SHROPSHIRE LIBRARIES STRATEGY

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1. Summary

The proactive approach from our communities to help address the pandemic has demonstrated their capacity and skills and reinforced the Council's role as facilitator. In addition to the traditional functions of libraries, with their presence in all our key market towns and some smaller rural communities, their role in supporting and in some cases leading on recovery needs maximising, providing a safe space for the wider community, and especially the more vulnerable, to access advice, information and services.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a move to working from home for many people, including Council staff, which is changing the role of smaller market towns and villages. Shropshire Council is undergoing a transformation to develop new ways of working, which includes the closure of Shirehall, Shropshire Council's HQ in Shrewsbury and the development of a new operating model to serve local communities.

An enhanced role for libraries and library and information services in the delivery of community priorities is needed going forward, with a clear narrative for the future of Shropshire libraries as community hubs. Library services are in a trusted position of strength to work with local partners to enable and provide local services in response to significant changes in the way people and communities live their daily lives.

Shropshire Libraries are a vibrant service at the heart of our communities. They provide environments that allow people to feel safe, where generations of people meet freely in a public space and where learning, discovery and innovation are encouraged.

Shropshire has a strong tradition of communities coming together when the need arises, and this has been evident with the pandemic when working in partnership to deliver their local public services. We are grateful to all the community partnerships in these challenging times whose continued commitment, time and resources enable the delivery and future development of library services.

Our draft library strategy outlines our promise as Shropshire Council and sets out the priorities we will focus on to deliver a commercial, contemporary and adaptable community service for the future.

It outlines our vision and strategic objectives, highlights the importance of libraries within the community, describes our core offer and provides a clear direction for the future of Shropshire Libraries. We see corporate and community collaborations as being integral to the long-term sustainability of the service. We will work together with our friendly, highly-skilled and experienced staff, to build on our offer around Reading, Information, Digital, Health, Learning, Culture and Creativity whilst working with partners to expand the services with our communities and businesses.

Shropshire Council has engaged consultants to build on the draft strategy by developing a Library Transformation Strategy which will review the current Library Services and make recommendations that will transform the library and information services and assets to deliver a modern, exciting and sustainable service, together with partners, which provides for the needs of the communities we serve. The Transformation Strategy will build on opportunities identified as a result of the review, and as a result of the considerable life changes which are resulting from the COVID pandemic.

Recommendations

2.1 Communities Overview Committee members provide feedback and comment in respect of progress made to date and the next stages of the library transformation.

2.2 Communities Overview Committee provide feedback and comment on the development of the new Library Transformation Strategy.

2.3 Communities Overview Committee receives a further update in respect of the Library Transformation strategy project in autumn 2021.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1. A risk management log is being maintained for all aspects of work associated with transition of the library redesign. This enables identification and assessment of risks, as well as identification of mitigating actions.

3.2. Human Rights: No adverse impact expected

3.3. Equalities Impact and Needs Analyses (EINA) will be developed for the services as part of the Library Transformation Strategy project and local engagement to enable a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to the analysis.

A low-level risk has been identified: access in rural areas. It is expected that this risk will be mitigated by the partners supporting local developments and reconfiguring Shropshire Local provision and library services.

3.4. The EINAs will continue to be updated over the coming months as the final delivery models are shaped.

3.5. The future redesign has the potential for greater freedom in local communities. Where collaboration and opportunities are identified, the outcomes identified from the library transformation project have the potential to further support and engage local communities.

4. Financial Implications

4.1. A savings target of £137K has been identified for 2021/22which will be achieved through a range of efficiency savings and improved operating arrangements.

5. Climate Change Appraisal

5.1. Climate Change and its effect on service delivery to be identified as part of Library Transformation Strategy with recommendations for carbon neutrality an integral part of future service delivery.

6. Shropshire Libraries Current Draft Strategy

The Shropshire Library services' current draft strategy has identified five strategic ambitions that express our vision for the next five years.

Our Vision is for libraries in Shropshire to be at the heart of their communities making connection to improve people's lives.

Our Mission is to provide physical and digital library services and spaces, that inspire people's learning, imagination and discovery, to connect and fulfil their potential; to articulate the value of library services to their communities.

