

Shropshire Library Services Strategy, 2018 to 2023

Some key facts about our library services....

In 2016/17: -

Just over **1 million** visits to libraries

Over **892,000** things borrowed

38,226 attendances at library events and activities

Over **13,000** hours of volunteer support given

Library computers used for over **74,000** hours

Over **2,000** people using library Wi-Fi every month

In excess of **326,000** enquiries dealt with

What our users say.....

"I am so **grateful** for the help I received today from a very competent and patient member of staff. A credit to Shropshire Council."

"The online catalogue is **brilliant** now, it's so easy to find books!"

"The library has given me so much **joy** over the years"

"Imagine my **delight** - my query was immediately answered more than fully and a series of interesting leads followed. Amazing!"

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Executive Summary

Shropshire Council (the 'Council') is proud of its library services. This Strategy reflects our ambition and commitment to continue to unlock the huge potential that library services have to impact positively on individuals' lives while at the same time delivering local priorities. Whilst acknowledging that this is a particularly challenging time for library services, it is also clear that they are highly valued by local communities and stakeholders alike. The next five years are crucial for the long-term sustainability and success of public library services in Shropshire.

Our **Vision** is for libraries in Shropshire to be at the core of their communities.

Our **Mission** is to work in partnership with others to enable everyone to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and to provide library services that inspire people's learning and enjoyment.

We will measure the success of this Strategy through the achievement of the following **Outcomes**:

1. Improved opportunities for literacy, reading and culture
2. Improved health and well-being of Shropshire communities
3. Communities that are resilient and inclusive
4. Libraries that are more innovative and sustainable

The Strategy sets out a **hierarchy of library services provision** and describes how the Council can meet its statutory requirements to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons" by providing:

- Static library provision within six Tier 1 locations (seven libraries) – Library Hubs – and seven Tier 2 locations (seven libraries) – Community Libraries.
- 281 Mobile Library stops, principally responding to challenges of an ageing population and access to services in a rural context.
- Digital library services including 24-hour access to a range of lending and information resources

The hierarchy of library services provision is intended to inform decisions on future investment and revenue support. The Strategy does not set out to close any existing library

services, but it does recognise that the Council will need to prioritise where it provides financial support.

100% of Shropshire residents will be able to access static libraries within one of these thirteen locations or a mobile library stop within a 20-minute drive time. In setting this out we recognise that the way that people access library services is much more complicated than this simple analysis suggests, for example, not everyone has access to a car, and that public and community transport options in rural areas are more limited.

The Strategy also reaffirms the Council’s commitment to investing in **digital services** and to supporting a range of “**core and targeted library services**”.

The Council will work with a broad range of interested parties to develop a co-ordinated and jointly owned detailed five-year implementation plan within the context set out in the Strategy and the Council’s financial position. The action plan will detail how our strategic outcomes align with the Libraries Taskforce seven outcomes and the six Universal Offers.

1.0 Introduction

Library services in Shropshire – book loans, e-books, computer use, on-line reference material, activities, gateway to council services, etc. - operate through a network of static libraries, mobile libraries and other services which together provide access to library services in every market town and in all parts of a very rural and sparsely populated county. In more detail library services in Shropshire include (at June 2017):

| | |
|---|--|
| 6 Principal market town libraries run by Shropshire Council (urban centres & larger market towns) | Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Market Drayton |
| 7 Local market town community libraries run by Shropshire Council | Gobowen, Church Stretton, Bayston Hill, Wem, Library at the Lantern, Pontesbury, Much Wenlock |
| 8 Local market town community libraries run by local community group / town councils, etc. | Albrighton, Bishop’s Castle, Broseley, Craven Arms, Highley, Shifnal, Cleobury Mortimer, Ellesmere |
| 4 Mobile libraries run by Shropshire Council | Cover approximately 354 stops ranging from 10 minutes to 2.5 hours on a fortnightly rota |
| Stoke Heath Prison Library | Operated under fully funded contract from Her Majesty’s Prisons |

But library services are changing reflecting the shifting habits and priorities of society. Nationally and locally there is a change in the traditional focus on book issues and library visits. Speed, convenience, 24-hour availability, learning spaces and easy access are what most people want. Library services will need to continue to evolve to meet future challenges, trends and needs; coupled with this, public libraries need to prepare for advances in technology as well as people’s changing behaviours and needs in a digital age.

