



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Library Service Strategy

2023 – 2027



Foreword

[Cabinet member/chief exec](#)

In recent years West Northamptonshire Libraries have been through a period of significant transformation against a challenging background of the global Covid pandemic and local government reorganisation. Throughout this period we have been privileged to partner with the amazing local community groups and organisations who worked tirelessly to take over their local libraries. This enabled continued local access to library services and a range of other services. Thanks to their dedication there are 9 thriving community managed libraries in West Northamptonshire, enhancing those libraries that form part of the statutory provision, each offering consistent library services along with a range of tailored activities, events and support services to meet the needs of their local communities.

They did this because libraries change lives – they provide a valuable resource to the local communities they serve; they are unbiased, accessible, friendly, free and warm. They offer opportunities and support at every stage of life and are a trusted source of information, providing learning and skills, study spaces, essential digital resources, a place to meet and socialise and volunteering opportunities. Throughout their lives, people dip in and out of libraries particularly during times of significant change: unemployment, parenthood, bereavement. It is important therefore that modern libraries are:

- Welcoming and accessible
- Safe and inclusive
- Enabling
- Proactive and responsive

When the closure of libraries was enforced as part of the Covid measures in 2020, the library team used their skills to support the Covid response and helped to contact 40,000 vulnerable individuals whilst adapting the library service to deliver as much as possible within the confines of the Government restrictions. Once these restrictions were finally lifted, Libraries re-opened and began the task of rebuilding public confidence delivering the highly valued services that our users need.

There are new challenges to meet with the rise in the cost of living and other global crises, and our libraries are seeking to meet these emerging needs; providing welcome and support groups for Ukrainian settlement, providing warm spaces for those who need them and partnering with banks and other organisations to ensure residents can access advice and support locally.

As West Northamptonshire moves forward with a new Integrated Care System, the function of our libraries as community hubs for local area partnership neighbourhoods is more important than ever. They are the eyes and ears at the heart of their communities, proactively identifying local challenges and opportunities and working with the right partners to meet the changing needs.

This strategy sets out how we propose to continue to develop our libraries as thriving community hubs over the next 4 years ensuring that we take advantage of every opportunity to help deliver on our council priorities and the 10 Public Health Live Your Best Life ambitions.

Our Strategy

This strategy will guide how we develop and deliver our statutory service over the next 4 years, shaping our services around local need and in alignment with the Libraries Connected Universal Library Offers, West Northamptonshire Council's Strategic Priorities and Integrated Care Northamptonshire Strategy: Live Your Best Life Ambitions.

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:



