Shropshire Council

Consultation Shropshire Library Strategy 2022 - 27

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1.   Synopsis

1.1   This report presents the Shropshire Library Strategy for adoption following a public consultation exercise. The Strategy provides a clear direction for the future of the Shropshire Library Service and embodies a transformation plan, which will help deliver the Shropshire Plan.

2. Executive Summary

2.1   The Draft Library Strategy and Executive Summary (Appendix 1,2 & 3) sets out the priorities we will focus on to deliver a contemporary and adaptable service for the future.

2.2   The priorities will help deliver the Shropshire Plan; helping tackle inequalities and rural isolation, offering support for health and wellbeing, offering opportunities for lifelong learning and business support, supporting digital skills and innovation, offering information on climate change and nature recovery, and signposting people to other council or wider community services. This will ultimately help achieve the vision of 'Shropshire Living the Best Life'.

2.3   It gives our proposed 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. Collaboration is integral to the long-term sustainability of the services. We will work together with highly skilled and experienced staff, to build on our offer of Reading, Information, Digital, Health, Learning, Business support, Culture and Creativity.

2.4 The Strategy, enhanced by learning from staff and public engagement and consultation, describes the changes we will make to be at the forefront of the council's future relationship with its residents and a critical partner in delivery of Shropshire's priorities.

2.5 It aims to change the way services operate so that we can further support the council and its partners to work with all our communities. It will ensure that services reach the people who need them most and that co-design and joint delivery with partners serve the priority needs of the county.

2.6 The development of this Strategy has been informed by an in depth staff and public consultation process and a specialist report outlining the potential for Library transformation.

3.   Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet approves the "Shropshire Library Strategy 2022-27" and agrees to it being published on the Shropshire Council website.

REPORT

4.   Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 A risk management log will be updated and maintained for all aspects of work associated with the library service redesign. This enables identification and assessment of risks, as well as identification of mitigating actions with risk owners. (Appendix 3)

4.2 Human Rights: No adverse impact expected

4.3 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) (Appendix 4) has been carried out as part of the library transformation and local consultations were undertaken to enable a wide range of stakeholders to contribute to the analysis. The overall outcomes from the two-phase approach towards engagement, in terms of the perceptions of the wider community and groupings within it, are that the likely impacts in terms of equality, social inclusion and health and well-being will be neutral to positive across groupings. There is potential for a medium positive impact in terms of supporting early years numeracy, literacy and play, and therefore the groupings of Age and of Pregnancy and Maternity; in terms of social inclusion, notably for low-income households, rural households and older people and others at risk of social isolation for whom libraries present a safe and warm space; and in terms of reaching out to diverse communities of Race and of Religion or Belief, notably with regard to refugees.

It is recognised that there will be ongoing engagement with people with Protected Characteristics including through community partnership.

We will focus upon specific groups such as children and young people, families, refugees, people with physical disabilities, people with experience of mental and emotional distress, and people for whom loneliness and isolation, due to factors including rurality and limited access to facilities and services, can lead to negative impacts upon their health and well-being. This will be through projects and partnerships already under way and through identification of comparator good practice. Actions may then be more readily identified from evidence gathered to enhance the positive impact of the strategy for these groupings, leading to better outcomes overall for communities in Shropshire.

The ESHIA will continue to be updated following consultations over the coming months as services are implemented as part of the strategy. This will enable further actions to be taken either to mitigate wider potential negative impacts for communities, for example in terms of access to services in rural areas, or to enhance the intended positive impacts for specific Protected Characteristic groupings, for example the groupings of Age and of Pregnancy and Maternity.

4.4 The implementation of the strategy has the potential for stronger place-based focus for local communities, building on Shropshire Council's organisational principles. Where collaboration and opportunities are identified, this has the potential to further support and engage local communities.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The initiatives identified in the Draft Library Strategy create potential for savings and/or increased income. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy identified the following savings for 2022/23:

- Review of library provision £191,930
- Libraries – Implementation of changes under the Library Transformation Project £50,000

5.2 A solution to these savings is proposed through a high-level Culture, Leisure and Tourism Services restructure, which will enable a more collaborative approach to delivering this strategy, without impacting on access to libraries or opening hours. This will be through a more joined up approach to marketing, income generation, venue and contract management and ICT.

