

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 13 December 2021

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Updated Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/28

Purpose: To consider the findings of the review of the implementation of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy and the proposed updated Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/28

RECOMMENDATIONS: *Lead Member for Transport and Environment is recommended to:*

- (1) Note the significant progress made in delivering and implementing new services including the new children and young people's offer to support literacy and numeracy, an enhanced modern eLibrary, and increased outreach work in our most disadvantaged communities.**
 - (2) Note that following the extensive review and update of the evidence base, including the Needs Assessment (Appendix 4) and Accessibility Analysis (Appendix 5) the current Vision and 4 Strategic Outcomes remain relevant and correct for the medium-term focus for the Library and Information Service and so remain unchanged. In addition, this assessment has concluded that we should maintain our network of 17 public library buildings, which have around 1 million visits annually as well as continuing to host partners and their service offers.**
 - (3) Agree the Updated Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/2028 and implementation to ensure the Library and Information Service continues to support residents' needs.**
 - (4) Agree the implementation of additional services to address the identified emerging needs, including the extension of homework and code clubs for children, the development of our Step into Reading service to help adults improve their reading and new services to help young people into employment including Job Pods. In addition, enhance access further to the Library and Information Service through removing reservations fees so that people can reserve books from across the whole catalogue and collect them at their local library, making the entire lending stock freely available to all residents (para.2.37).**
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1 Background Information

Libraries Strategic Commission Strategy 2018-23

1.1 In March 2018 the Council adopted a five-year Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy (LSCS) for the period 2018-2023. The LSCS was informed by a comprehensive evidence base, which included a Needs Assessment, an Accessibility Analysis and a Property Review. The LSCS was part of a wider project to deliver a modern and sustainable Library and Information Service for

East Sussex, based on current and future needs for the county, as identified at that time and to ensure East Sussex County Council continued to meet its statutory duty.

1.2 It is timely to review the Strategy to evaluate its success, review the evidence base, including the Needs Assessment, Accessibility Analysis and Property Review, and based on the findings, review the strategic outcomes and offers to ensure they reflect the emerging/changing needs of residents. In the light of the pandemic and the financial pressures facing East Sussex County Council, it was decided to bring forward the review of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2018-2023 to ensure the Library and Information Service responds to the changing needs identified and supports the recovery of our residents and businesses.

1.3 The current Vision for the LSCS is to provide a Library and Information Service 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.

1.4 Our current four key strategic outcomes are:

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

1.5 Under section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 it is: 'the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof'. The extensive review and update of the evidence base, including the Needs Assessment and Accessibility Analysis, evidence that the updated Strategy would enable the Council to continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient service

1.6 Access to library services is provided by 17 library buildings across the county, the online eLibrary, the Community Information Service (ESCIS) and the Home Library Service. To ensure we reach and engage with as many residents as possible we also deliver a range of outreach activities in community settings such as children's centres. Membership of the Library and Information Service is free to everyone who lives, works and studies in East Sussex. There are currently 292,635 registered library members (members have to re-register every two years) and in 2019 there were 1,020,804 visits.

2 Supporting Information

Review of the implementation of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning

2.1 A detailed review of the implementation of the LSCS (Appendix 2) has been carried out. In the years since the launch of the Strategy in 2018, we have made significant progress delivering activities in line with our strategic outcomes.

2.2 To ensure effective delivery of the Strategy, the Service realigned resources to meet need and introduced new ways of working:

- The Service focussed on support for the most vulnerable people e.g., young people with mental health issues, people who need support to improve their literacy, isolated people and supported families.
- The team have also proactively bid for external funding to deliver initiatives which support the delivery of our Strategic Outcomes. For example, we secured funding and equipment from the NHS, SELEP Digital Skills Partnership and the Good Things Foundation to increase digital inclusion.

- As part of our new culture offer, we submitted a bid to achieve funding from Arts Council England to deliver a project for Key Stage 1 (KS1) children, bringing them to libraries for a puppet show about using the library and encouraging them to return with their family.

2.3 In March 2018, we completed an extensive £9.5m refurbishment of Hastings Library enabling customers to access a wide range of services from four storeys of the library, creating a Learning Centre for adults taking qualification courses in English, Maths and ICT and bringing the children's library into the same building.

2.4 Also, over the last four years we have invested over £1.27m in our library buildings to configure our libraries to provide the best possible space and facilities to deliver our strategic outcomes. This includes the complete refurbishment of Battle, Crowborough, Lewes, Eastbourne, Heathfield, Uckfield and Hampden Park libraries.

2.5 Progress and successes are outlined below against each of the strategic outcomes, further detail is provided in Appendix 1.