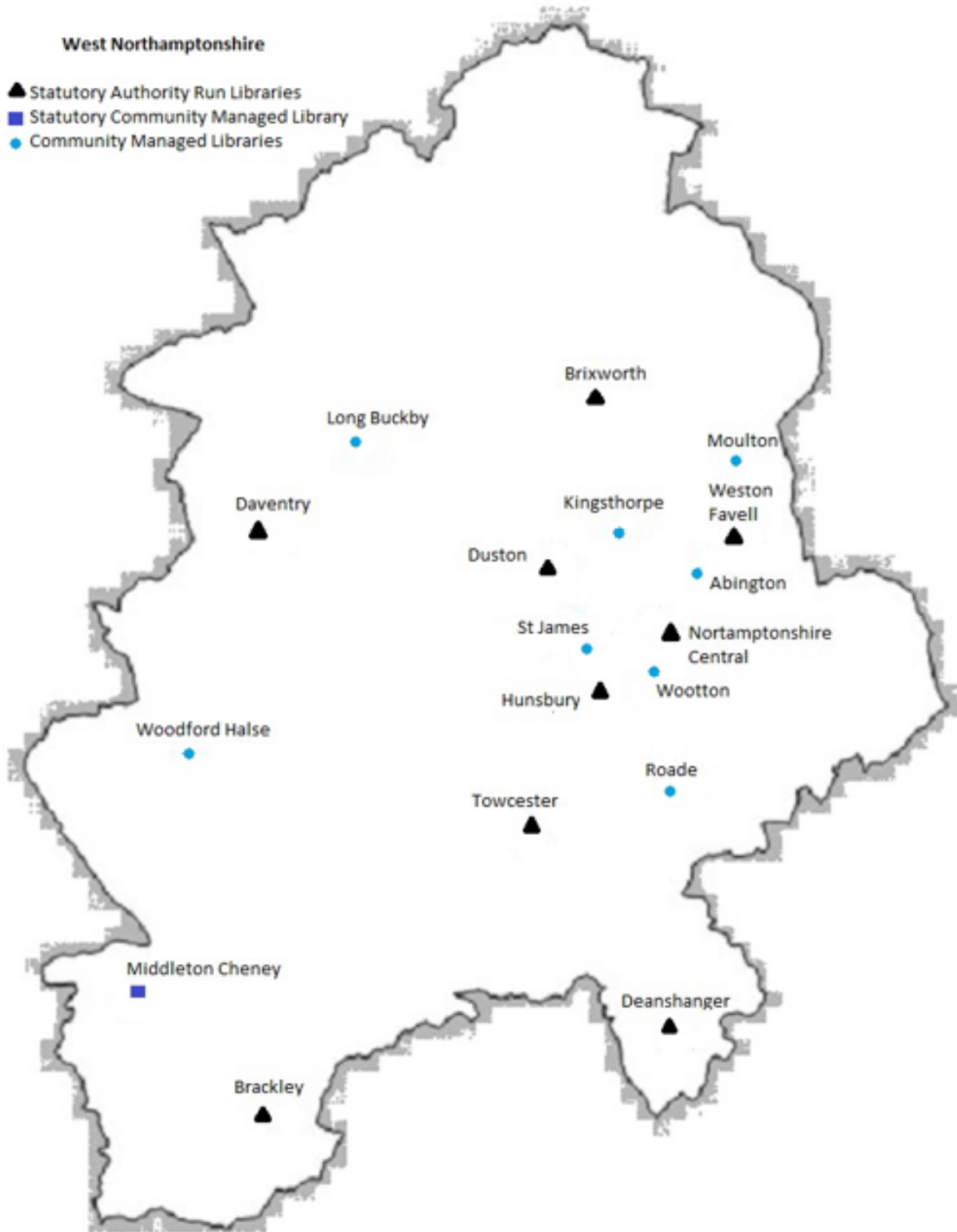
As a Public Library Service, we aim to include a broad representation of opinion and as such do not censor or remove books. Our public libraries are committed to upholding the values of freedom of expression and debate as set out by the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals. We therefore do not restrict access to information on any grounds, except that of the law and we do not censor material on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds.

The local authority has a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service and the Libraries Connected Universal Library Offers give guidance as to how to connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity. We have aligned this strategy to the wider council priorities and the public health 'Live Your Best Life' ambitions. We will be engaging local partners and volunteers to enable us to fulfil our objectives.

Our statutory library service is made up of 9 council run libraries, a 24/7 online library service, a school library service and a Library to You home library service which delivers to housebound customers. We also support 9 Community Managed Libraries who extend the library services outside of the statutory provision and we value our Community Managed Libraries as key stakeholders and community-based delivery partners.

