Committee	Cabinet
Date and Time	18th November 2026 Public

Shaping the future of Shropshire Libraries – Consultation

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Sarah Marston – Portfolio Holder for Communities & Environment	
Lead Director:	Paula Mawson – Service Director, Communities & Customer	
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Electoral Divisions Affected	All Divisions	
Key Decision?	Key Decision	
Cabinet Forward Plan	Yes -15 October 2026	
Report considered by	Cabinet – 18 November 2026	

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's approval to commence a consultation on proposals to shape the future of the Shropshire Libraries Service, in the context of the statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all who live, work or study in the area.

1.2. These proposals have been based on an updated needs assessment for this service which is presented to Cabinet in this report, and the Council's need to meet Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

1.3. The proposals are also made in the context of the Council's ongoing financial emergency; it's imperative to reduce reliance on exceptional financial support from the government, and the corresponding decreased financial envelope available to the council to deliver its statutory duties.

1.4. If approved, the consultation would seek to identify the views of residents, communities and key stakeholders regarding the proposed changes, the potential impact upon them and their views on mitigations and alternative suggestions.

1.5. This report does not present any decisions or predetermined positions on the future of the library service. The responses to the public consultation will be analysed and presented to Cabinet to inform decision making in a future report.

1.6. The Council remains committed to ensuring the statutory duties for library services are met, and to delivering a comprehensive consultation process to inform future decision making.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1.1 Note the updated needs assessment for the Shropshire Libraries Service (October 2026) at Appendix A, which presents demographic information for Shropshire, the profile of Shropshire Library users, the service demand and usage analysis, library costs and individual library profiles.

2.1.2 Approve a public consultation for 12 weeks on the future of Shropshire libraries based on the proposed changes outlined in the report.

2.1.3 Endorse the approach presented in the report to undertake a targeted review of physical assets and locations of libraries.

2.1.4 Endorse the approach to continue to explore mitigations and alternative delivery options with Town & Parish Councils, voluntary sector and community groups to support the delivery of Libraries.

2.1.5 Instruct Council Officers to prepare a pre-decision report to the Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the public consultation for libraries, for consideration of any recommendations or feedback to Cabinet based on the consultation responses.

3. Background

3.1 **Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 ("1964 Act")**

Shropshire Council has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who "live, work or study and want to access the service" in the Shropshire Council area (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964). In so doing, the statutory duty under section 7 of the Act requires that the Council must have particular regard to:

- Ensuring an adequate range and quality of materials in sufficient number, range and quality to meet the general needs and special requirements of adults and children.
- Encouraging adults and children to make full use of the library service

- Securing full cooperation between those carrying out the library authority's functions and other authorities whose functions operate within the library area.

3.2 Shropshire's Libraries Service Offer

Shropshire libraries are a valued part of the Council's universal public services with a strong core library offer to meet the statutory duty. Libraries are trusted, safe and welcoming community spaces, offering a route for access to a broader range of public services and community events. Community information and signposting advice is available, alongside social spaces for people to come together and access to a range of services, both from the council and other partner agencies. Libraries provide opportunities that encourage learning and ambition, improve skills and self-confidence, promote wellbeing and reduce loneliness and isolation across our rural communities. Libraries implement the Libraries Connected four universal library offers:

Table 1 Libraries Connected Four Universal Offers

Culture and Creativity	Enabling local communities to enjoy high-quality arts and cultural experiences through libraries.
Health and Wellbeing	Supporting the health and wellbeing of communities through services that inform, engage and connect.
Information and Digital	Ensuring communities can access quality information and digital services, learn new digital skills and feel safe online.
Reading	Building a literate and confident society by developing, delivering and promoting creative reading activities in libraries.

3.3 The Need for Change

The 1964 Act places a duty on local authorities to ensure a comprehensive library service is offered to all those who want to access it. One of the ways local authorities assess that they are meeting the statutory duty is through the production of a comprehensive needs assessment. The needs assessment, which is updated regularly, enables local authorities to assess their library delivery and consider evidence-based changes through a range of factors, including the monitoring of library usage and demand, demographic information, access information, amongst others. As a result, the way in which Local authorities meet their statutory duty to provide a comprehensive library service is not a fixed concept; it may change over time reflective of the evidence in the needs assessment and following appropriate consultation with communities and assessment of their feedback. Additionally,

the Council must ensure it complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act), through delivering a service that is accessible for all residents, using reasonable means, making best use of assets available whilst recognising the constraints on council resources.