Our offer for improving child and adult literacy and numeracy:

2.6 Literacy skills, whether traditional or digital, underpin success in all walks of life, and libraries have a key role to play in ensuring children, in particular, have the building-blocks for future academic and employment success. 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. As a result of our offer for children and young people, we have seen an increase in the number of books borrowed by them in 2019/20, which was higher than the previous two years. As a result, we have increased the percentage of spending on stock for children from 27% of the spend on lending stock in 2018/19 to 39% in 2020/21.

2.7 We have seen a significant increase in the number of participants in Rhymetime and Storytime: Rhymetime participants increased from 10,469 sessions in 2017/18, 14,842 in 2018/19 to 16,111 in 2019/20; Storytime participants increased from 1,837 in 2017/18 to 2,004 in 2019/20.

2.8 There has been an increase in our outreach offer to communities with higher need, for example, we work closely with children's centres in areas of the highest need, target schools in areas of the highest need and support the literacy work of the Hastings Opportunity Area. 50 outreach sessions were delivered by Librarians at children's centres in areas of deprivation in 2019/20. The sessions introduce families to the importance of sharing books with young children to support speech and language development, encourage a love of reading and spend quality time together enjoying an activity.

Our offer for supporting the economy

2.9 Beyond the traditional role of libraries to facilitate reading and literacy, the Library and Information Service provides information and support to individuals and businesses to help develop the economy. We offer free access to over 200 computers across our 17 libraries and each library also has free Wi-Fi, available to anyone who joins the library.

2.10 We have increased our stock to support the development of adult literacy during the period from 2018 to 2021. The stock has been used to support projects such as Step into Reading where volunteers assist people to develop reading skills in one-to-one sessions.

2.11 Our Learning Services Team supported learners to achieve over 150 qualifications in English, Maths and ICT between April 2018 and March 2020. Learners can study from home or in Eastbourne or Hastings Libraries and are fully supported by a dedicated tutor.

Our offer for better health and wellbeing

2.12 As part of the offer for better health and wellbeing, a comprehensive range of self-help materials have been provided both in libraries and online. The Library and Information Service 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 Library and Information Service has also launched Teen Wellbeing Bags. In 2019, customers were able to have Health Checks in libraries and smoking cessation clinics were delivered in Hastings Library through partnership working with the NHS.

2.13 We are working in partnership with the Hygiene Bank, a community initiative to give hygiene, personal care and household cleaning products to those who need them. We launched the Periodbank in January 2021 at Eastbourne and Hastings libraries. From January to March 2021, over 120 bags containing free, donated period products have been taken by members of the public.

Our offer for increasing digital inclusion

2.14 We continue to work to support people who are digitally excluded; all 17 of our libraries offer free access to computers and Wi-Fi. There is still significant need in East Sussex for free access to computers and the internet.

2.15 In 2019/20 there were 158,519 sessions by over 25,000 residents on our computers and 37,413 sessions by over 6,000 residents on our Wi-Fi, a total of 195,932 sessions. On average, there are 3,812 sessions per week taking place in our libraries.

2.16 We have increased the 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 Library and Information Service Tutors support people to gain qualifications in ICT, English and Maths when they undertake online courses.

Review of the evidence base

2.17 We have undertaken a comprehensive review of the Needs Assessment in 2021 (Appendix 4) with colleagues from across East Sussex County Council.

2.18 A review of the evidence base has identified the context in which the Library and Information Service in East Sussex is operating in terms of reducing demand for traditional library services, the needs of the population of the county and East Sussex County Council's priority outcomes, as well as the financial challenges facing the authority. This included a consideration of factors which may influence need in the future, such as changes in population and housing growth, the age and health of the population, economic factors, and developments in new technology (the service has seen more customers accessing electronic service throughout the last 18 months).

2.19 The Needs Assessment identifies significant areas of need across a broad range of indicators, where the Library and Information Service would be well placed to help achieve better outcomes for the people of East Sussex. In addition to providing a core library offer accessible to all residents, by re-prioritising and developing new, more targeted services we have a key opportunity to continue to support and empower those with the greatest needs to make potentially transformational changes to their life chances.

2.20 Literacy skills underpin success in all walks of life, providing children with the building-blocks for future academic and employment success, thereby improving their future prosperity, health and wellbeing. In East Sussex between 25% and 35% of adults have low literacy skills.

2.21 There are areas of East Sussex among the 10% of most deprived areas in England for working age adults with no or low qualifications or who cannot speak English well or at all. 22 out of 329 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are amongst the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England, 7% of all LSOAs in the county. 16 of these are in Hastings, four are in Eastbourne and two in Rother.