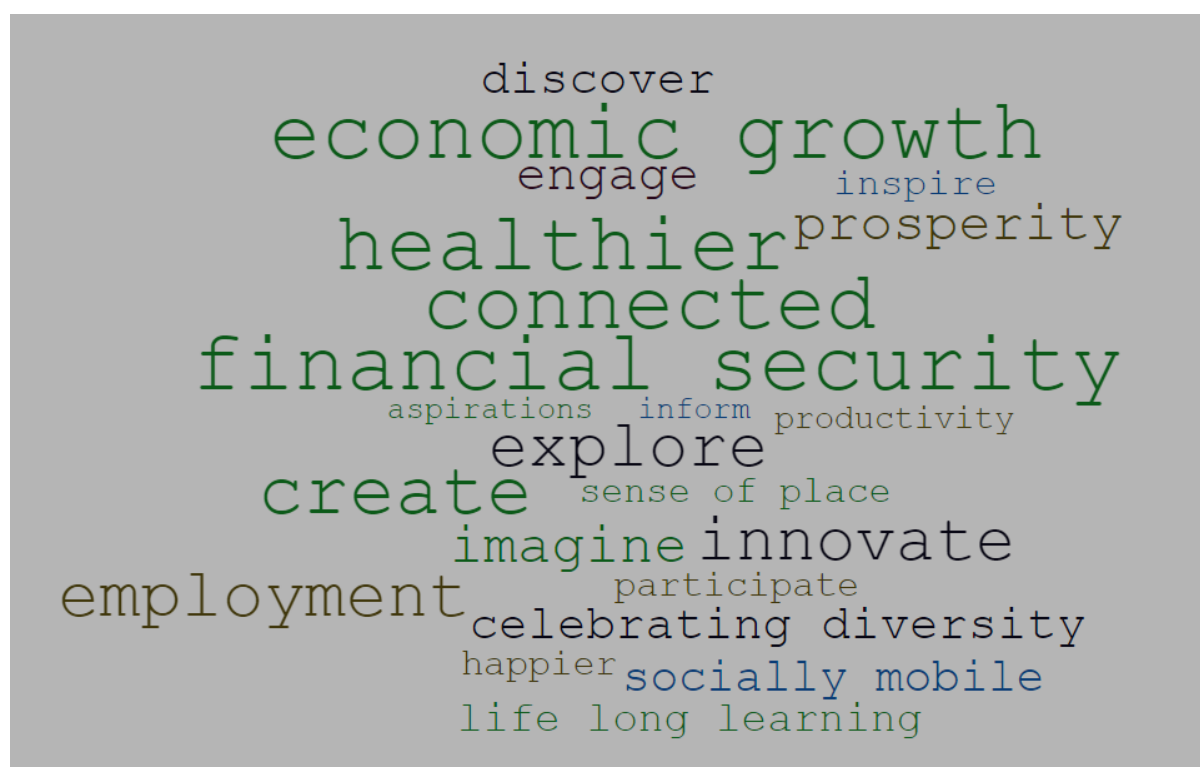
West Northamptonshire

- ▲ Statutory Authority Run Libraries
- Statutory Community Managed Library
- Community Managed Libraries



Our Public Library priorities are:

- Increased reading and literacy
- Cultural and creative enrichment
- Improved digital access and literacy
- Healthier and happier lives
- Helping everyone achieve their full potential
- Greater prosperity
- Stronger and more resilient communities



What are we going to do?

We will provide a modern, sustainable, responsive library service in welcoming, inclusive spaces in local communities where people are treated with dignity and respect. This means we will:

- Optimise the spending of the annual book and media fund
 - Negotiating the best prices for books, e-lending, e-books and other resources
 - Consortium purchasing, bulk buying and standing order plans for discount purposes
 - Purchasing the best value items from the permitted sources
 - Make best use of economies of scale
 - Meeting the changing needs of modern readers by providing books in a range of formats
- Provide up to date books, resources and technology to enable equal access to services for all by:
 - Maintaining books and resources that are current and relevant in accordance with the Northamptonshire Libraries Stock Policy and national guidance
 - Providing resources that cover a range of perspectives that encourage debate
 - Regularly refreshing technology to be fit for the future
 - Stocking items to meet community need

- Support Community Managed Libraries to provide up to date, relevant resources and support in their communities by:
 - Providing training and support
 - Annually reviewing the Service Level Agreement
 - Providing systems and resources
 - Updating and renewing systems and resources
 - Assisting with purchase of their books within their allocated funds
 - Engaging and consulting around any proposed changes
- Engage with local partners and volunteers to maximise our range of services making full use of the Local Area profiles to target events around local need
- Making Every Contact Count to improve health and wellbeing of individuals by:
 - Engaging with customers and listening to their needs
 - Signposting to services and support
 - Obtaining impact stories to measure success
 - Supporting Public Health campaigns
- Support climate responsibility and sustainability by:
 - Reducing our carbon footprint in our activities and physical resources
 - Enabling communities, jointly with local partners to explore, develop, learn and decide about sustainability
 - Increasing recycling in our buildings including supporting residents to recycle in our libraries
- Seek to enhance our income opportunities to reduce the cost of the library service to the council by:
 - Accepting donations and selling redundant stock
 - Hiring rooms and exhibition spaces
 - Developing our retail offer
 - Being entrepreneurial by maximising income generation opportunities such as parcel distribution centres
 - Hosting traded services

How will we measure success?