5.3 A further £60,000 saving is identified in the MTFS for 2023/24. Investment will be required to release further benefits with savings and income opportunities. Further work and consultation with internal and external stakeholders will be needed as part of the service transformation programme. Given the current financial challenges, external funding will be sought for investment, where possible.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 Libraries have an important role to play in translating our climate change and carbon reduction objectives into action on the ground by local communities and businesses. Local libraries provide a trusted source of information about the Council's Climate Action Plan, signposting residents to helpful information and tools, to help them adopt practical solutions for low carbon lifestyles. (Appendix 4).

6.2 Several library buildings have already been refurbished using Government grants to install low carbon heating and lighting and it is expected that this will continue subject to the continued availability of funding. Library buildings may also provide opportunities to host roof-mounted solar panels to generate renewable energy to meet a proportion of their energy needs. It is unlikely that libraries will provide direct opportunities to capture and store carbon, but the design of future building refurbishment works will also need to consider opportunities to incorporate measures to maximise the resilience of the structure to extreme weather which is expected to be a consequence of climate change and to provide for continued service delivery in these circumstances.

7. Background

7.1 Shropshire Council is statutorily responsible under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it (section 7). In considering how best to deliver the statutory duty each library authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs for the delivery of a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources.

7.2 In providing this service, local authorities must, among other things:
- Have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service (section 7(2)(b))
- Lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area (section 8(3)(b)

7.3   The DCMS Taskforce's 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021' document emphasised that library authorities need to:
- Think long-term and strategically as they plan and transform their library service and
- Do this in consultation with their staff and communities

7.4   In drawing up and delivering their library strategies and plans, councils should consider their legal obligations, including under:

- The Equality Act 2010 including the Public Sector Equality Duty
- Best Value Duty 2011 guidance
- Localism Act 2011
- the Human Rights Act 1998

7.5   This is especially important given the challenging times councils face. They are looking for more radical and transformational approaches to providing local services as they cope with pressures on resources, increasing demands for social care and changing expectations from local communities. The way people use libraries, and their expectations of public services are changing. Financial, technological, and demographic challenges are increasing. Standing still is therefore not an option for library services.

7.6   The proposed transformation of Library Service operations as set out in the Draft Library Strategy is to enable the redesign of Libraries to provide a more sustainable service model that will contribute to the delivery of the Shropshire Plan and Cultural Strategy. The delivery of the Strategy will be collaborative, with Culture, Leisure and Tourism Council departments and external partners.

7.7   Potential areas of transformation to better meet community needs include:
- Working in partnership with other Council services, health services, community organisations and businesses
- Reviewing library locations and opening hours
- The introduction of self-service machines to free up staff to support those in need
- Review of staffing structures and skills development
- The extension of Shropshire Local to bring digital access to Council services into the community

7.8   The library levels were developed to give a clear indication of the range of resources and support a customer can expect in particular locations. They also help to define the library opening hours, level of staff, numbers of public computers and expected performance. They are reviewed quarterly to monitor performance and to help improve our service delivery.

These are:
- Level 1- urban centres: Shrewsbury, Oswestry
- Level 2 - larger market towns: Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Market Drayton and Whitchurch
- Level 3 - smaller market towns and outlying rural areas: Albrighton, Bishop's Castle, Broseley, Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Ellesmere, Shifnal and Wem, Bayston Hill and The Library at the Lantern.
- Level 4 - rural areas: Cleobury Mortimer, Gobowen, Highley, Much Wenlock, Pontesbury and Shawbury.
- Mobile libraries cover the north, central, southeast and southwest of the county.

7.9 This may be reviewed as part of the delivery of the Library Strategy, which will depend on understanding the needs of communities and what services need to be offered to help meet these needs. It is anticipated that this will differ depending on the community and levels of support available from partners.

7.10 There may be more emphasis on 'Community services' where there are opportunities for them to be:
- The natural home for cross sector working for the transformation of services around people
- "Neutral" and inclusive venues at the heart of the community
- Where possible owned and run by the community for the community, where appropriate
- Recognising the capacity of the community and are underpinned by strong local networks, relationships and a commitment to a common cause
- Placing the emphasis on providing the right support to people at the right time within their communities where community self-help is the norm

7.11 The importance of technological solutions to assist remote access to services is recognised. Also, that face to face contact is important to our most vulnerable residents to aid support within their community and reduce expensive professional involvement.