The Council is projected to have a funding gap of £44 million by the end of 2019.

This Strategy reflects our ambition and commitment to continue to unlock the huge potential that library services have to impact positively on individuals' lives while at the same time delivering local priorities. Whilst acknowledging that this is a particularly challenging time for library services, it is also clear that they are highly valued by local communities and stakeholders alike. The next five years are crucial for the long term sustainability and success of public library services in Shropshire.

In summary the key objectives of this Strategy are to:

- Analyse the supply and demand for library services and design innovative services that are fit for the future.
- Ensure that the delivery of library services is undertaken with full reference to relevant strategic and local priorities including well-being considerations and financial constraints.
- Clarify the role of the Council as commissioner, provider, partner and/or enabler of library services.
- Confirm an approach for Council support for the future provision of library services.
- Maximise engagement with existing and potential customers and key stakeholders.

2.0 Shropshire Council's statutory responsibilities

Local authorities have a statutory duty 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 the delivery of a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources.

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)) Note that there are exceptions for example for the notification of the availability of reserved items and library overdue charges, and for the lending of audio visual material.

The Council also has statutory duties under the [Equality Act 2010](#) and [section 149: Public Sector Equality Duty](#) in having policies and practices which address equality and diversity effectively, and place these matters at the heart of all decision making processes. Equal opportunities form a core element of good policy making concerning healthy, resilient and prosperous communities. This partly recognises that greater economic activity by all groups in society contributes to and boosts the local economy, as well as aiding individual prosperity and wellbeing. A society in which everyone feels valued, and where their skills and talents are used to the full, is a productive and resourceful society. It is also about social inclusion. A society in which everyone feels they have a part to play, and in which people respect the views of other people, is a resilient and caring society.

3.0 Libraries, our Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives for the delivery of Library Services in Shropshire

Shropshire libraries are the Council's long term investment in relationships with local communities. Libraries are more than a place to borrow books; they are neutral local spaces with an appealing offer for everyone. People will have the option of connecting with knowledge, information, support and entertainment. They will also have the opportunity to connect with each other. Public libraries are greatly liked by Shropshire people, as a brand, they have enormous potential as channels to meet the diverse needs of local communities.

The Council will create the context that enables the library services to impact positively on the lives of the people of Shropshire. But it is local communities and people that make libraries come alive.

Our **Vision** is for libraries in Shropshire to be at the core of their communities.

Our **Mission** is to work in partnership with others to enable everyone to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and to provide library services that inspire people's learning and enjoyment.

We will measure the success of this Strategy through the achievement of the four **Outcomes**¹ and linked actions:

- 1. Improved opportunities for reading, literacy and culture by**
 - providing quality reading materials in all formats
 - providing a wide range of events and activities
 - supporting reading groups
 - promoting reading to children through events and support of National initiatives such as the Summer reading Challenge
- 2. Improved health and well-being of Shropshire communities by**
 - providing specialist health resources
 - working with health partners in innovative ways to engage with the public
 - extending our volunteering offer
- 3. Communities that are resilient and inclusive through**
 - providing physical spaces to bring people together
 - providing digital access for all
 - supporting government initiatives
 - developing alternative ways to access services for those who are unable to access them in the traditional way e.g. Home Library Service and downloadable audio books

¹ The delivery of these strategic objectives are designed to reflect:
The **Universal Offers** – Reading; Information; Digital; Health; Learning; and Culture - developed by the Society for Chief Librarians in 2013 for library services.

The seven **Outcomes** – Culture & creative enrichment; Increased reading & literacy; Improved digital access & literacy; helping everyone to achieve their full potential; Healthier and happier lives; Greater prosperity; and Stronger, more resilient communities - described by the Library Taskforce in their vision for libraries in the 21st century.