2.22 Similarly, there are also parts of East Sussex in the top 10% of worst areas of England for health deprivation and disability. Average life expectancy by borough or district varies by four years. Hastings has the lowest (79.8) and Lewes has the highest (83.5).

2.23 The highest health deprivation levels and disability measures are concentrated in the coastal towns, either in central residential areas or large estates on the edge that often have other income, employment and social exclusion issues. There are some pockets of health deprivation in each of the three more rural districts, but usually associated with the mid-sized towns. One area with a relatively high percentage of residents with long term illness is east Bexhill. Other high levels are found in Eastbourne, Hastings, St. Leonards and Newhaven.

2.24 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has also informed this Needs Assessment and revision of the Strategy. The Covid-19 pandemic led to changing needs for many of our residents, including a greater need to access online services for work, shopping, socialising and for health information and access to health services to support both physical and mental health. There is a need for children and young people to recover from lost education and lack of opportunities to socialise with their peers. Those who lost their jobs need support to build their employment chances and individuals and communities need to regain their confidence and community networks to combat isolation and loneliness.

2.25 Therefore, in assessing the needs of individuals and communities in East Sussex, and how the Library and Information Service meets those needs, it is important not to focus on the demand (who is currently using the service) or the want (those who express a desire for a library) but on those specific needs that can be satisfied best through access to the Library and Information Service (the supply).

2.26 Given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the updating of some data sources used to evidence the current Strategy, the service has also worked with internal and external partners to gauge emerging needs affecting residents of East Sussex.

2.27 We have reviewed relevant research published since 2020 to inform our identification of emerging needs and gaps in provision. In addition, to ensure we capture any emerging/changing needs, we have met with colleagues from across the council to discuss any initiatives, projects, changes they are aware of which the service can support. We have also engaged with the Youth Council and the Seniors' Forum as well as partners including the Citizens Advice Bureau and 3VA Voluntary Action in Eastbourne, Lewes District and Wealden. We will continue to work with colleagues and partners to identify further emerging needs as data is available.

2.28 Several areas of emerging and changing need have been identified from this analysis which include:

- higher youth unemployment, young people aged 16-24 have been hard hit in terms of employment opportunities
- increased social isolation and loneliness
- children need support to recover lost education
- digital exclusion is preventing people from accessing vital services and communicating with friends and family.

2.29 We have also identified some gaps where we can develop provision of services. These are addressed in this updated version of the Strategy.

2.30 A new Accessibility Analysis (Appendix 5) has been carried out. The research we undertook for the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2018-2023 of the types and duration of journey people make shows that a journey time of 20 to 25 minutes to a library by public transport and car is reasonable.

2.31 The accessibility data and analysis has been updated in 2021 and the percentage of the population of East Sussex within a 10-, 20- and 30-minute drive of one of the 17 East Sussex libraries has been calculated. The same calculations have been undertaken for public transport journey time and walking time. There is no significant change to accessibility since the previous

analysis: accessibility to our library network is at least the same and, in some cases, marginally better than when the analysis was carried out in 2017/18. For example, the proportion of the population that can access a library within a 30-minute journey by public transport has increased slightly, from 95% to 97% which may be due to changes in localised population distribution as a result of new housing development.

2.32 We have carried out a Property Review (Appendix 6). The County Council owns 12 of the 17 libraries, and the remainder are leased. The Library and Information Service will continue to identify whether library services could be delivered in the same locality in a more cost-effective way. The Service will also continue to seek out new partnerships to share accommodation with other organisations, to reduce costs or to deliver a better service in conjunction with other services, or both.

Updated Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/28

2.33 Following the extensive review and updating of the evidence base, including the Needs Assessment, Accessibility Analysis and Property Review, our analysis demonstrates that the current Vision and 4 Strategic Outcomes remain relevant and correct for the medium-term focus of the Library and Information Service and so remain unchanged. In addition, this assessment has concluded that we should maintain our network of 17 public library buildings, which have around 1 million visits annually as well as continuing to host partners and their service offers. We have, therefore, incorporated the review of the current Strategy and the evidence base to develop an updated Strategy which incorporates additional activities to address gaps in provision and support identified emerging/changing needs.

2.34 The review of the extensive evidence base contained within the Technical Appendices of the Strategy demonstrated that libraries can and do support a wide range of needs, directly and indirectly. In terms of implementation, each Strategic Outcome will be delivered through a range of different offers, or services, provided according to evidence of need.

