation and community feedback events to better understand the needs and preferences of different community groups, ensuring services are tailored to meet local needs and support the creation of stronger communities
- Operating as a community spoke for the Family Hub model to support family engagement and early years development initiatives
- Theatre and arts events to maximise the impact of cultural activity across the county

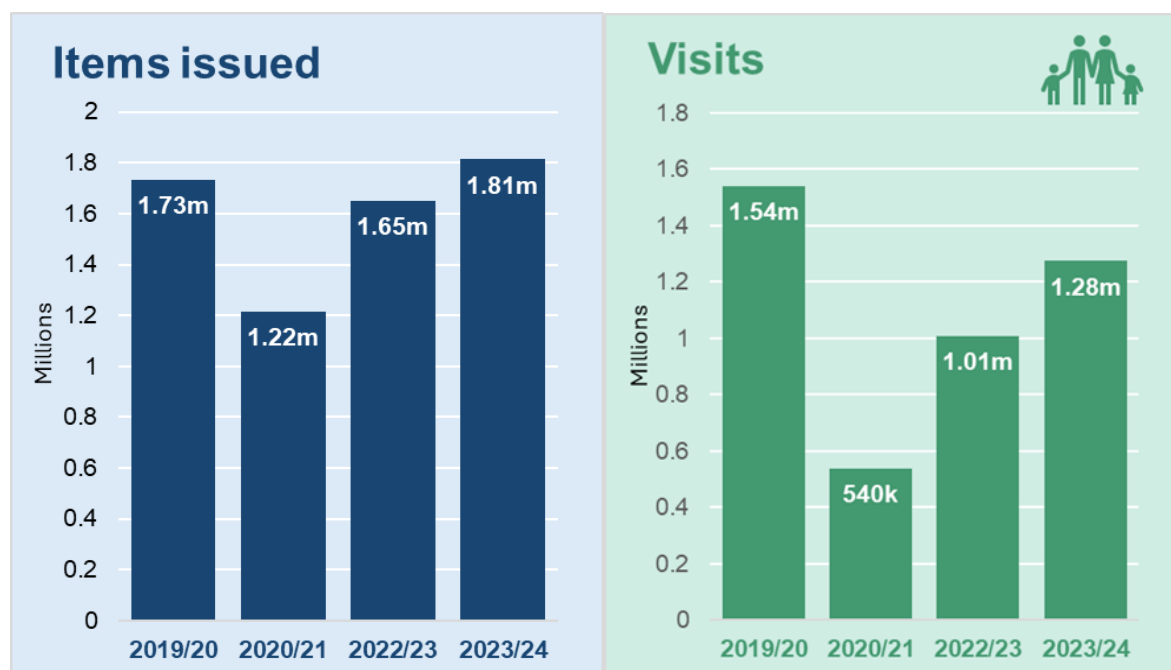
Quote

“The library service contributes to all the themes in the Council’s Business Plan and the Service Plan reflects this. There is a conscious effort made when looking at working with partners to deliver new initiatives that cover both the council priorities, and they are a universal offer” - Peer Challenge report 2023.

Section 4 - Let's celebrate!



Performance 2023/24



Performance 2023/24 compared to previous years

Section 5 - What did people tell us about library services?

Discussions with customers and non-users took place in a variety of locations including libraries, a supermarket, specially arranged meetings and surveys. The results showed:

Customers thought the most important service the library offered was access to a wide selection of books. The environmental benefits of borrowing rather than buying books was also emphasised. Other areas of importance mentioned were access to information and activities to help with health and wellbeing outcomes and the importance of supporting children to develop their imagination and reading skills from an early age.

The two biggest reasons for people not using a library were they had the internet at home or lacked the time to use the library. They also said they would like more events and activities for adults. Data showed us that young people's membership starts to drop from aged 13 and males aged 20 to 35 were least likely to use a library compared to males in other age groups.

Section 6 - Future trends in Wiltshire

Research for the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2024) shows Wiltshire has an ageing population. Currently 22% are 65 years and over. By 2040 this will be closer to a third, a rise of 43%. A high proportion of older people use library services and therefore demand is predicted to increase. There is also a growing awareness of how library services can support preventative agendas to help reduce demand for council health and wellbeing services.