Visit: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573911/Libraries_Deliver - Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573911/Libraries_Deliver_-_Ambition_for_Public_Libraries_in_England_2016_to_2021.pdf)

- undertaking a customer survey to ensure services are relevant

4. Libraries that are more innovative and sustainable by

- developing new services such as code clubs
- using technologies to free up staff time to support those in most need of it
- utilising library spaces in non-traditional ways
- developing action plans with our local partners

Library services will continue to provide a “universal offer” in physical library spaces and across the full range of digital and virtual platforms. Libraries will serve all sections of the community, while concentrating resources to where they are most needed and can be most beneficial including:

- Both ends of the age spectrum – children and older people. Libraries will continue to play a key role in “signposting” older people to a range of community based “preventative” services, and in promoting literacy and providing activities that support children, young people and families
- Disadvantaged communities and people. Libraries will, for example, continue to support people who lack computer and internet skills and who need help to find work.

A core set of [principles](#) will underpin the future delivery of public library services:

- The provision of information and reading will remain fundamental to public library provision, and will take account of the shifts in society and the opportunities provided by technological developments.
- The importance of libraries as community spaces, as hubs for people, for creativity, for the delivery of other services and for the provision of a wide range of opportunities and support to local communities and people.
- The opportunity to work with individuals and organisations as partners in the delivery of library services that best reflect the needs of local communities.

4.0 Designing sustainable library services that meet the future library needs of residents in Shropshire

[Appendix 1, Library Needs Assessment](#), provides an assessment of local needs in relation to the future development of library services, and in the context of the Council’s statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all its residents. It considers the Council’s specific requirement to provide library services to children and adults under section 7(2)(a) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, as well as the specific needs of individual groups: older and younger people, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, people with disabilities, and workless adults.

In developing this needs assessment the Council has taken account of guidance issued by the department for Culture Media and Sport (December 2015). The Council has also carefully considered its duties in respect of Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Equality Act 2010.

This analysis suggests that the future design of library services should be based on four key considerations:

1. Accessibility
2. Usage of the facilities
3. Population including population density and its demographic make up
4. Deprivation

Detail of how we have applied these considerations is included within the Library Needs Assessment, in particular section 11.0.

5.0 Library Services, our plans for the next five years

We have applied the approach described above to the design of a [hierarchy of library services provision](#). This hierarchy is intended to inform decisions on future investment and revenue support. It does not set out to close any existing library services, but it does recognise that the Council will need to prioritise where it provides financial support.

Proposed hierarchy of library services provision

| Library Services Provision | Details |
|---|--|
| Tier 1 Library Hubs (urban centres & larger market towns) | Shrewsbury (the main library and the Library at the Lantern), Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Market Drayton |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad opening times to reflect the wide catchment areas served • Staffed libraries • Conveniently located within “Community Hubs” - multifunctional spaces, gateways to a range of services, co-location of partners, etc. • Part of the Library Network retaining access to stock, requests service, reading groups, digital services etc. • Presumption for on-going management by Shropshire Council within arrangements that provide value for money within the provision of a “comprehensive” library service • Revenue support for the provision of library services; opportunity for partner organisations to “add value” to provision via partner funding • [“Back office support²” provided by Shropshire Council Libraries Team at no charge, if appropriate] • Proactive approach to on-going investment in support of improved facilities • Proactive approach to the development of innovative approaches to the use of library spaces and to raising income |
| Tier 2 Community Libraries (smaller market towns) | Cleobury Mortimer, Church Stretton, Bishop’s Castle, Ellesmere, Wem, Pontesbury and Albrighton |

² Shropshire Council “back office support” includes:

- Administrative support including training, library IT systems and public computers, stock, and stock management
- Marketing and publicity
- National and local library initiatives
- Reading Groups
- Development of library services

| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible opening times to reflect local need • Staffed libraries supported by volunteers • Conveniently located within “Community Hubs” - multifunctional spaces, gateways to a range of services, co-location of partners, etc. • Part of the Library Network retaining access to stock, requests service, reading groups, digital services etc. • Hosted and managed by local community organisations within contract arrangements with Shropshire Council that provide value for money within the provision of a “comprehensive” library service • Maximum of five year time limited tapered revenue support linked to a plan to achieve sustainable and cost neutral provision (to the Council) by the end of 2022/23; within this context different solutions may be required for different libraries • “Back office support” provided by Shropshire Council Libraries Team at no charge • Proactive approach to investment in support of improved facilities • Proactive approach to the development of innovative approaches to the use of library spaces and to raising income |
| <p>Tier 3 Community Libraries (smaller market towns)</p> | <p>Broseley, Shifnal, Highley, Craven Arms, Much Wenlock, Gobowen, Bayston Hill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible opening hours • Staffed libraries supported by volunteers, where part of the Library Network • Managed by local community organisations within contract arrangements with Shropshire Council • Maximum of three year time limited tapered revenue support linked to a plan to achieve sustainable cost neutral provision (to the Council) by the end of 2020/21; within this context different solutions may be required for different libraries • On-going “back office support” provided by Shropshire Council Libraries Team at no charge, where sustainable revenue funding requirements are met • Potential “one-off” investment in support of improved and sustainable facilities |
| <p>Stoke Heath Prison Library</p> | <p>Operated under fully funded contract from Her Majesty’s Prisons – supported by Shropshire Libraries</p> |
| <p>Mobile Libraries: 281 stops</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to rural areas • Presumption for ongoing management by Shropshire |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| | <p>Council within arrangements that provide value for money within the provision of a “comprehensive” library service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fortnightly rota • Part of the Library Network • Offering a broad range of information and advisory support to potentially vulnerable and isolated individuals |
| Digital Library Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-hour access • e-lending • e-resources • Community Directory |

All library services supported by the Council will provide a number of core and targeted services.

Core and targeted library services

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Core library services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books loans for adults, children and teenagers • Specialist Book collections for Parents and Carers, Special Situations, Books on Prescription • e-books, e-magazine, e-newspapers • Music & Drama lending Service • Free WIFI • Free computer use • Online reference resources • Home library service • Rhyme & Story Times for pre-schoolers • Reading Groups • Gateway to a range of Council, other public and partner services |
| Targeted library services | <p>Initiatives that support the Outcomes for Shropshire library services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved opportunities for literacy, reading and culture • Improved health and well-being of Shropshire communities • Communities that are resilient and inclusive • Libraries that are more innovative and sustainable |

Based on our assessment of need the Council considers that it can meet its statutory requirements to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons” by providing (see also maps 1, 2 and 3):

- Static library provision within seven Tier 1 locations – [Library Hubs](#) – and seven Tier 2 locations – [Community Libraries](#).

- 281 **Mobile Library** stops, principally responding to challenges of an ageing population and access to services in a rural context.
- **Digital library services** including 24-hour access to a range of lending and information resources

The table below summarises the percentage of the Shropshire population that live within 20 minutes of a Tier 1 library hub, Tier 2 community library and mobile library stop; 20 minutes of a Tier 1 library hub and Tier 2 community library; and 25 minutes of a Tier 1 library hub.

| Distance | Population estimate | Percentage of the total population |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| Within 20 minutes' drive time of 7 Tier 1 Library Hubs + 7 Tier 2 Community Libraries + 281 Mobile Library stops | 311,400 | 100% |
| Within 20 minutes' drive time of 7 Tier 1 Library Hubs + 7 Tier 2 Community Libraries | 298,210 | 95% |
| Within 25 minutes' drive time of 7 Tier 1 Library Hubs | 286,423 | 91% |

Source: Based on using Annual Mid-Year Population Estimates, 2016, Office for National Statistics (ONS)

It is also noteworthy in making this analysis that 37% of the Shropshire population (115,900) live within 20 minutes of a library within a neighbouring authority area.

In adopting this approach, we recognise that the provision of library service is not simply a question of proximity but also of availability and quality. Hence, providing 95% of the population with access to Tier 1, Tier 2 and mobile library provision within a 20-minute drive time is only a reasonable target if the library services themselves are open and of a reasonable quality.