- We will seek customer feedback about the impact that the library service has made to them
- % Increased use of library facilities
 - Visitors
 - Borrowing
 - Engagement at events
- % Increase in volunteers

Vision and Values

West Northamptonshire Libraries will provide local access to resources and services to enable individuals to develop their skills and improve their wellbeing throughout their lives, leading to more resilient communities.

We draw from the Libraries Connected strategic vision. Our ethos and values entwine with the council values thoroughly for our customers, our partners and our colleagues.

Libraries are essential community hubs in West Northamptonshire that continue to thrive because of a strong customer ethos, a hard-working and dedicated workforce of staff and volunteers and a constantly moving offer which is relevant in the lives of local people.



We will provide an up to date, diverse and accessible library service for all to make use of.

Libraries in the local communities, where everyone is welcome – where you can go to study, to meet people and to become involved in your local community.

Libraries for life - residents are able to utilise services from cradle to grave, as places to learn and develop, enabling them to be healthy and happy.

Libraries where you can access information and support – in a variety of innovative and accessible ways.

Libraries that are diverse and inclusive – demonstrating a broad representation of opinion and without censoring material on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds.

Priority 1

Increased Reading and Literacy

Engage, Imagine, Discover

Research shows that those reading for pleasure are happier, healthier and more confident. Adult education in literacy is shown to reduce depression levels and children who read for pleasure have increased cognitive development.

Libraries give everyone free access to books and literature regardless of age, disability, wealth or education. Increasing literacy is vital for learning, employability and life opportunities.

Working with partners we will:

- Deliver a range of events and activities to support reading
 - Bookstart Bear club, Summer Reading Challenge
 - Adult reading initiatives
 - Quick reads
 - Library to You
 - Rhymetime / story-time
 - Book clubs
 - School Library Service
 - Story sacks
 - Other national and regional initiatives to promote reading for pleasure
- Increase opportunities for Reading Friends groups to further engage locally and with partners
- Provide advice and guidance to help people extend and develop their reading choices
- Provide an engaging and diverse book stock and reading material that is fully inclusive, upholding the values of freedom of expression and debate
- Work with volunteers and reader development organisations to support less confident readers and grow reading for pleasure activities
- Provide alternative access to library resources through Library to You and online library membership
 - Digital book club
 - Online and audio books and resources

“My eight year old daughter did the summer reading challenge and chose quite difficult books because she wanted it to be hard. She has gone back to school now and she has gone up by four reading levels! I attribute it completely to the SRC.”

What does success look like:

- Increased borrowing of both physical and digital literature
- Increased involvement in literature initiatives
- Topical subjects covering a wide range of materials
- Up to date Wellbeing collections
- Protected book and media fund
- Impact stories are actively sought and recorded
- Systems are updated on a 5-year cycle enabling improved services

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Improved life chances
- Robust resources management

Live Your Best Life ambitions:

- The best start in life

- Access to the best available education and learning

Case Study:

Reading Friends connects people by starting conversations through reading, providing opportunities to meet others, share stories, make new friends, and have fun. It creates social connections and takes a person-centred approach, building on interests and hobbies to get people talking.

It is not a traditional reading group and people taking part in Reading Friends don't need to be 'readers' as reading is used as a conversation starter, to create connections and to help people get to know each other.