Wiltshire is a largely prosperous county, however there are pockets of deprivation in some larger towns and rural areas. Take up of the warm and welcome winter offer

over the past two winters has shown how important libraries are as free to access community spaces, with an ability to offer signposting and support to residents who need help.

Library membership levels are consistent across all indices of deprivation. This shows those who might struggle to afford to get online, access books, information or cultural events are happy to access the library and benefit from this provision.

There is growing demand for council services and support for those with disabilities, autism and SEND. Libraries provide concessions and bespoke services for these particular groups however, improved data and engagement will be important to continue to meet future needs.

Wiltshire Council has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2030 and the library service has a role to play in this. Some library buildings have LED lighting, air source heat pumps and solar panels but there is more to do.

Section 7 - Our vision

Using feedback from the public, partners and future trends the library strategy highlights successful services and facilities considered part of the core offer. There are also a series of ambitions to ensure the service remains relevant and able to deliver on the national and local priorities a public library is there to support.

Our vision is for libraries to be trusted spaces at the centre of their local community.

The purpose of Wiltshire Libraries is to:

- Deliver free and inclusive access to friendly, welcoming library spaces and reading for pleasure to deliver better health outcomes
- Enable people to meet, access books, information and culture, use digital services, and develop their skills to improve social mobility
- Act as a Council interface with communities, working with residents and partners to provide a range of interventions and opportunities to build strong and cohesive communities
- Be a vibrant high street presence boosting footfall and helping to improve the quality of life for communities

Section 8 - What are the priorities for the next five years?

Wiltshire libraries have 6 focus areas to guide their work.

These have been developed through engagement with the community, library staff, volunteers, council departments and external partners. Work done by Libraries Connected, The Reading Agency, Carnegie Trust and the Council priorities have also helped inform the strategy.

Deliver a comprehensive and efficient service

Links to Council missions - Live well together/Evidence based decisions/Vibrant, well-connected communities/On path to carbon neutral

Priority: Ensure empowered and well-trained staff and volunteers are available in welcoming, accessible buildings and vehicles to deliver a first-class library offer that is innovative, understood and reflects the needs of those who use our services

We do this already by:

- Delivering accessible library services for all ages aimed at reducing inequality and promoting social mobility
- Recruiting, training and retaining high quality staff and volunteers, who know their community, to provide the best possible service to customers
- Being a visible Wiltshire Council presence in local communities, signposting to services and facilitating other departments to engage with residents of all ages through their local library
- Supporting the Council to become a carbon neutral organisation and the ambition to assist the Wiltshire area to be carbon neutral by 2030 through staff training, championing change and signposting to relevant book stock, information and partner organisations
- Providing accessible meeting facilities for individuals wishing to meet with council and partner organisations, and for community groups to hold cultural activities

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Develop a sustainable network of library buildings and mobile libraries, supported by an efficient and eco-friendly van delivery system. Aiming for carbon neutrality and to refurbish buildings as funding allows
- Encourage flexible use of library buildings by their communities through increased access outside of opening hours, either through co-location, a building management system or self-service
- Develop a strong marketing strategy promoting the relevance of libraries and encouraging greater use; including the introduction of a newsletter to help promote existing and new services with targeted messaging to non-users especially males aged 20 – 50 & young adults
- Deliver services and facilities within the available budget and investigate sources of additional income to help expand service delivery where possible according to evidence based need
- Improve the signage and signposting to library buildings to ensure they remain attractive and those new to an area know where to find them

- Work towards gaining national accreditation for the library service

Our workforce strategy

Links to Council missions - Evidence based decisions/Efficient and Healthy Council

As well as recruiting, training, and retaining staff and volunteers to deliver excellent customer service, we prioritise employee wellbeing and recognise our team's contributions

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Commit to investing in skills and training opportunities for those interested in working in a library through work experience, apprenticeships and volunteering
- Invest in skills and training opportunities to support career progression within library teams through targeted training and effective succession planning to maintain excellent service standards
- Ensure recruitment processes encourage diversity, so the workforce reflects the demographics of local communities

Reading, Culture & Creativity

Links to Council missions - Best start in life/Stay active/Right skills to prosper

Priority: Build a literate community for all ages through access to books, reading and cultural experiences, supporting people to read for pleasure to improve their wellbeing and knowledge

We do this already by providing:

