

Report to:	Place Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	19 March 2019
By:	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title:	Implementation of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy
Purpose:	To provide the Committee with a report on how the changes to the Library and Information Service have been introduced and their impact on service users

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To note how the changes to the Library and information Service have been introduced and their impact on service users**
 - (2) To endorse the progress that has been made to deliver the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy as set out in the report and Appendix 1.**
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1 Background Information

1.1. In March 2018, following a 12 week public consultation, the County Council's Cabinet agreed a revised Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy (LSCS) which will create a modern, sustainable library service that reflects the changing ways people access the service and which prioritises resources more closely towards specific groups and communities where the Council has identified highest need.

1.2. The Vision for the LSCS is to provide a Library and Information Service (LIS) that promotes reading and knowledge as a route to leading fulfilling lives, prioritising our resources and expertise to support the needs of residents and communities in East Sussex to achieve four key outcomes:

- improving child and adult literacy and numeracy
- supporting the economy
- better health and wellbeing
- increasing digital inclusion

1.3 The Vision and Strategic Outcomes for the LSCS were developed from an extensive evidence base contained within the Technical Appendices of the Strategy which demonstrated that libraries can and do support a wide range of needs, directly and indirectly. In terms of implementation, each Strategic Outcome is delivered through a range of different offers, or services, provided according to evidence of need.

1.4 Savings of £1.25 million were achieved from an Internal Review of the service in 2018/19 which included a reduction in back office staff (£500k), the implementation of new opening hours (£500k) and a reduction in the libraries stock fund (£250k). A further saving of £653k was achieved as a result of the implementation of a needs-based library service and through a combination of income generation and shared efficiencies by co-locating LIS services with other ESCC services. Overall, this equated to £1.903m of total savings delivered over the last three years and a consequent reduction in staff numbers of 30 fulltime equivalent. The net revenue budget for the LIS has been reduced by 46% since 2014/15.

1.5 Cabinet agreed that, as part of the LSCS, Langney, Mayfield, Ore, Pevensey Bay, Polegate, Ringmer and Willingdon libraries and the Mobile Library Service would close on 5 May 2018, and support to Northiam Village Library would also cease from this date. Cabinet agreed that the County Council would consider any viable community proposals to take over the running of the seven libraries or the Mobile Library Service. For further information on community libraries see Appendix 1. The Technical Appendices to the LSCS demonstrated that the remaining network of 17 libraries would still provide people in East Sussex with a high level of access to a library within a reasonable journey time of 20-25 minutes, and that, together with the eLibrary and specific mitigations for vulnerable people such as that provided by the Home Library Service, the county would continue to have a comprehensive and efficient library service.

2 Supporting Information

Action to implement the LCSC in 2018/19

2.1 Implementation of the LCSC will take place over the lifetime of the Strategy. However, significant progress has been made in the first year, with a range of new library services introduced during the last 12 months. These include an enhanced, modern eLibrary with greater investment, a new Children and Young People's Offer to support literacy and numeracy, increased outreach work in our most disadvantaged communities, and new Community Library Membership and Teachers Library Memberships.

Strategic Outcomes

2.2 A summary of the progress in implementing the strategy against the four Strategic Outcomes is provided below. Further detail is provided in Appendix 1.

Improving child and adult literacy and numeracy

2.2.1 Central to the above Strategic Outcome has been the launch of the new Children and Young People's Offer, which provides literacy and numeracy support, including outreach work for pre-school and school age children and their families. The Summer Reading Challenge supported 4,800 children in East Sussex to maintain their reading skills during the 2018 school summer holidays by reading six books, and Librarians actively supported 11 schools in the areas of highest need in the county with visits to encourage participation in the challenge.

2.2.2 The LIS has also launched the Teachers' Membership, a service for primary and special schools, which enables teachers to borrow up to 40 books from our special Teachers' Collection. 35 teachers have signed up and 13 are actively using their tickets. The LIS will review the scheme during the Spring Term, contacting those already signed up, to identify whether there are improvements that could be made to encourage greater take-up of the scheme and/or better promotion of it.

2.2.3 In addition, the LIS offers support to schools in areas with highest needs free of charge (within our available resources), for example, working with Ore Village Primary Academy to improve their library and resources. The LIS also continues to provide some charged services to all schools, including participation in the Children's Book Award (39 schools participated and over 600 pupils enjoyed author visits in 2018), supporting schools to make the best of their budgets by selecting a range of titles for them, and advice and training on management of a school library.

2.2.4 The LIS's outreach activities include delivering rhymetimes and storytimes in Shinewater, East Hastings, Ticehurst and Crowborough Children's Centres to an average of 50 people (adults and children) per week, as well as providing three sessions at the summer school for a total of 45 Looked After Children.

2.2.5 The LIS provides rhymetime/storytime sessions in all libraries subject to the availability of volunteers. Supported by volunteers, 13 rhymetime and 5 storytime sessions are delivered in libraries every week, and an estimated 400 children and adults attend these sessions on a weekly basis.

2.2.6 The LIS has also delivered two training sessions for Children's Centre staff, Health Workers and Early Years staff about the library offer, specifically advising these staff how to promote the eLibrary and other online resources. These sessions were well-attended and well-received.