7.12 Service delivery will look different within each community, reflecting local need, demographics and assets. The transformation work that already undertaken in Pontesbury as part of the development of the Pavilion in partnership with Pontesbury parish council and Friends of Pontesbury Library, Cleobury Country and Enterprise Southwest Shropshire shows how successful collaborations can be. Children's services, adult social care, public health and primary health care all benefit from co-location.

8. Strategic Ambitions

8.1 **Shropshire library service five-year strategy will**: Re-shape the service following a set of strategic ambitions based directly on Shropshire Plan and Cultural Strategy. It will also build on the work developed as part of the Library Transformation highlighting the importance of targeting delivery to support the needs of communities and strengthen the capability of staff to aid in community development.

8.2 It will challenge established ways of working to position collaborative resources and services to deliver a provision that maximises impact and future sustainability.

8.3 We have identified six **Strategic Priorities** to achieve our vision, as set out in 8.1, for the next five years, which will help achieve the Shropshire Plan as set out below:

Shropshire Plan aim	Shropshire Plan priority	Shropshire Library Strategy priority
Healthy People	We'll tackle inequalities, including rural inequalities, and poverty in all its forms, providing early support and interventions that reduce risk and enable children, young people, adults and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life.	**Improved opportunities for reading, literacy, culture and creativity** Reading, Literacy, Culture and Creativity are increasingly important parts of library services, we will create relationships that ensure libraries enhance people's lives as a place of discovery, diversity, and interactivity. **Library services that are more innovative and sustainable** We will increase our contribution to Local and National cross cutting aims for reducing social isolation, living independently and addressing the challenges of rurality. Utilise technology to free up staff interventions to work creatively to support an improved quality of life and sustainable communities.
Healthy People	We'll support Shropshire residents to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, choosing healthy lifestyles and	**Improved health and wellbeing of Communities** We will strengthen our role in the co-delivery of health and wellbeing interventions for people living in the county. Explore opportunities for greater collaboration with Adult

	preventing ill-health, reducing the need for long-term or hospital care.	Social Care, Health, Children's Services and external partners, including the voluntary sector to deliver commissioned services.
Healthy Economy	We'll provide access to lifelong learning, supporting people and our communities to prosper, and through providing the right skills developing greater productivity and improved wages.	**Promote Economic Recovery and Growth** We will support the development of small, medium businesses, entrepreneurs and job seekers. Deliver digital technology for internal and for loan, business information, free and low-cost access to business intelligence, market research, 1 to1 training, innovative spaces and intellectual property support. **People are enabled to discover the digital world** We will provide a 21st century service that enables people of all ages to get online, and ensure they have the skills to engage with the digital world safely and effectively. Help to build digital confidence for day-to-day life as part of community and workforce development.
Healthy Organisation	We will communicate clearly and transparently about what Shropshire Council delivers, signposting to the right places for services and support, and listen to what communities say about their place and what they need.	**Communities that are resilient and inclusive** We will highlighted the key role we play in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. We will, with technological support provide services events and pathways that help address health needs, contribute to tackling inequalities in individuals, families and groups across all ages.

9.   Consultation

9.1   To obtain feedback to inform the development of the draft strategy, an engagement plan was designed to include two periods of consultation:

- Stage 1 (six weeks) - open questions to obtain feedback from local people concerning what they would like the strategy to focus on.
- Stage 2 (twelve weeks) - a copy of the draft strategy to see if any amendments and changes are needed prior to final agreement and sign off.

9.2   The Stage 1 consultation survey was designed to find out:

- How libraries are currently being used (to support existing data held by the service)
- Why people use libraries and which library services people most
- What prevents people using library services
- How satisfied library users are with current services
- Whether there are any areas of dissatisfaction and requested improvements
- Changes people would like to see in the future
- What people would like to see included in the next library strategy

9.3   Shropshire Council asked key equality and diversity monitoring questions within its public consultations to help identify relevant groups within the community had been adequately included in the consultation and whether the respondents are representative of the wider community. 909 people completed the survey, with a significant number of paper surveys used to ensure that people had a choice of how to respond. The response from local communities during the 6-week period was good with 2,677 comments read and tagged against the main themes.