- Free access to books and reading to support literacy skills and promote the benefits of reading for pleasure for all ages
- A curated, accessible, inclusive and relevant collection of books and online resources to meet the needs of the community
- A programme of events and activities including those aiming to reduce social isolation and boost the imagination
- Local studies books and activities to help people feel part of their community, develop a sense of place and improve their wellbeing
- Reading materials for people to access a wide range of information, unlocking opportunities to develop hobbies, ideas to support personal development and for lifelong learning and employment

- Support and opportunities for all ages to engage with reading groups; along with reminiscence sessions and the Reading Friends Shared Reading project enabling them to meet with others who share the same interests in literature and local history
- Access to partners who offer formal and informal learning opportunities to best support the needs of the local community including the council's Family & Community Learning team and the charity ReadEasy

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Finalise and deliver the whole council Reading Strategy being developed with The Reading Agency to engage everyone in the benefits of reading for pleasure and lifelong learning
- Expand the cultural offer including a refresh of the Performing Arts collection and build more proactive relationships with theatre groups to offer a wider programme of creative activities
- Offer greater opportunities to share reading experiences with others through author talks and innovative ways to engage readers with new authors and genres
- Work with our library stock suppliers to ensure book selection and maintenance processes have the lowest possible environmental impact
- Explore options to expand reminiscence sessions and other activities to engage individuals who may be experiencing difficulties due to physical/cognitive disabilities or frailty. Enabling them to meet others, overcome loneliness and improve confidence to support a reduction in demand for longer term Adult Social Care support and maximise independence
- Build on the work of the Green Libraries initiative, developing a regular programme of environmental events and ensure the use of space outside library buildings is utilised to promote biodiversity and engagement in nature
- Consider ways to increase cultural activity in library buildings to boost footfall on high streets and in the post 5pm economy, supporting the council's Cultural Strategy

Quotes

"I've only recently discovered reading as I've always been busy doing other things. Thank you for making it so easy for me"

"I start my library visits by checking out your staff recommends display. It's so interesting to see what you've all been reading and you always make such good suggestions, thank you"

“Coming to the book group is fun, it gets me out of the house and I enjoy hearing different opinions and the themes that emerge. I’m definitely reading more these days”

Information & Digital

Links to Council missions - Right skills to prosper/Vibrant, well-connected communities

Priority: Enable access to quality information and digital services, to learn new skills, support employment and improve digital literacy ensuring all have safe, easy access to technology

We do this already by providing:

- A range of information and online resources to support people’s study, general enquiries, and signposting when we are unable to provide direct help
- Equipment and support to upskill people to get online, especially job seekers, those studying or applying for benefits
- Up to date and reliable internet access, printing facilities and WiFi so everyone can stay connected and be confident using IT
- Access to free SIMS and mobile data, in partnership with the Good Things Foundation, to people in need via the National Databank scheme
- Supportive library staff and volunteers to help customers understand and use new technology through digital support sessions and remain safe online
- Well-trained library staff to help those who need assistance engaging with other council departments, charities and local organisations to get the information they need
- Community information through the display of posters, leaflets and consultation documents relevant to the local area

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Improve the creative digital and cultural offer to encourage more 13 – 19 year olds to use the library. Developing their confidence and skills in areas such as science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) to support the economy
- Grow the range of online resources we provide to ensure we continue to meet customer need, for example by providing eNewspapers
- Ensure those without skills or access to the internet are not left unsupported due to the move online by organisations and businesses

- Review the use of library social media to ensure audiences are communicated with and engaged through the most appropriate channels
- Deliver and embed the Wi-Fi printing service so people can print from their own devices in their local library
- Support people to use and access technology to stay in their homes for longer, reducing care costs for the council, in partnership with the Adult Social Care Teams
- Train staff and volunteers to provide services and facilities in support of the council's digital strategy
- Ensure the Arena website is kept updated to help provide easier access to the catalogue of books and promote the library service offer
- Improve study areas for those who want to work away from the office or home, alongside space to use their own devices
- Provide training so staff understand the capabilities of AI and other technology developed over the next 5 years and can convey their learning to the public

Quotes

"I passed my driving theory test yesterday (49/50 for the multiple choice!) and the only money I spent was on the test itself – all thanks to Wiltshire Libraries and the free resources they provide, such as Theory Test Pro, I couldn't have done it without them."

