

Cabinet

1st March 2023

Members Question and Responses

Background Notes

A new Library Strategy was agreed by Cabinet in December 2022. The strategy aims to bring the Library Service up to date, based on good practice across the sector, and to strengthen the function of our libraries as community hubs in the heart of our communities.

Our strategy broadens their scope to include:

- Inequality and rural deprivation
- Health and wellbeing
- Business support
- Digital skills
- Income generation, where possible
- Innovation

Potential areas of transformation to better meet community needs include:

- Working in partnership with other Council services, health services, community organisations and businesses
- Reviewing library locations and opening hours
- The introduction of self-service machines to free up staff to support customers' needs
- Review of staffing structures and skills development
- The extension of Shropshire Local to bring digital access to Council services into the community

A Library transformation programme will follow on from the publishing of the strategy.

Question from Cllr Julia Buckley

Library Transformation and Staffing Implications

Over the last 12 months we have received presentations about the proposed, and approved, transformation of library provision across the county. Whilst the notion of opening up libraries into community hubs for more activities is welcomed, we must be mindful of the impact this has had on staff workloads and core service levels.

Throughout the process we have been reassured that there will be “no staff redundancies” despite the level of financial savings detailed in the reports.

- **Could the cabinet member reassure staff and members that this commitment to no staff redundancies remains in place?**
- **Furthermore, could the cabinet member confirm that the qualified librarians will not be re-deployed into back office functions for which their training and professional experience does not align?**

- **And that there will be no impact on service delivery from any staff changes?**

Response:

As reported to Cabinet in December 2022, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy identified the following savings for 2022/23:

- Review of library provision £191,930
- Libraries – Implementation of changes under the Library Transformation Project £50,000

These savings are being address through a proposed operational restructure of the Culture, Leisure and Tourism service, including Libraries, which will centralise some elements of the service, such as marketing, income generation, project development and external grant applications, ICT, contracts and venue management. This centralised approach will free up capacity within services to deliver their core priorities.

The restructure aims to remodel and develop Culture, Leisure and Tourism (CLT) Services to:

- Increase efficiency
- Boost income generation
- Bring in more external funding
- Improve partnership working
- Ensure better compliance
- Improve outcomes for the community

This will ultimately help deliver the priorities of the Shropshire Plan, the Cultural Strategy and the Library Strategy and secure and improve these services in the medium to long term. It aims to ensure that these services, including Libraries, are in a stronger position in the future.

As a formal consultation is about to start with staff impacted it would not be appropriate to share details of the proposed restructure until those staff have had the opportunity to comment, and plans have been finalised, with staff comments taken into consideration. We are therefore not in a position to provide a commitment around the new structure at the present time.

However, whilst the restructure is intended to result in some changes to how the Library Service is managed and delivered, it is confirmed that there are no proposals to reduce front-line staffing, or the number of venues or opening hours. The proposed restructure critically protects front line services and those services that are most important to the public.