Shaping the Future of Library Services³

This Strategy does not make any specific recommendations on alternative delivery models for libraries in Shropshire, although it is based on an assumption that the Council will want to engage with a broad range of local partners in the development of future approaches. It is noted that at the end of June 2017 eight libraries are being managed by “community organisations” within a range of contract arrangements. While many of these arrangements are in their early days it is possible to draw some early conclusions:

- Positive engagement with town and parish councils and local community organisations
- Increased confidence from local organisations to work with the Council in the delivery of library services
- Development of friends groups and community support

³ In the “Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021” report, the Libraries Task Force set out a vision for the future of public libraries in England in which libraries are vital community hubs, bringing people together and giving them access to the services and support they need to help them live better. The report provides a focus for collaborative working and challenges national and local government to think and act differently to transform library services. Visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573911/Libraries_Deliver_-_Ambition_for_Public_Libraries_in_England_2016_to_2021.pdf

- Libraries staying open and providing a full range of services at a cheaper cost to the Council

The development of new delivery models will be focussed on the creation of relevant resilient library services that meet modern needs. In particular, new models will support the development of:

- An increased focus on the delivery of national and local outcomes
- New enterprising opportunities for income generation
- Friends Groups, fundraising, volunteering and exciting programmes of events

In developing modern sustainable library provision the Council will continue to work collaboratively with the DCMS, the Arts Council and others to apply best practice and to acquire external funding. Access to the Council's Capital Programme will also be pursued. The Council will consider providing one-off funds, particularly to libraries that are unlikely to be financially supported in the future, in order to increase their chances of sustainability.

The desirability, viability and feasibility of a range of alternative delivery model options available for their library services are explored within a recent Libraries Task Force / DCMS toolkit⁴.

6.0 Actions to review and monitor the delivery of library services

The Council will work with a broad range of interested parties to develop a co-ordinated and jointly owned detailed five-year implementation plan within the context set out in the Strategy and the Council's financial position. The implementation plan will detail how our outcomes align with the Libraries Taskforce seven outcomes and the six Universal Offers.

Any proposals for significant investment and / or decommissioning will be brought back to Shropshire Council Cabinet.

The Strategy, its delivery and review, is set in the context of Shropshire Council's three high-level outcomes and Performance Management Framework:

- Healthy people
- Resilient communities
- Prosperous economy

What will success look like?

Shropshire Libraries will have a clear brand linked to the seven national library Universal Offers. We will help to build healthy, thriving and resilient communities. Investment in our staff, information technology and our services will place libraries at the heart of their communities.

Shropshire Libraries will nurture ambition, support health and well-being, challenge inequality, grow the economy and create more learning and employment possibilities to underpin continued social and economic development for Shropshire's citizens.

Specifically we will have made significant progress in achieving our outcomes:

1. Improved opportunities for literacy, reading and culture
2. Improved health and well-being of Shropshire communities

⁴ Libraries Shaping the Future: good practice toolkit March 2017.

Visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-shaping-the-future-good-practice-toolkit/libraries-shaping-the-future-good-practice-toolkit#deliver-services>

3. Communities that are resilient and inclusive
4. Libraries that are more innovative and sustainable

We will know that we have done this when we have:

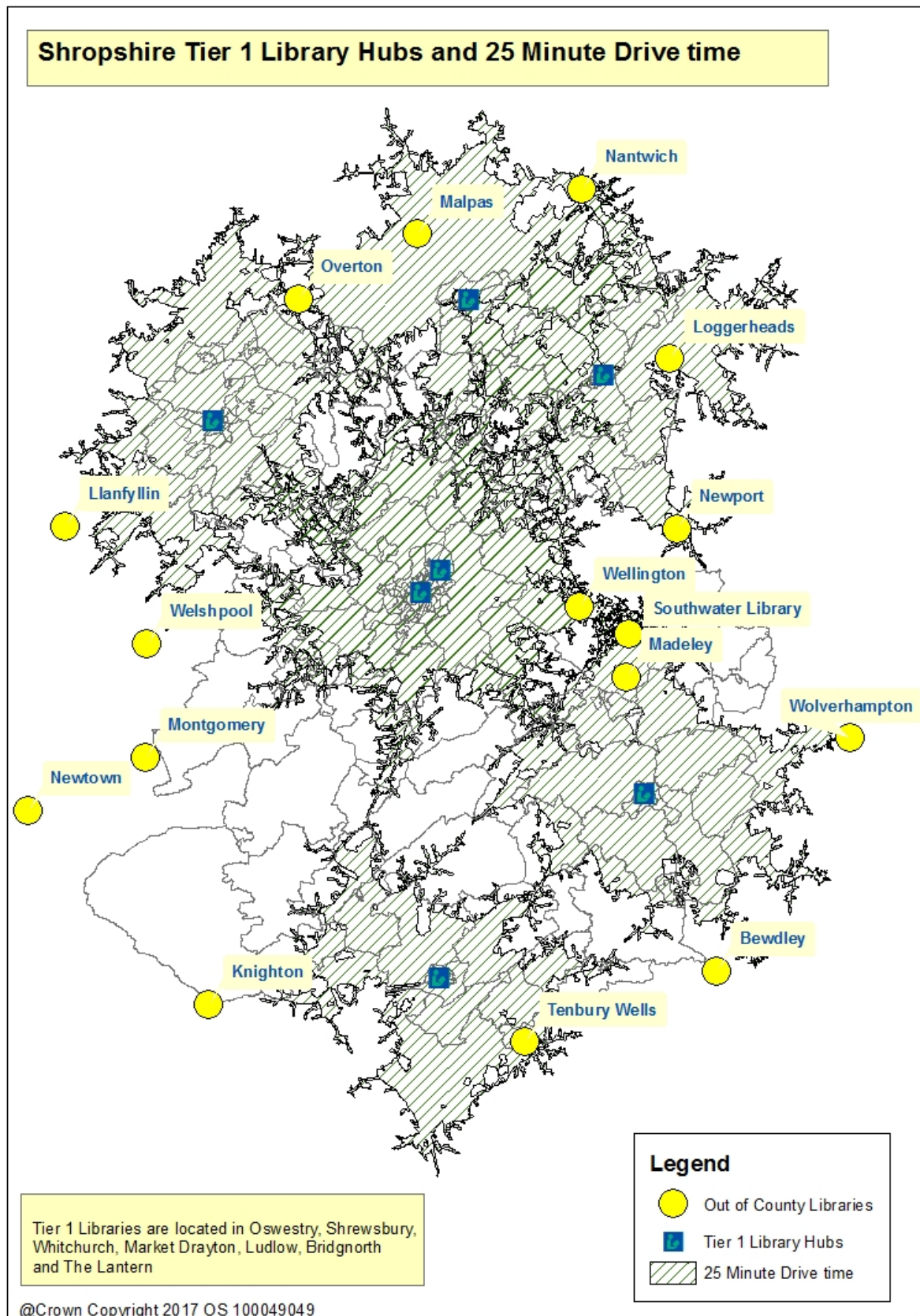
- invested in our staff, IT and infrastructure
- improved access through the provision of a full range of online services and targeted opening hours
- provided a quality range of well publicised services across our libraries
- improved library usage and visits using effective marketing and by exploiting digital services
- improved processes and systems for greater efficiency
- operated at lower cost
- operated as community facilities working in partnership and alongside additional services
- used trained volunteers to improve added value library services and enhance the free statutory library offer
- exploited opportunities to work with partners to develop commercial services
- promoted key health and wellbeing opportunities

Usage of library service provision will be monitored and kept under review. However, the focus will change to reflect a broad range of measurements that reflect the varied usage of spaces and services and the co-creation and delivery of new management arrangements. Ongoing efforts will be made to encourage participation by users and non-users.

The potential impact of the on-going redesign of library services on will continue to be reviewed and monitored the council also has statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and section 149: Public Sector Equality Duty in shaping policy, in delivering services, and in relation to their own employees.

