

# Shropshire Library Strategy 2022-27

## Executive Summary



## Executive Summary

Shropshire Libraries are a vibrant service at the heart of our communities. They provide environments that allow people to feel safe, where generations of people meet freely in a public space and where learning, discovery and innovation are encouraged. Shropshire has a strong tradition of communities coming together when the need arises, and this has been evident with the Covid pandemic when working in partnership to deliver their local public services.

This library strategy outlines our promise as Shropshire Council, and sets out the priorities we will focus on to deliver a commercial, contemporary and adaptable community service for the future.

It outlines our vision and strategic objectives, highlights the importance of libraries within the community, describes our core offer and provides a clear direction for the future of Shropshire Libraries. We see corporate and community collaborations as being integral to the long-term sustainability of the service. We will work together with our friendly, highly skilled and experienced staff, to build on our offer around Reading, Information, Digital, Health, Learning, Culture and Creativity.

This Strategy describes the changes library services will make to be at the forefront of the council's future relationship with its residents and a critical partner in delivery of the county's priorities.

This Shropshire Library Strategy aims to change the way library services operate so that we can extend our work further into the mainstream of the way the council and its partners work with Shropshire's communities. It will ensure that library services reach the people who need them most and that co-design and joint delivery with partners serve the priority needs of the county.

The development of this Strategy has been informed by a public consultation process and a commissioned report around the potential for Library transformation.

The Vision, Mission and Priorities highlighted in this Strategy reflect these findings.

## Shropshire's Library Offer

Shropshire Library service operates through a network of twenty-one static libraries, a prison library, three mobile libraries and development and online services which together provide access to library services in every market town and most parts of a very rural and sparsely populated county.

- ❖ 6 Principal market town libraries run by Shropshire Council: 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
- ❖ 3 Mobile libraries run by Shropshire Council cover 274 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

As one of the largest landlocked county's Shropshire's library locations is one where resources are thinly spread across several branches:

- ❖ It has one of the highest numbers of libraries amongst its statistical neighbours. It has 24 service points, of which three are mobile libraries compared to an average of 17 libraries across the group<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Its total revenue expenditure for 2019/20 was lower than the national average and the average of its statistical neighbours.
- ❖ It has 13,463 residents per branch, which is considerably lower than the national average of 25,526 and is lower than the average of its statistical neighbours.

This needs to be seen in the context of the county's size and rurality. However, there is a need to review the library locations to maximise potential and allow them to easily respond to community need.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical neighbours as per CIPFA Stats Comparative Profile, 2018-19 Actuals and 2019-20 Estimates are: Herefordshire, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Wiltshire, Central Bedfordshire, North Somerset, Stockport, York, Isle of Wight, Calderdale and Solihull and cover service points open for more than 10 hours a week.

## What do Shropshire Library Services do for us?

Libraries in Shropshire are increasingly at the heart of their communities, providing safe, trusted spaces which host a huge range of services and activities that support Shropshire residents to lead full and healthy lives. Our ambition and commitment is to continue to unlock the huge potential that library services have to impact positively on individuals' lives whilst at the same time delivering local priorities.

Libraries already provide:

- ❖ Quality information and digital support ensuring staff have the skills to support services.
- ❖ e-services that enable individuals and communities to develop skills to find answers and to inform life choices and feel safe online.
- ❖ Accessible resources that embrace technology.
- ❖ Bookstart, which is a national programme for parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from any age.
- ❖ Universal Reading Offer, which supports the growth of a literate, empathetic and confident society.
- ❖ Health and Wellbeing partnerships to promote healthy living provide support and engagement opportunities supported by inclusive spaces; signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities.
- ❖ Work with the business, education, culture and health sectors to facilitate economic growth with appropriate developments for communities
- ❖ Investment in spaces that are flexible, inclusive and attractive vibrant multi-functional spaces.
- ❖ Training for staff in line with development strategies to ensure a flexible, confident work force equipped to respond to any future needs of our communities

## How are we doing?

Over 900 people responded to our Library Strategy consultation that ran during October/November 2019. 90% of respondents were identified as current users. During National Libraries Week we engaged over 400 library users with our quick snapshot survey and Library Roadshows.

*The key themes from the consultation were:*

- ❖ Overall levels of satisfaction with library services are high.
- ❖ Borrowing books and other items remains the main reason why people visit their library.
- ❖ Customers view library staff as the most important aspect of the service. Opening times and range/quality of library stock are also very important.
- ❖ Library staff are highly rated regarding customer service and approachability.
- ❖ In terms of the future, respondents were keen for libraries to stay as they are. People argue strongly for the importance of libraries to individuals and communities.
- ❖ The largest proportion of responses were from female library users aged 60+. Levels of engagement with those under 30 was very low.

The key themes suggest we need to balance the needs of our 'traditional' users alongside the needs of other library users. Developing services to attract new users is also essential to ensure that libraries stay relevant in the future.

# Shropshire Library Strategy

## Vision

Our **Vision** is for library services in Shropshire to be at the heart of our communities making connections to improve people's lives.