2.35 Going forward, the Library and Information Service will adopt the following approach:

- target spending on stock and resources to ensure they support the delivery of Strategic Outcomes and continue to provide a range of quality materials to meet residents' needs so they can enjoy the pleasure and benefits of reading as well as the better life chances that literacy and numeracy unlock
- provide access to library services through our eLibrary, continuing to expand the range of online services and materials that are offered, including the provision of reliable information and services to promote good health, and support people to manage their own health and the health of those they care for
- continue to provide, both in libraries and online, training and guidance for people of all abilities seeking to learn and to work, so they are able to build skills and confidence in a supportive environment
- focus on outreach provision, working closely with other County Council services and partners to make sure that we directly reach the communities and individuals with the greatest needs.
- continue to provide a range of services through our Children and Young People's Literacy offer, including literacy support and outreach work for pre-school and school age children and their families
- enhance the role of libraries as cultural spaces within their communities, developing our Culture Offer to support the wider cultural economy of the county.

2.36 The four Commissioning Themes represent the important role that libraries play in society as a gateway for individuals of all ages to access information, support, knowledge and culture. We propose to launch additional offers and activities to address emerging needs for each of our four Strategic Outcomes, including:

Improving child and adult literacy and numeracy

- We will support children to recover lost education, build their confidence and increase their social interaction by providing homework clubs with enrichment activities to support their physical and mental health
- we will codesign our offer for young people to support their study to ensure we meet their needs and promote the offer
- we will extend our code club provision for children; this is where children can learn coding in the libraries
- we will improve the promotion of our support for schools to increase take up of services

Supporting the economy

- we will expand our Step into Reading service to help adults to improve their reading
- we will develop our Jobs Pod offer which provides confidential space, a computer and support for people with online job interviews
- We will increase our services to support people into employment, targeting support for 16–24 year-olds who are currently experiencing high levels of unemployment. We will provide access to training, skills and qualifications, as well as interview support
- We will support Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) and entrepreneurs by being part of the Brighton & Hove Business and Intellectual Property hub which offers business insights and access to free resources, training and events, both online and in-person, for business development

Better health and wellbeing

- We will develop initiatives to encourage people, including our volunteers, to return to library buildings, building social interaction and helping to combat isolation
- We will work with colleagues to support programmes which build food security for individuals and communities to help people to have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life
- we will develop and expand our offer for better health and wellbeing, including our initiative to provide free period products in libraries
- We will support the work of the Family Focus team, working closely with key workers to support their initiatives such as anti-bullying and promoting the benefits of accessing library services to improve resilience

Increasing digital inclusion

- We will work to ensure vulnerable people have access to online services, including health services, by lending equipment as well as providing connectivity to the internet and training for those who need to improve their digital skills
- We will promote the free access to computers and Wi-Fi in our libraries to improve digital inclusion
- We will continue to develop our IT for You offer, where people are supported by staff and volunteers to use computers to go online

2.37 In addition to the additional offers, in order to enhance access further, from April 2022, we propose to provide free reservations so that people can reserve books from across the whole catalogue and collect them at their local library, making the entire lending stock freely available to all residents.

Equalities Impact Assessment

2.38 The Strategy has been developed using the 'strategic commissioning framework'. This ensures a clear understanding of 'need', before identifying the best way to meet it. It also sets out a clear rationale for the review and decision-making process. The assessment of local needs must demonstrate that the proposals meet the requirements of section 7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library Service (Appendix 4). A number of Technical Appendices have been prepared which collectively and comprehensively assess needs within East Sussex and establish the type of service offer that is required to deliver the Strategic Outcomes and to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library Service. The Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/28 draws on the conclusions of each of these documents.

2.39 The Library and Information Service considers inclusivity of those with protected characteristics as a core element of the offer and strives to develop the offer with the evolving needs of its users. An Equalities Impact assessment is appended as Appendix 3 must be read and its findings taken into consideration when determining this proposal.

Financial analysis

2.40 The budget for the Library and Information Service for 2021/22 is £3,751,600 net and £4,540,600 gross (planned income of £789,000). This follows on from savings of £240k in 2021/22 and £1.9m delivered through the Libraries Transformation Programme between 2014/15 and 2018/19. Staffing levels have decreased from 168.3 FTE in 2010 to 150 FTE in January 2015 to the current staffing level of 96.5 FTE posts. In addition, we have the support of over 400 volunteers.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The report and accompanying appendices describe in detail the excellent progress made to deliver the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2018-2023. The offers outlined in the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/28 have been developed following a comprehensive review of the data. The Strategic Outcomes allow for some flexibility in developing offers which will meet the challenges that the community will face going forward, in this period of Covid-19 recovery.

3.2 There are no financial implications to updating the Strategy. We will refocus existing resources to provide additional services and support.

3.3 We are seeking Lead Member approval to implement the updated Strategy 2022/23 to 2027/28, from April 2022.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None