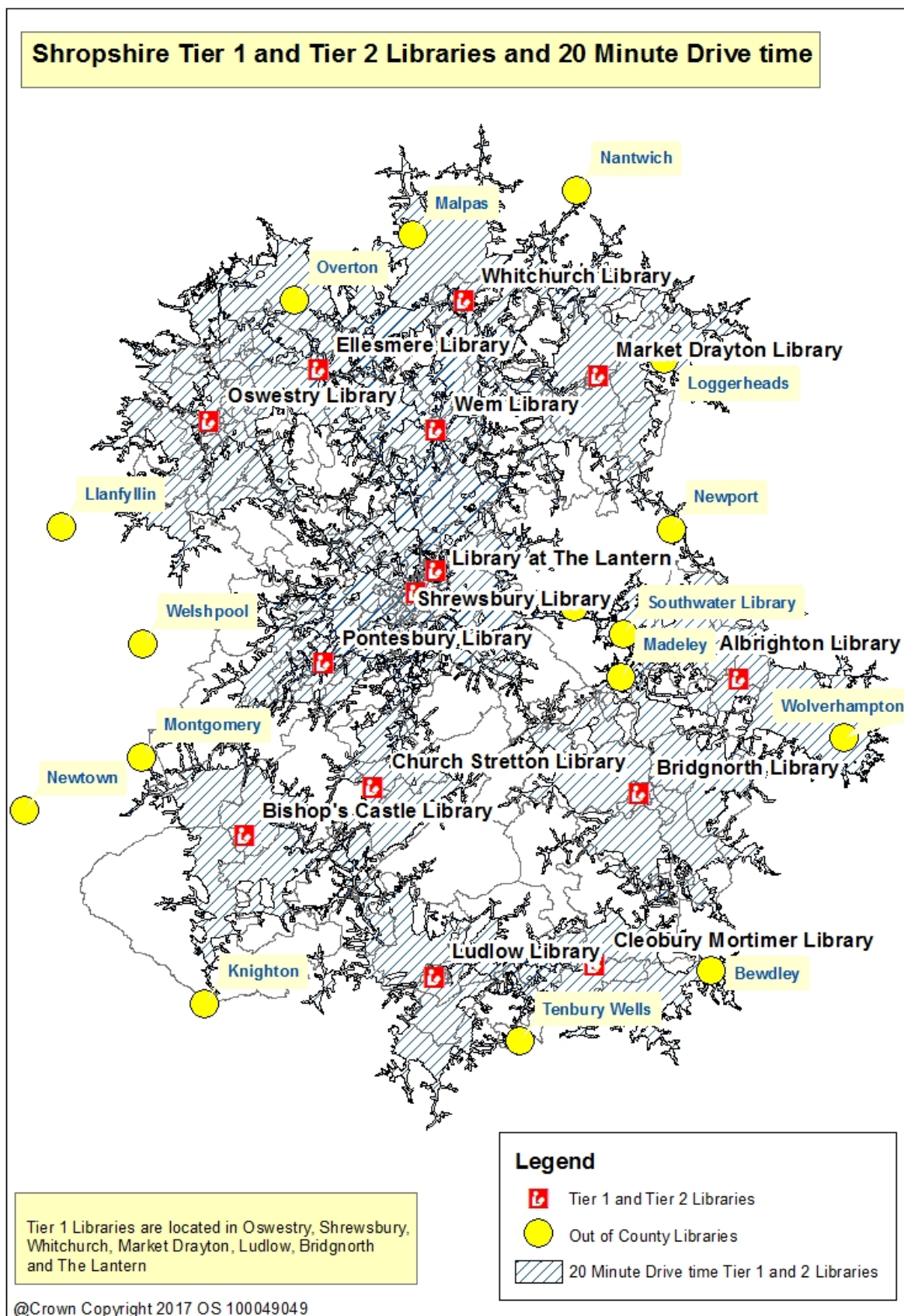
Alongside this the Council will continue to look at best practice, encourage comments and ideas from local residents and actively encourage the participation of local community groups in the development and delivery of library services.

Map 1 – Tier 1 Library Hubs showing 25 minute drive times



Map 2 – Tier 1 and Tier 2 Library Hubs and Community Libraries showing 20 minute drive times

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Map 3 – Tier 1 Library Hubs, Tier 2 Community Libraries, Mobile Library Stops and across border libraries