These are identified by:

- **Improved opportunities for literacy, reading and culture**
Reading, Literacy, Culture and Creativity are increasingly important parts of library services, creating relationships that ensure library services enhance people's lives as a place of discovery, diversity, and interactivity.

- **Improved health and wellbeing of Shropshire Communities**
We play an important role in supporting both mental and physical health and wellbeing of people living and visiting the county. Shropshire Library Services partnership work around health and wellbeing is recognised and shared nationally as an example of good practice.

- **Communities that are resilient and inclusive**
Library services play a key role in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. We provide services and events, together with our partners, that help address health needs, contribute to tackling inequalities and support skills development and learning in individuals, families and groups across all ages and abilities.

- **Libraries that are more innovative and sustainable**
Increasingly our Library services are contributing significantly to National and Local cross cutting aims such as reducing social isolation, living independently and embracing rurality. This is vital to supporting an improved quality of life and sustainable communities in Shropshire.

- **People are enabled to discover the digital world**
In the 21st century it is vital that people of all ages can get online, and that they have the skills to engage with the digital world safely and effectively. Basic digital confidence is essential for day-to-day life and to thrive within the workforce.

These can be further explored with Cross-cutting Themes that;

- Articulate our value to communities, partners and other stakeholders

- Develop our services to meet changing community aspirations in line with council priorities, focusing on the most
    vulnerable and promoting independence

- Continue to develop the library network as centres for innovation expansion and community collaboration

- Retain independent access to our network of libraries within the context of physical and digital services

- Build on our successes and partnerships to engage communities in sustainable co-delivery, optimising and enhancing our
    spaces

- Optimise management structures that can deliver strategic ambitions for cross-service delivery

- Proactively seek funding to enhance service excellence and deliver changing priorities

Strategic Overview

6.1. **Improved opportunities for literacy, reading and culture**

We have a unique position within our communities, offering a wide range of services that are available to all. Reading, Literacy, Culture and Creativity are increasingly important parts of libraries, creating relationships that ensure libraries enhance people's lives as a place of discovery, diversity, and interactivity. Reading and literacy are fundamentally important life skills that enable families to be healthier, happier and more self-assured. This also empowers greater investigation and innovation allowing libraries to move towards expanding the services we give our customers and the commercial opportunities offered through a range of high-quality activities.

We will explore opportunities to:

- Further develop inclusive family learning activities to support the home learning environment and lifelong learning, encouraging reading for pleasure and literacy

- Maintain and extend library materials in response to circumstances to ensure inclusivity of access to literature and creative opportunities.

- Enable staff, customers, entertainers and the curious to envisage how culture and technology could be used to make library services more accessible.

- Empower staff, people and communities to experience and co-create cultural enrichment

- Embed opportunities for a wider range of arts, culture events and performances, allowing staff to develop and own projects and share their experiences, knowledge and learning with their teams and communities.

6.2. **Improved health and wellbeing of Shropshire Communities**

Shropshire Library Services plays an important role in supporting health and wellbeing of people living in in the county. Our partnership work around health and wellbeing is recognised and shared on the national level as an example of good practice.

Partnerships with Public Health and the voluntary and community sector is strengthened through innovative ways of working. Being part of this multi organisational style of service delivery is most helpful when supporting a complex spectrum of individual needs. Investment in health and wellbeing resources, fit for purpose environment and trained professional staff expands on possibilities of people centred support. Highlighting national, regional and local campaigns gives us focus to engage people around their health and wellbeing in a meaningful, friendly and non-clinical way.

We will:

- Expand on partnership work with Public Health, GPs, voluntary, community and other professional organisations to deliver health and wellbeing support in the community through Social Prescribing and other health related initiatives

- Invest in health and wellbeing resources to lower the health inequality gap

- Increase staff confidence through training development

- Engage communities to explore living well in a creative way to generate curiosity and aspiration

- Expand on opportunities to deliver library service benefits to the most vulnerable and/or living in the most rural areas

- Support wellbeing of families and individuals throughout different stages of life

- Provide accessible environments, activities and resources for people with specific needs, such as visually impaired, hard of hearing, people living with dementia, autism and other needs

6.3. Communities that are resilient and inclusive

We have a key role to play in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. We provide services and events that help address health needs, impact upon the wider factors of health and contribute to tackling health inequalities in individuals, families and groups across all ages. As trusted, safe and welcoming community spaces, libraries offer a route for public services to reach communities, providing access to information and signposting, creating social spaces for people to come together and access services that encourage learning and ambition, improve skills and self-confidence, promote wellbeing and individuality and reducing loneliness and isolation.