"I've been coming to the library for several weeks now to get help to use the computer so that I can apply for jobs. I've been out of work for a long time but have now got a job and can't wait to start. Thank you so much for all of your help, it made a real difference to me. More than anything it helped me to believe in myself again."

"I first visited the library to get help to send photos to my family on my phone. I recently visited again to learn how to use the NHS app. So, when my audiologist said that there was an app for my hearing aids, I knew just where to come for help in using it!"

Health & Wellbeing

Links to Council missions - Stay active/Live well together

Priority: Support the health and wellbeing of library users, through books and services that inform, engage and signpost, often in partnership and co-design with other council services including Public Health and local organisations

We do this already by providing:

- Welcoming, accessible, social spaces to meet people and take part in activities to improve their health and wellbeing
- Collections of resources including health information, self-help reading and other materials to support people's engagement in improving their health outcomes
- Informed staff confident to signpost to health resources and services
- Opportunities for promotion of key health messages and continuing to work with Public Health and the NHS to embed delivery of the prevention agenda
- Libraries as a community spoke for Family Hubs, so people have local access to parenting advice and guidance
- Space in libraries across the county for partner led drop-ins delivering health advice and support
- Access to wellbeing reading groups, for example Shared Reading, to encourage reading together to develop the imagination and enjoy the company of others
- Loanable equipment such as blood pressure monitors and activity tracker watches to help people make informed, healthy choices about their lifestyles as well as resources to support cost of living such as thermal imaging cameras to identify heat and energy lost around the home
- Volunteering opportunities to help people overcome loneliness, build confidence and make a difference in their community
- A warm and welcome winter offer to support those impacted by the cost of living

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Increase signposting and guidance to relevant resources to improve health literacy, including access to trusted sources such as the NHS app
- Explore opportunities with Adult Social Care to enhance peoples access to information and resources to live longer healthier lives
- Offer the opportunity to increase the number of health practitioners and partner organisations to deliver drop-ins and appointments in libraries
- Increase staff awareness and provide facilities to support the council's dementia and carers strategies

- Improve the library offer to those in or coming home from hospital to access reading material

Quotes

“One of our customers is homeless and he told us the other day how nice it is to be greeted by name when he visits, he called the library a safe haven”

“I come in most days to have a chat with whoever is around, without the library I would be very lonely”

“What a lifesaver the library is! I have fibromyalgia and sometimes cannot move, so having a regular supply of books to read when I am stuck in a chair is invaluable”

“Thank you for the loan of the activity watch, it’s got me walking more and feeling better about myself”

Children & Young People

Links to Council missions - Best start in life/Right skills to prosper

Priority: Inspire children and young people to enjoy books and read for pleasure from an early age, providing them with materials and activities to enthuse and support their education

We do this already by providing:

- A wide range of books in different formats to help children, from babies to young adults, to read for pleasure and support their educational attainment
- Access to regular rhyme times to support the development of speech, communication and language skills in very young children and enable new parents to share similar experiences and develop supportive friendships and networks
- A free programme of activities to help reduce the dip in reading skills over the summer holidays, supporting children’s reading confidence, skills and learning
- Year round free reading programmes, including Story Sharers and Story Adventurers’ Club, plus other seasonal and school holiday activities to encourage family book sharing and reading for pleasure
- Outreach activities to new parents and families promoting the benefits of library membership through connections with partners including the Registration Service, Children’s Services, the Family Hub team, schools and national partners such as Booktrust who provide free book packs for families
- Opportunities for school and pre-school pupils to engage via a programme of class visits to libraries aimed at those in areas of deprivation and at key transition points such as starting in reception or going up to secondary school

- Access to information and the promotion of library services and specific activities for children, young people and families via the All Together website
- Work experience and volunteering placements to help raise young people's aspirations, improve confidence levels and help build relevant skills for future employment

