

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

11th July 2023

**Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Leisure:
Councillor Adam Brown**

Report Title	Library Service Strategy 2023-27
Report Author	Carl Dorney – Head of Libraries, Museums and Community Hubs Carl.dorney@westnorthants.gov.uk

List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	14/06/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	14/06/2023
Other Director	Jane Carr	08/06/2023
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	14/06/2023

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Library Service Strategy 2023-27

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report is to introduce members to the proposed new draft strategy for the library service for the next 4 years and, subject to public and stakeholder consultation and any associated resulting amendments reported back through the portfolio holder, for the strategy to be formally adopted.

2. Executive Summary

- 1.2. This report provides the background around the current library service model in West Northamptonshire following a programme of service transformation, the local government reorganisation and post-pandemic recovery work.
- 1.3. It introduces the new 4-year draft strategy for the Library Service, setting out the 7 priorities and how these deliver against the WNC corporate priorities, the Integrated Care Northamptonshire Strategy “Live your best life” ambitions and the Libraries Connected Public Library Universal Offer.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cabinet approve the adoption of the draft strategy for the library service subject to public and stakeholder consultation, to be reported back through the portfolio holder, with any amendments, prior to finalisation and formal adoption.

Reason for Recommendations

- The proposed strategy will provide a framework against which the Library Service can deliver and maximise its role in the delivery of WNC corporate priorities.
- The proposed strategy will support the established model of community managed libraries enabling the Council to deliver vital services and support at a local level from community library venues.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 At the point of vesting day for West Northamptonshire Council the Northamptonshire Library Service was midway through a transformation programme which would see those libraries which were not required to fulfil the statutory duty of the Council offered to community organisations to run as community managed libraries. This would enable the provision of maximum local reach to library and other services for council customers whilst minimising the cost to the council where these were not part of the Councils core statutory duty.
- 4.2 In West Northamptonshire, 9 libraries were maintained as council run statutory libraries, 1 was maintained as a community managed statutory library and 8 libraries were proposed for transfer to become community managed libraries. As of April 1st, 2023, 6 of these libraries have successfully transferred and the remaining two (Abington and Kingsthorpe) will transfer once their leases have been finalised by the Council’s Estates team.
- 4.3 With the transformation programme coming to an end West Northants Libraries now require a new strategy to enable the service to now focus on its contribution and role in delivering against the West Northamptonshire corporate priorities and the 10 Integrated Care Northamptonshire Strategy “Live your best life” ambitions.
- 4.4 The Strategy sets out the 7 priority areas for our public libraries, what we will do to deliver against these and how we will measure success. These 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

4.5 Our new strategy will build on the previous work to make our libraries hubs for local communities from which a range of services, information and support can be accessed. It considers the post-pandemic landscape and the resulting behavioural changes of residents and needs of the communities, as well as the opportunities to utilise the new community managed libraries model to provide services locally.

5. Issues and Choices

5.1 The accompanying Library Service Strategy 2023-2027 has been designed to address the corporate priorities of West Northamptonshire Council. The 18 library venues are well located at the heart of local communities and provide vital local access to services and support for residents.

5.2 The strategy uses the 6 corporate priorities as a framework and demonstrates how the Library Service delivers against the priorities with particular emphasis on Improved Life Chances, Thriving Towns and Villages and Economic Growth.

5.3 Libraries' unique position of being neutral, safe, trusted, and non-judgemental spaces also enables them to support the Integrated Care Northamptonshire Strategy "Live your best life" ambitions. As community hubs of knowledge, information and resources libraries act as conduits and connectors, providing information and opportunities to improve wellbeing, and in particular mental health. This includes opportunities for self-help as well as community level social prescribing and the promotion of key Public Health messages and campaigns to a wide audience.

5.4 The statutory function of the library services is preserved and maintained through delivery of the Libraries Connected Public Library Universal Offers. These focus on Reading and literacy, Health and wellbeing, Culture and Creativity and Information and Digital.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 It is anticipated that the new strategy will be delivered within the current service budget envelope. However, the service will continue to exploit new and existing channels of income generation as part of the strategy and will make best use of S106 contributions to enhance the service locally. The strategy calls for the protection of the book and media fund at its current level alongside a commitment to invest in technology to ensure the service remains fit for the future.

There are no further additional resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 The council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.” The strategy has been reviewed by colleagues from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport to ensure that the strategy is concurrent with the statutory duty. There are no specific legal implications arising from the proposals.

6.3 Risk

6.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. The risk of not adopting a new Library Service Strategy is that significant opportunities would be missed to further develop the community hub functions of both the council run and community managed libraries. These missed opportunities would be detrimental to local communities and the Local Area Partnerships as the strategy provides a framework for significantly increased community support through the library service.

6.4 Consultation and Communications

6.4.1 Following Cabinet approval of the draft, we will consult the public and stakeholders over an 8-week period on the draft strategy for the library service, prior to finalising the document for its future adoption. Following approval of the final strategy, the Council will undertake a range of communications activities to ensure residents and other stakeholders will be kept informed and engaged about the objectives, priorities and outcomes of the strategy.

6.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

6.5.1 The Strategy was considered by the Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 18th April 2023. The committee approved of the proposed strategy and the key priorities. They asked for greater clarity around the importance of Libraries as hubs for other council and local services and clearer definition in the section on “How we will measure success”. As a result, changes were made to the text to make these areas clearer.

6.6 Climate Impact

6.6.1 The Strategy sets out the Library Service’s approach to climate responsibility and sustainability and a commitment to promoting this within communities. Libraries should play a key role in educating communities about climate and sustainability and provide opportunities to connect people enabling them to explore these issues locally.

6.7 Community Impact

6.7.1 The Strategy sets out the ways in which the service and the individual libraries will be tailored to meet the changing needs of the local communities they serve. This includes providing face to face support locally as well as a front door to West Northamptonshire Council.

7. Background Papers

7.1 NA