9.4   The overall outcome of the public consultation is that it will be positive across groupings in the community. This is given its breadth of ambition and approach to social inclusion, and the recognition of the rurality of the county, opportunities for digital content to promote inclusion and access across the area, and the optimisation proposed of libraries as free, high-quality, local venues. Given that there are low numbers of under 30s using the service at present, efforts will need to be made to maximise the positive impacts of the proposed Library Strategy for this age grouping.

9.5   Stage 2 Consultation
Feedback was gathered through an online survey and stakeholder Engagement (appendix 5). The engagement ran for twelve weeks from the 12th of May to the 3rd of August 2022, online, through local newsletters and networks. The survey was designed to better form a vision for a modern library service designed to meet customer needs.

9.6   Questions covered:

- What people value most and main priorities.
- Consideration of how libraries need to plan and prepare for the next 5 years.
- Service themes including mobile services, technology and self-service options, partnerships, access and cost effectiveness.

9.7   Members of the public and stakeholders were encouraged to comment on the draft Library Strategy using an online survey, available paper copies, with optional email and postal addresses. In addition, engagement was undertaken with key stakeholders including community libraries and staff.

9.8   Information was posted on Shropshire Council's Get Involved consultation pages, via the Council's newsroom and the engagement opportunity was advertised very widely through local stakeholder newsletters such as the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) and Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA). Library staff members also worked hard to raise awareness of the opportunity to provide feedback and local libraries offered paper copies of the survey and support for those less confident with online response methods. Information was also shared widely through local networks and partnership meetings. The concerns from the consultation can be summarised as:

- The draft is too long but lacks clarity/ detail
- Worry about service cuts and aims to save money
- Concerns that the traditional library service offer isn't well promoted
- Income generation could distract from the main purpose
- Self-service and digitisation may mean loss of staff or human connection

9.9   This has led to the following changes in the Draft Library Strategy:

- The document has been shortened. There will be more detail in the Implementation Plan
- The emphasis on a more commercial approach has been reduced, although income generation will still be an important element where appropriate
- The importance of face-to-face contact has been recognised and that the introduction of self-service should free up staff time so that they can better help those in need, whilst speeding up transaction processes

9.10   The majority of feedback came from existing library customers, so the delivery of the strategy will focus on more engagement with communities and with potential new customers.

10.   Conclusions

10.1   Shropshire Library services have a long-established role in supporting communities to develop their skills and employability. As part of our strategic ambitions, we will target communities to improve opportunities for reading, literacy, culture and creativity as well as places of discovery, diversity and fun.

10.2   Partnerships are being developed to help economic growth with local business and entrepreneur's key regeneration priorities. The new destination management partnership will build on the trusted role libraries and cultural services play in being windows to information, visitor accommodation, events and attractions to reinvigorate our towns and villages.

10.3   We will help to strengthen the council's role in the co-delivery of health and wellbeing partnerships for people living in the county. This will highlight the key role library services play in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. Also increasing our contribution to local and national cross cutting aims of reducing social isolation, living independently and embracing rurality. Library services remain at the heart of the communities we serve as a trusted service that can lead the council in refocusing its partnerships with Shropshire's towns and villages.

10.4   The way society interacts continues to revolutionise our lives. Library services will facilitate a 21st century outlook focusing on a carbon neutral approach that enables people of all ages through Shropshire Local to be up to date, get online and ensure they have the skills to navigate the digital world safely and securely. This will allow cost savings for the Shropshire Council and greater contact and satisfaction for our communities.

10.5   Specialist advice was commissioned to advise on the Draft Library Strategy and suggested a clear plan to transform Library Services. If agreed, this will guide the implementation of this draft strategy over the next 5 years to ensure services address local community needs, offer excellent value for money, and provide support to local people and businesses, through Shropshire Local as appropriate. The transformation is likely to be different in each community and may include co-location of services, more community led approaches and closer working with community organisations and other council departments.

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

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
Cllr Rob Gittins Portfolio Holder for Culture and Digital

Local Member

Appendices
- Appendix 1 - Shropshire Library Strategy 2022-27, Revised Draft
- Appendix 2 - Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)
- Appendix 3 – Risks
- Appendix 4 – Climate Change Appraisal
- Appendix 5 – Public Consultation Report