Supporting the economy

2.2.7 The LIS continues to be actively supported by a large number of dedicated volunteers. Five Code Clubs in locations across the County, run by volunteers, have now been established. The 60 children who attend or attended Code Clubs have learned computing skills that could potentially unlock a wide range of future career opportunities.

2.2.8 In order to implement its offer to provide support for adults with low literacy and numeracy the LIS has been awarded a £100,000 contract by the East Sussex College Group to deliver accredited courses in English, Maths and ICT at Eastbourne and Hastings libraries. This funding replaces the funding previously received from Learndirect. This contract has strengthened the

LIS's relationship with local colleges and will enable the service to signpost learners to the colleges and vice versa.

2.2.9 The LIS now offers volunteer-led IT For You sessions at nine libraries. In the course of 2018/19 to date, it is estimated that 56 adults have been supported through these sessions with IT skills that can help them into work or study. This is supplemented with free online training resources at all libraries to help people look for and secure jobs as well as improving their ICT skills. Resources include access to job sites, video guides on how to produce an excellent CV, as well as support to use the most popular computer software, including Microsoft, Apple and Google products.

Better health and wellbeing

2.2.10 As part of the LSCS's revised offer for better health and wellbeing, a comprehensive range of self-help materials are now provided both in libraries and online. The LIS has developed Wellbeing Boxes to help people to take ownership of their health. These boxes contain interactive resources, local service information and literature about different areas of wellbeing, using the NHS '5 steps to mental wellbeing' and the LIS has recently launched Teen Wellbeing Bags at Seaford Library at an event for parents and practitioners.

2.2.11 As part of the LIS's commitment to support children and adults with disabilities and long term health conditions such as visual impairments to be confident using adapted reading materials and technology Supernova software, which provides a screen magnifier and screen reader, has been installed on all library computers. The LIS has also purchased specialist equipment for Bexhill, Eastbourne and Hastings Libraries, as well as for Lewes Prison Library.

2.2.12 Over 450 people receive a Home Library Service from volunteers who deliver books and other resources from the local library to those who cannot easily use a library due to disability or frailty, or are caring for someone who cannot be left. This helps these customers maintain the pleasure and wellbeing benefits that come from reading, as well as the important social contact from a regular visit by a volunteer. There was a slight increase in demand when the Mobile Library Service closed, which the LIS was able to meet as it had recruited more volunteers prior to the closure. The number of people receiving the Home Library Service remains stable.

Increasing digital inclusion

2.2.13 The LIS provides an increased number of activities to increase digital inclusion, including the support provided by Computer Buddies and the IT for You sessions run by volunteers. A basic course is available to help people to get online (Learn My Way), and LIS Tutors support people to gain qualifications in ICT, English and Maths when they undertake online courses.

Capital investment

2.3 The County Council is committed to maintaining a quality physical environment that meets the needs of our customers in every library, and is delivering a programme of capital schemes to refurbish and modernise library buildings. Hastings Library reopened in March 2018 following a major refurbishment and modernisation which has resulted in an increase of 20% in items issued from April to December 2018, compared to the same period prior to the refurbishment. Crowborough Library reopened in January 2019, following refurbishment which included new carpeting, new shelving and new furniture. At the time of writing whole monthly usage statistics on items issued are not yet available.

Community Libraries and Community Collection Membership

2.4 Following the closure of seven libraries and the Mobile Library Service in May 2018, proposals to establish Community Libraries at six of these libraries were received. The County Council has supported these proposals with the offer of stock, fixtures and fittings, and where former library buildings are in the ownership of the County Council, with the opportunity to set up Community Libraries on a peppercorn lease in these buildings. The LIS ran a training day on running libraries for the community groups who are developing their projects, and continues to provide support and advice. All of the community groups involved have worked hard to raise funding and a volunteer base to establish their libraries, and two Community Libraries have now opened. The Ringmer Village Library opened in June 2018 and the Langney Community Library opened in the late autumn of last year in a new rent-free unit in Langney Shopping Centre. The LIS is continuing to work with interested parties to establish Community Libraries in Ore, Polegate, Pevensey Bay and Willingdon in 2019. No proposals were received to take over the running of the Mobile Library Service.

2.5 The LIS also launched the Community Collection Membership (CCM) in 2018. This allows communities to borrow a range of items which can be made available locally to the community, for example in a village hall, café etc. Five CCMs have been set up in Fairlight, Pett, Chelwood Gate, Northiam and Ticehurst. Although this offer was established primarily as mitigation for the withdrawal of the Mobile Library Service, there does not seem to be a significant need for the CCM within communities, as those wishing to set up local community book swaps or small village libraries seem to receive large quantities of donations from local people. In many cases, communities have advised the LIS that they prefer this kind of informal book swap to having County Council stock, which involves a periodic trip to an ESCC library to exchange stock. The LIS will continue to operate the scheme, advertise it on the website and support those communities who wish to operate a CCM. However, additional resources will not be put into its development. The LIS will continue to provide advice to communities wishing to set up book swaps or similar local schemes.