Reading Friends helps both participants and volunteers feel more connected to others (Reading Friends evaluation)

Age UK's research shows that maintaining meaningful engagement with the world around you is key to wellbeing. Taking part in activities that support wellbeing is most difficult for people who are lonely and isolated or in poor health¹

"we're so pleased we came to Reading Friends, it made us realise that just because we're in the place we are that we are still welcome in the library. You told us about the link to Universal Credit on your computers and we came in and used them, that helped us sort our Universal Credit. We had a look at the Strong Start website and think it's something we can do when the baby gets here, it's really good to find out about the free stuff out there and who can help us: it's all a little scary at the moment but you really helped us."

¹ Hughes et al (2010) - 'Engagement in reading and hobbies and risk of incident dementia: The MoVIES project OECD' [↗](#)

Priority 2

Enhanced Cultural and Creative Enrichment

Explore, Create, Participate

Culture and creativity enrich lives enhancing a sense of place, improving social opportunities and increasing wellbeing. Studies show that only 15% of the general population engage in cultural activity and they tend to be of the higher socioeconomic status.

Libraries are inclusive cultural hubs in communities used by all social groups. We will support an increase in cultural and creative activities and resources to enable and encourage all to explore, create and participate in learning, leisure, community and social activity.

Working with partners we will:

- Deliver a range of events and activities to support culture and creativity and enable peer support networks
 - Rhymetimes, knit and natter, craft groups
- Provide an engaging and diverse book stock reflecting culture and creativity that is fully inclusive
- Identify and maximise opportunities to enhance our cultural offer with a range of partners
- Provide space within libraries for cultural and creative groups to exhibit and meet which will encourage participation
- Work closely with Northampton Museum and other partners to bring cultural activity into libraries
- Pursue cultural funding opportunities from a range of sources e.g. Arts Council England

What does success look like:

- Increased engagement in cultural activities
- Increased delivery of cultural events and activities through partners
- Impact stories are sought and recorded

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Improved life chances
- Thriving villages and towns

Live Your Best Life ambitions:

- Connected to their family and friends
- To be accepted and valued simply for who they are

Priority 3

Improved Digital Access and Literacy

Inform, Inspire, Innovate

Digital skills give people the opportunity to live more independently, to access services more easily and more economically, to learn and interact with others. This increases employability and reduces social isolation.

Libraries provide a network of accessible locations with free Wi-Fi, charging, computers, printing, and tablets.

We will provide a safe and supportive environment enabling an increase in digital access, training and support to help people use online services confidently and safely. We seek to future proof citizens in a world that is rapidly becoming digital by default.

Working with partners we will:

- Provide resources and activities to develop the skills to become independent users of digital services
 - Coding clubs, digital skills
 - Digital champions
 - Learning and development activities
- Promote Online safety within our own equipment and provide access to resources for individuals to be safe online
- Support to access gov.uk and other online services
- Provide physical and virtual access to resources and activities
- Provide engaging and diverse e-lending services including e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines, e-newspapers, online subscriptions such as Go Citizen, Theory Test pro, Ancestry
- Provide access to the internet in a range of ways to enable use of information, services and support
- Provide up to date, relevant technology to provide an efficient and future proofed library service

What does success look like:

- Increased engagement at digital events
- Increased delivery of digital events and activities through partners
- Impact stories are sought and recorded, demonstrating increased digital confidence
- Systems are updated on a 5-year cycle
- Increased digital champion volunteers

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Improved life chances

Live Your Best Life Ambitions:

- Access to the best available education and learning
- To feel safe in their homes and when out and about
- Connected to their family and friends

“After helping me print a document I was booked in with an IT buddy who supported me to use my laptop. I never realised this sort of help was available in the library, I am very grateful.”

Priority 4

Healthier and Happier Lives

Healthier, Happier, Connected

Libraries deliver significant economic benefits on preventative spend and return on investment. The health and wellbeing offer from libraries is estimated to bring a cost saving to NHS England of £27.5m each year (source Arts Council 2015 Health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries.) Research suggests significant associations between frequent library use and reported wellbeing and improved access to health information through libraries and reduced calls on services such as GP's.

Libraries offer a wide range of information around more common health conditions as well as activities and resources to improve mental health.