We will: -

- Enable people to prevent their mental ill-health from escalating and to recover and live healthy and happy lives.

- Understand loneliness and deliver services to help lessen its effects by providing services that enable people connect.

- Encourage understanding and tolerance between generations

- Create space to allow kindness to be talked about and experienced.

- Identify and promote sustainable and effective mobile services to meet the needs of our communities.

- Develop environmental, social and economical workable services that meet local community needs.

- Maintain and improve visits and digital networks to ensure that we our relevant for business, innovation and entertainment.

- Ensure energy use is considered to reduce the impact on climate change and wider environment.

- Continue to work with Town, Parish councils and local organisations to deliver community focussed and managed services.

- Work with internal and external partners to identify and target those at risk and provide pro-active arrangements that support communities.

6.4. **Library Services that are more innovative and sustainable**

Increasingly our Library Services are contributing significantly to National and Local cross cutting aims such as reducing social isolation, living independently and embracing rurality. This is vital to supporting an improved quality of life and sustainable communities in Shropshire. We will embed Library Services firmly within planning frameworks such as Place Plans, the Cultural Strategy and Community and Rural Strategy.

Working with other sectors and partners we will also embed Library Services within their work to create models of good practice and develop skills and knowledge within the creative sector to deliver new programs.

We will ensure a mixed economy model of Library Service provision through our services across the town and rural villages of Shropshire supported by mobile and digital services covering the more rural areas ensuring everyone has access to relevant and timely resources

We will continuously assess our ability to respond effectively to unplanned circumstances, altering our services to reflect the restrictions in place whilst ensuring high quality delivery.

We will: -

- work with partners to support local businesses Through the 'Let's Do Business In Shropshire' programme

- Increase employability by supporting skills and learning and helping people back into work

- Expand the tourism offer to grow visitor economy through enhanced connectivity and innovation

- invest in Library spaces so they are flexible and attractive vibrant multi-functional spaces

- explore further opportunities for co-location

- invest in our IT infrastructure digital equipment and invest in our staff in terms of IT training

- Continue to invest in Staff Development in line with the Public Library Skills Strategy to ensure a flexible, confident work force equipped to respond to any future needs of our communities

- look for new funding streams to develop and support the delivery of innovative services

- explore ways of increasing income generation

- look for new opportunities for marketing our spaces and services

- work with volunteers to provide activities and services particularly suited to the local area

6.5. **People are enabled to discover the digital world**

In the 21st century it is vital that people of all ages are able to get online, and that they have the skills to engage with the digital world safely and effectively. Basic digital confidence is essential for day-to-day life and to thrive within the workforce. Beyond that basic level the digital world offers incredible opportunities to connect with others, to engage with cultural and creative experiences, and to broaden learning and understanding in new ways. This has been highlighted during the Covid pandemic.

Effective digital engagement has the potential to improve a person's employability, to improve mental well-being throughout all life stages, and to help people stay independent in their own homes for longer. Many people are at risk of being excluded or left behind as technology moves on, so Shropshire Library Services are playing a key role to enable digital access, to give people the skills they need, and to provide access to digital services that people want to use. We want to build on this role by further enabling people to participate in the digital world.

To achieve this, we will:

- Ensure that our IT and digital services and equipment are robust, up to date and relevant to what our customers need.

- Ensure that staff have the skills to deliver services that reflect the digital needs of communities and individuals.

- Work with partners to deliver projects that are either wholly digital, or that include digital elements that complement our physical services.

- Continue to explore new ways of creating and sharing our own digital content to further develop Shropshire Library Services vibrant online community.

- Look for innovative and emerging technological solutions to transform the services we deliver and the ways that we deliver them.

- Work with partners, staff and volunteers to place library Services at the heart of digital support and learning for Shropshire.

- Be proactive in seeking funding to develop digital projects and to invest in new equipment and solutions.