Stock and eLibrary

2.6 The County Council continues to invest over half a million pounds annually in stock and has continued to promote the eLibrary in a range of ways. Loans of eBooks and eAudiobooks from the eLibrary are up by 43% in 2018/19 (year to date) compared with 2017/18. Expenditure on materials in electronic formats increased by 3% in 2018/19. Particularly popular are eMagazines and newspapers. New services have been added to online reference resources including Kompass (business directory) and Aptem (employment). In a recent survey, customers rated both the choice of books and the condition of the stock as higher this year compared to 2015, when the last user survey was undertaken.

Impact on service users – data

2.7 When comparing data for April – December 2018 to April – December 2017, it can be seen that visitor numbers have decreased by 15% to 828,772 and the number of items issued has decreased by 10%, whilst the number of eBooks and e Audiobooks issued has increased by 43% and the number of people borrowing eBooks and eAudiobooks has increased by 34%. The data reflects the closure of 7 libraries and the mobile library in May 2018 and the increasing use of online resources by customers.

2.8 We carried out the Public Library User Survey (PLUS) in November 2018. This is carried out every three years to give a broad understanding of how customers (over 16) rate Library Services. The results for 2018 demonstrate the effectiveness of the new Strategy in maintaining high quality services as planned. 91% rated their overall levels of satisfaction with libraries as very good/good compared to 92% previously, and 94% of customers rated customer care as very good/good, compared to 98% previously. There was a decrease in satisfaction with opening hours to 67% from 88%, following a 25% reduction in opening hours in November 2016 and the closure of libraries in May 2018. Further detail is provided in Appendix 1.

Key priorities for 2019/20

2.9 The main focus for 2019/20 for the LIS is to further improve and develop its range of activities to support child and adult literacy and numeracy in East Sussex. We are planning innovative activities to engage children in this year's Summer Reading Challenge, Space Chase. In line with the new offer for Children and Young People, when new capital schemes to improve library buildings are being developed, the LIS will seek to reconfigure the space so that new activities such as Homework Clubs and Study Clubs can be provided, where appropriate. Capital schemes currently in development at Lewes, Eastbourne, Hampden Park and Heathfield libraries will ensure the space for children and young people is attractive, welcoming and fit for purpose. As described above, the LIS will also consult with both users and non-users of the Teachers' Membership to determine if there are ways to improve the way the membership works for teachers that better meets their needs.

2.10 The LIS will continue to ensure that stock meets the needs of customers, particularly stock which supports their health and wellbeing and which supports learning. To ensure as many residents as possible have access to library stock, the LIS will continue to extend the range and number of titles in the eBook offer, demonstrating how this can be accessed in outreach sessions, targeted to areas of higher need. The LIS will continue to promote the eLibrary widely, ensuring that customers have a much better understanding of the resources it offers and confidence to use it. In 2019/20 the LIS will launch and promote short 'how to' video guides on the LIS website and eLibrary apps, showing customers how to do things like download an eBook.

2.11 As described earlier in this report, the range of health and wellbeing materials has been improved in 2018/19, at the same time as maintaining a wide range of stock to support reading for

pleasure and expanding the range of eBooks. The LIS will review this for 19/20 as part of an ongoing programme to ensure that stock spend continues to be aligned with the priorities set out in the LSCS.

2.12 In the coming year the LIS will also promote Home Library Service further by writing to all parish and town councils with an article about the Home Library Service and asking them to include it in parish magazines, as well as contacting all relevant community organisations, including East Sussex Seniors' Association, to provide information about the Home Library Service and asking for help in promoting it through their channels.

2.13 Building upon elements of the LIS's successful Advantage East Sussex project, funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and administered by Arts Council England, the LIS will seek to work more closely with other cultural and heritage institutions in East Sussex to promote libraries as spaces that can be used for the arts, covering activities such as creative writing workshops, book and poetry readings, exhibition areas, and venues for outreach by other cultural organisations. The extent to which the LIS can develop its Culture Offer is dependent on the desire of the creative sector to work with libraries, and to some extent, the availability of external funding.

2.14 Finally, a key priority for 2019/20 is to put measures in place to evaluate the impact of the offers set out in the LSCS. Where the LIS is working with individuals and families in areas of need, this is likely to include the collection of case studies to demonstrate how their lives have been affected by interaction with library services. The LIS will continue to collect and analyse a broad range of management information to show trends and inform business planning.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 This report provides an update of how the changes to the LIS agreed by Cabinet as part of the LSCS have been introduced and their impact on service users. The impact of library closures and a reduction in resources have been minimised by the implementation of the mitigations set out in the LSCS and the introduction of new initiatives to support the most disadvantaged residents with the highest needs..

3.2 The report and accompanying appendix describe in detail the excellent progress being made to deliver the LSCS in the context of a 46% reduction in budget in the past four years. Library user survey data provides evidence that the County Council continues to provide a high quality library service, with overall customer satisfaction levels for libraries at 91%.

3.3. It is recommended that the Committee note the changes to the LIS that have been introduced and their impact on service users and endorse the progress that has been made to deliver the LSCS as set out in this report and its appendix.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None