We will offer non-clinical spaces for health and wellbeing groups and provide resources to promote self-care and self-management of long-term conditions to boost health literacy. This enables an understanding of how to find and use information to improve own health and wellbeing, closing health inequality gaps.

Working with partners we will:

- Provide free, warm, accessible, welcoming places
- Provide quality assured health literacy resources and information
- Provide volunteering opportunities to reduce isolation and improve future life choices
- Provide opportunities and activities to connect with the wider community to reduce social isolation
- Upskill staff to enable them to have healthy conversations - Make Every Contact Count (MECC)

What does success look like:

- Up to date reading well collections
- Increase in reading well collection loans
- Impact stories are sought and recorded

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Improved life chances
- Robust resource management

Live Your Best Life ambitions:

- Opportunity to be fit, well and independent
- To be accepted and valued simply for who they are

"Just to say, I popped in and borrowed the epilepsy books this morning. What a great selection. I'm very pleased and impressed. Thank you so much for your efforts in this regard. I'm most grateful"

Priority 5

Helping Everyone Achieve Their Full Potential

Aspirations, Transitions, Lifelong Learning

Libraries provide support during key life transitions and help people to access services to resettle, reset or improve their life. They raise people's aspirations and promote lifelong learning through the offer of free resources for developing and studying: From the provision of parent/carer collections and rhymetimes for babies to development of the skills to handle and interpret information confidently and safely throughout a lifetime.

We will provide warm welcoming spaces with opportunities to study, develop, volunteer and socialise.

Working with partners we will:

- Provide alternative spaces for study where people cannot study at home
- Provide Study Happy spaces and resources
- Provide volunteering opportunities to enable people to develop life and work skills
- Deliver a range of events and activities to support lifelong learning
 - Rhymetimes
 - Homework clubs
 - Language café's
 - Digital (online) skills
 - Maths/English/English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
 - BIPC courses and workshops
- Provide parent /carer collections
- Provide physical and online resources for self-led studying and learning
 - Books and audio books
 - E-books and e-audio books
 - Go Citizen
 - Theory test pro

What does success look like:

- Increased engagement at learning events
- Increased delivery of wellbeing events and activities through partners
- Increased borrowing
- Impact stories are sought and recorded
- Volunteers gaining employment

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Improved life chances

Live Your Best Life ambitions:

- The best start in life
- Access to the best available education and learning
- Employment that keeps them and their families out of poverty
- The chance for a fresh start when things go wrong

"Thank you for your help using Excel in the past, I have passed my exams with marks of 75% and 95% and thank you for providing me with a study space, I would not have been able to study at home and appreciate being able to use the library"

Priority 6

Greater Prosperity

Employability, Economic Growth, Financial Security

Libraries contribute to improving the prosperity of local communities by increasing employability, supporting small businesses to flourish and helping to keep families out of poverty.

BIPCs provide excellent value for money and return on investment - £6.95 is generated for every £1 of public funding.

We will work alongside local partners to expand our support for job seekers and provide good quality information and resources on debt and money management to enable people to take up benefits and support they are entitled to.

Through the BIPC we will enhance our provision for aspiring entrepreneurs and small medium enterprise (SME).

Working with partners we will:

- Deliver and develop our award-winning Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC)
 - Provide advice and support to help start up, protect and grow business through one-to-one advice, workshops and webinars
 - Provide free access to business research databases and Intellectual Property advice
 - Seek external funding to deliver grants for small businesses
- Support the West Northamptonshire Council anti-poverty strategy
- Provide physical and virtual resources to enhance money management skills, employability and small business success
- Deliver a range of events and activities to support job seeking and business improvement
 - Job clubs
 - Networking events
- Provide volunteering, apprenticeship and work experience opportunities to enable people to develop work skills
- Provide learning opportunities which support people with work and life skills
- Provide access to the internet to enable people to acquire information and conduct research

What does success look like:

- Increased number of small and medium businesses launched
- Increased engagement at events
- Increased delivery of events and activities through partners
- Impact stories are sought and recorded
- Additional specialist support leveraged from partners by the BIPC

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Improved life chances
- Thriving towns and villages
- Economic growth

Live Your Best Life ambitions:

- Employment that keeps them and their families out of poverty

Case study

The Business & IP Centre (BIPC) Northamptonshire is part of the British Library led network of Business & IP Centres. They support entrepreneurs and innovators from that first spark of inspiration to successfully launching and growing a business.