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Deliver new services to support those who may need additional help to get the best start in life, for example children and young people who are fostered, care experienced, those with SEND, pupils excluded from school or individuals living in areas of deprivation
- Develop an offer for children who are home schooled to support them to meet others and benefit from access to resources to support their educational attainment
- Improve the designated areas in larger libraries for young people so they are more appealing safe spaces, with a wider range of stock and activities, to encourage them to spend more time in the library experiencing the benefits. This will be developed in collaboration with young people and youth professionals to ensure they meet the needs of the target group
- Introduce a simple process to help parents who are carers or work long hours to take out a library membership for their children without having to physically visit the library
- Promote library membership through a range of campaigns and with the support of partners at each key stage of a child's development and reading journey, especially aimed at retaining young readers as they transition to secondary school

Quotes

"Thank you to the lovely lady who helped me when I was looking for recommendations when my daughter was starting to read independently. The books you suggested were perfect and opened up a whole world of reading for her. We have read them all together as a family and she reads them to herself, I often hear her giggling in bed to herself as she reads!"

"It's our last rhyme time session today, as she is extending her hours at nursery. Thank you for all you have done for us. The improvement in her confidence over the years we've been coming has been a joy to watch"

Accessible Services

Links to Council missions - Stay active/We are safe

Priority: 'Provide an inclusive and welcoming reading and learning environment with access to alternative formats and borrower concessions for all those who need additional support to use the library service

We do this already by providing:

- Concessionary memberships, accessible reading formats and other support for those with physical or sensory disabilities, SEND or caring responsibilities to help ensure equality of access to library services
- Library services in rural communities via our mobile libraries and Home Library Service, reaching people in and close to their homes reducing the need to travel to access library services. Along with opportunities to work in partnership to promote the services offered by other council teams
- Resources in a range of languages and formats to ensure those who have English as a second language or are unable to use standard format books have access to the materials they need
- Volunteering opportunities to help people overcome loneliness, build confidence, gain life skills and make a difference in their community
- Access to reading groups for people who have a visual impairment or health condition to encourage reading together to help develop the imagination and enjoy the company of others

Our ambitions over the next 5 years are to:

- Offer greater support for those who need help to access library services and facilities. Working with support groups to ensure library buildings are flexible, inclusive, accessible and meet the needs of those with SEND, autism, memory, sight and hearing loss or have a physical disability
- Increase the reach of the Home Library Service so those who are unable to visit in person due to frailty, disability or health conditions still benefit from library services
- Support those who wish to transition from using large print and spoken word books on CD to access free library provision of electronic versions
- Improve outreach to areas where engagement with libraries is low; through pop up mobile library visits and attendance at community or partner events and local groups
- Work with local communities, especially those in areas of deprivation, to ensure library services and accessible spaces are shaped and supported by residents, reflecting local need and improving individual outcomes
- Explore opportunities for involvement in social prescribing and bibliotherapy

- Develop a community profile for each library highlighting those who would benefit most from engagement in libraries and a plan to deliver this
- Work with others involved in supporting refugees, asylum seekers, military families, boaters, Gypsy, Roma, Travellers and care leavers to ensure library services reflect their needs

Quotes

“The mobile library service means the whole world to me; I really mean it. I don’t know what I would do without it. The staff bring me such wonderful books to read, it keeps me sane”

“I’m a carer for a lady with dementia. I’ve been reading fairytales to her from the children’ library and to see her eyes light up makes my day”

"I feel so much better since the Home Library Service visits have enabled me to start reading again!"

Section 9 - Next steps

Developing a high-level action plan with measurable outcomes is the next stage in delivering this strategy. This will be incorporated into the annual library service plan and other associated project planning documents.

This strategy is a living document guiding every aspect of library service delivery. It will be embedded within service planning and the individual objectives of all library staff. Progress will be reviewed and communicated to stakeholders on an annual basis.

Section 10 - How can you help?

We can't do all this without you. We want everyone to be able to come together and enjoy the services offered by our libraries. You can help by:

- taking part in conversations about your library to improve what’s on offer
- using libraries as your community space
- attending events and activities to grow vibrant communities
- coming to the library and getting online
- telling your friends and family about us
- volunteering your time

Sources of information used to inform the strategy:

- Wiltshire Council Business Plan (2022 – 2032)
- Libraries Connected National Universal Offers (2024)
- LGA Peer Challenge (2023)
- The Public Libraries Act (1964)

Wiltshire Library Strategy 2025 - 2030

- Results of customer engagement/needs analysis (2024)
- Cipfa plus customer survey (2018)
- JSNA (2024)
- Equalities Impact Assessment (2024)