7. Additional Information

7.1. Consultation

Over 900 people responded to our original Library Strategy consultation that ran during October/November 2019. During National Libraries Week we engaged over 400 library users with our quick snapshot survey and Library Roadshows. We were also able to capture views from several non-users.

The key themes from the consultation in 2019 and pre COVID were:
- Overall levels of satisfaction with library services are high.

- Borrowing books and other items remains the main reason why people visit their library.

- Customers view library staff as the most important aspect of the service. Opening times and range/quality of library stock are also very important.

- Library staff are highly rated regarding customer service and approachability.

- In terms of the future many people are keen for libraries to stay as they are. People argue strongly for the importance of libraries to individuals and communities.

- The largest proportion of responses were from female library users aged 60+. Levels of engagement with those under 30 was very low.

The key themes suggest we need to balance the needs of our 'traditional' users alongside the needs of other library service users. Developing services to attract new users is also essential to ensure that libraries stay relevant in the future.

7.2. Library Transformation Project

It is recognised that the COVID pandemic has had an enormous impact on The way we all go about our everyday lives and has increased our reliance on digital services and processes faster than anyone ever anticipated. It has resulted in people working from home and so local services are becoming more and more important.

It is as a result of the changes over the last 12 months that the Library Services are undertaking a further piece of work to ensure that a new library strategy reflects the changing needs of communities as a result of the pandemic. In order to develop and finalise a new strategy which we hope will strengthen our Library Services and adapt to new demands we have engaged consultants to assist us in the process.

They have been asked to: -

- Collate and review the existing evidence base, working with Shropshire Council's library team and other staff to provide a detailed report on the current service provision to include Library Peer Review feedback, previous consultation results, financial pressures, membership and visitor numbers, staffing, venues, opening hours, service provision, software and equipment, and building on the impetus already underway within the Council to transform both physical and digital services.
- Consult with Place Directorate Senior Managers and Shropshire Council Directors on the Council's desired approach to community-based services, with specific reference to the emerging Shropshire Local service model and the role that libraries might play in the delivery of this.
- Consult key partners, such as Town and Parish Councils, Social Enterprises and VCSA to identify further opportunities for collaboration and innovation to better meet community needs
- Review community need based on existing research, identifying strengths and weaknesses of current library service provision and conduct an assessment of value for money
- Identify a key performance data/performance framework which will enable the library service to evidence the difference it is making to communities and council objectives
- Review staffing, locations and opening hours, including mobile library service, in light of consultation responses and review of need
- Recommend appropriate income generating opportunities, based on good practice elsewhere, external funding opportunities, and evidence of viability
- Recommend new ways of working that will better meet community needs, within current financial restrictions and maximise alternative funding sources
- Model a zero-based budget and staff structure, with venues, processes and equipment to deliver this new approach, in line with wider department redesign proposals – see background note below – and Shropshire Council's Organisation Principles.
- Draft a library transformation document which identifies the resources required to deliver the transformed service, with a detailed implementation and action plan
- Provide a critique on the draft library strategy in order to ensure the strategy and transformation document are intrinsically linked whilst also demonstrating how the library service will deliver against the Community and Rural Strategy, the Corporate Plan and the Shropshire Cultural Strategy
- Draft a short, compelling, community focused summary of the strategy for wider dissemination
- Draft a consultation framework for the service transformation proposals
- Understand how services contribute to the health and wellbeing of Shropshire people over recent years?

This work is planned to be delivered by the end of May 2021.

8. **Conclusions**

Shropshire Council is undergoing a transformation to develop new ways of working, which includes the closure of Shirehall, Shropshire Council's HQ in Shrewsbury and the development of 'Shropshire Local' hubs in local communities.

There needs to be a better, agreed role for library Services and library and information services in the enablement and delivery of community priorities going forward, with a clear narrative for the future of Shropshire libraries as community hubs.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

PDF	PDF	PDF	PDF	PDF
Summary Report	Library Services	Library Services	Library Services	Library Services
Library Strategy Phase	Appendix 3 - Library S	Appendix 2 - Shropsh	Appendix 1 - Summar	Appendix 4 - Library S

Cabinet Member Lezley Picton (Portfolio Holder)

Local Member All

Appendices