The programme of support includes workshops, webinars and 1:1 advice sessions covering everything from the basics designed to equip attendees with the skills needed to start and run a successful business, to business growth, social media, website SEO, intellectual property and more. They also offer free access to business subscription resources which are invaluable for business planning and intelligence.

BIPC Northamptonshire is comprised of a Regional Centre at Northampton Central Library and four BIPC Locals – two in North Northamptonshire at Kettering and Wellingborough Libraries and two in West Northamptonshire at Brixworth and Towcester Libraries. All other council run libraries act as a signposting service.

Libraries in Northamptonshire have been delivering business support since 2012 and have been part of the National Network of Business and IP Centres since 2015. They are ideally situated within communities to provide trusted and impartial advice and have a proven track record of supporting local economies. In 2019 an independent economic evaluation showed that businesses which start with the support of a BIPC show strong survival rates – an average of 9 in 10 are still trading after 3 years, compared to 6 in every 10 for the general business population. BIPCs also provide excellent value for money and return on investment - £6.95 is generated for every £1 of public funding.

Feedback from BIPC Northamptonshire users

“Good informative advice session, given me confidence to progress further with my business idea.”

“...Excellent training, really informative and I come away enthusiastic and with a ‘to do’ list full of suggestions from the session. Thank you, what an invaluable resource, so glad I have found you!”

“Very insightful, speaker was engaging, knowledgeable and easy to listen to. Probably one of the most helpful social media marketing webinars I have attended. The slides were also useful, clear and concise! Thank you very much!”

Priority 7

Stronger, More Resilient Communities

Sense of Place, Celebrating Diversity, Social Cohesion and Mobility

Libraries are accessible, inclusive spaces, open to everyone, for the community to share. Library staff understand communities needs and are trusted to provide reliable guidance and to support a range of issues when needed. 'People who are more socially connected to family, friends or their community are happier and live longer, healthier lives with fewer physical and mental health problems than people who are less well connected.' The Mental Health Foundation (2016)

We will offer a modern, sustainable, responsive library service in welcoming inclusive spaces where people are treated with dignity and respect. Located in the heart of Local Area Partnership neighbourhoods, we will provide community hubs that seek to understand the needs of local communities enabling the right services and partners to collocate and deliver their services from the library.

Working with partners we will:

- Provide free warm, accessible, baby friendly, welcoming places
- Provide spaces where vulnerable residents can 'Keep safe'
- Provide information and resources to explore the local area and its history
- Host a range of diverse local events
- Provide rooms for hire
- Provide a front door to council and partner services including consultation and engagement activities and blue badge and bus pass applications
- Support refugee resettlement programmes, welcoming refugees and providing relevant resources in their language
- Deliver outreach activities and events outside of our buildings taking the library to new places to engage with new customers who do not currently use the library, to include underrepresented groups and protected groups under the Equalities Act
- Consider autism and dementia friendly spaces, adapt libraries where practical and build into future library redesigns
- Provide access to assisted technology to enable those with additional needs to access library service
- Provide volunteer opportunities for people to be involved in and give back to their communities

What does success look like:

- Increased partnership working to meet local needs
- Increased visitors
- Increased volunteers
- Impact stories are sought and recorded

West Northamptonshire Council priorities:

- Thriving towns and villages

Live Your Best Life ambitions:

- A chance for a fresh start when things go wrong
- To feel safe in their homes and when out and about
- To be accepted and valued simply for who they are

"It is really good that you are providing tea and coffee for the winter warmth, I suffer with mental health issues and it's great that I can come in each day and talk to the staff and have a cup of tea. Thank you, it's really important for me"