Our **Mission** is to provide physical and digital library services and spaces that inspire communities, learning, imagination, discovery, and health.

We have identified six **Strategic Priorities** to achieve our vision for the next five years:

<p><b>1. Improved opportunities for reading, literacy, culture and creativity</b></p> <p>Reading, Literacy, Culture and Creativity are increasingly important parts of library services, we will create relationships that ensure libraries enhance people's lives as a place of discovery, diversity, and interactivity.</p>
<p><b>2. Improved health and wellbeing of Communities</b></p> <p>We will strengthen our role in the co-delivery of health and wellbeing interventions for people living in the county. Explore opportunities for greater collaboration with Adult Social Care, Health, Children's Services and external partners, including the voluntary sector to deliver commissioned services.</p>
<p><b>3. Promote Economic Recovery and Growth</b></p> <p>We will support the development of small, medium businesses, entrepreneurs and job seekers. Deliver digital technology for internal and for loan, business information, free and low-cost access to business intelligence, market research, 1 to1 training, innovative spaces and intellectual property support.</p>
<p><b>4. Communities that are resilient and inclusive</b></p> <p>We will highlight the key role we play in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. We will, with technological support provide services events and pathways that help address health needs, contribute to tackling inequalities in individuals, families and groups across all ages.</p>
<p><b>5. Library services that are more innovative and sustainable</b></p> <p>We will increase our contribution to Local and National cross cutting aims for reducing social isolation, living independently and addressing the challenges of rurality. Utilise technology to free up staff interventions to work creatively to support an improved quality of life and sustainable communities.</p>
<p><b>6. People are enabled to discover the digital world</b></p> <p>We will provide a 21st century service that enables people of all ages to get online, and ensure they have the skills to engage with the digital world safely and effectively. Help to build digital confidence for day-to-day life as part of community and workforce development.</p>


## Operations

### Partnerships

Sustained impact requires working with communities to understand their needs, strategically with partners to support outcomes. Library services will work more closely with other parts of the council and partner organisations, across health and care, economic growth and climate change agendas.

### Venues

We will retain a tiered mixed economy model of Library provision across the town and rural villages. Each library location will be reviewed, taking account of potential to serve areas of greatest need.

### Technology

Self-service kiosks will be installed in all libraries, along with contactless card-payments. This will enable a deliberate shift in the balance of staffing from routine customer service tasks, to service development and community impact roles.

### Opening Hours

Opening hours will also be reviewed, aiming to target opening times at periods when the service is most able to reach and attract those with the greatest needs.

### Staffing

The focus on meeting priority needs will require strengthening of some of library services' capabilities, in particular: service development (including partnership building and income and grant generation); community engagement; data and intelligence; digital; and marketing and communications. A change to the current library services structure, supported by a clear workforce strategy, will enable Library staff to further enhance their roles with less reactive transactions, to proactive more community engagement.

### Shropshire Local.

The council is exploring the extension of its Shropshire Local community interactions. Shropshire Local digital offer increases opportunities for residents and businesses to navigate Council services. It offers self-service, assisted digital support and customers skills learning for their future online needs. Libraries will be integral to this development, with co-location and integration with wider community information provision.

### Mobile Services.

Shropshire's library mobiles in partnership with the voluntary sector, health and local services will help to maximise the ability of local areas to combat loneliness and social isolation. Options are being piloted to combine the mobile library service with Shropshire Local and a health promotion. This will strengthen the role of libraries as a gateway to information, communication and support.

## Resources

Due to continued pressure on public finances, there is a need to ensure that all Services provide value for money. This Strategy creates opportunities to reduce ongoing public subsidy for Library Services, whilst increasing income. However, investment will be required to realise benefits. These can be summarised as opportunities for subsidy reduction; through colocation, the introduction of self-service machines, changes to staffing and reviewing opening hours, and income generation; through venue hire, external grant funding and co-production of new activities. Realising these will require investment in new equipment and software, building refurbishment and training.

The subsidy reduction that will be achieved will depend on local circumstances and each library will be considered in turn. It is therefore not possible to specify the financial impacts at this stage, but it is anticipated that over the duration of this strategy considerable savings/ income generation will be made. Any savings would aim to retain community access to library services by identifying efficiencies, as outlined above.

## How will we measure success?

A new approach to Performance Management, which will be developed over the next 12 months. Building on existing monitoring, the key aim should be to find indicators of impact. These will be aligned with delivery partners and their priorities. This could include measures such as:

- ❖ Usage of the Library Services by adults in most deprived areas.
- ❖ Usage of the Library Services by young people entitled to free school meals.
- ❖ Percentage of Library Service users who have been supported by library staff to access/use library IT services or equipment in the last 12 months and agree/strongly agree that their ability to access and use online resources/services has improved due to support provided by library staff.

## Timescales

The Library Strategy Implementation Plan for this work will be developed and delivered over the next 3 years, working with communities at each library venue to best address local community needs, offer excellent value for money, and provide support to local people and businesses, including through Shropshire Local as appropriate.