A summary of the latest needs assessment for Shropshire is presented in the next section with the full needs assessment in Appendix A. This shows that the demand for libraries is changing. The Council needs to demonstrate that it is keeping the service relevant for the existing population and its delivery model will meet the future needs of the population to be compliant with the statutory duty. This must consider both the needs of the adult population, and importantly the needs of children and young people. To illustrate, the needs assessment provides evidence of significant growth in attendance at events, with reasonable growth in visits to static libraries. Loans and physical issues from libraries have fallen. The Council has considered in detail the findings of the needs assessment to inform the consultation proposals outlined in this report.

For Shropshire Council, consideration of the libraries service delivery needs to also be considered within the challenges of the Council's ongoing financial emergency, the imperative to urgently reduce reliance on Exceptional Financial Support from the government and the need to secure a sustainable financial position for the local authority. The Council must therefore consider how best to meet the needs of communities, adhere to the library's statutory duty but within the context of the significantly reduced financial resources available to it.

The proposals that we are now consulting upon before reaching a final decision are reflective of both the updated needs assessment and reflective of Shropshire's difficult financial position.

3.4 Library Service Needs Assessment.

Shropshire Council maintains a needs assessment on the delivery of library services across the County. This needs assessment was recently updated to include the delivery information for 2025-26, and can be found in Appendix A. A summary of some of the key points from the needs assessment for the service is provided below but Cabinet members are invited to read the assessment in full.

Shropshire operates a network of twenty-one static libraries, a prison library (Stoke Heath), digital services, three mobile libraries and a targeted home library service. Together, these services provide access to libraries across the County as shown in Table 1.

Table 2: Shropshire Library Access Points

Static libraries	Principal libraries in market towns	6	Shrewsbury; Oswestry; Bridgnorth; Ludlow; Market Drayton; Whitchurch	Run by Shropshire Council
Static libraries	Local community libraries	7	Gobowen; Church Stretton; Bayston Hill; Wem; The Lantern; Pontesbury; Much Wenlock	Run by Shropshire Council
Static libraries	Local market town community libraries	5	Bishop's Castle; Craven Arms; Highley; Cleobury Mortimer; Ellesmere	Run by local community groups

Static libraries	Commissioned libraries	3	Albrighton; Broseley; Shifnal	Run by the relevant town or parish council, with associated asset transfer
Prison library	Stoke Heath Prison Library	1	Stoke Heath Prison	Operated under a fully funded contract from His Majesty's Prisons
Digital Service	Online library	1	E-books; e-audiobooks; e-magazines; e-newspapers	Digital library provision
Mobile library service	Mobile library vans	3	232 stops over a two-week cycle across three vans	Serves rurally isolated parts of the county; stop duration ranges from 10 to 150 minutes depending on need
Home Library Offer	Book delivery to people who cannot attend a physical location or access online materials		Operates in certain libraries with the support of volunteers	Currently a targeted offer only

3.5 The core library service across Shropshire offers a range of services. These service offers are tailored to specific individual libraries and the communities they serve. Individual libraries will offer a range of provision selected from the below and tailored to their community and individual library arrangements:

- General community hubs for events and activities.
- Safe space and warm hubs for communities.
- Activities, events and services based on community need working with internal and external partners, including Voluntary & Community Sector Agencies (VCSA).
- Bridgnorth and Oswestry libraries operate as Community and Family Hubs.
- Shropshire Local (council's customer service team) delivers from Oswestry, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Bridgnorth, Whitchurch, Bishops Castle, Shifnal, Highley, Albrighton & Broseley libraries.
- Books and other reading materials for loan.
- Book clubs.
- Local history Information & Groups.
- Wi-Fi access.
- Public computer access.
- Printing/scanning facilities.
- Support and training to enhance digital inclusion.
- Targeted Home Library offer – volunteers delivering to those that cannot access a library.

The Needs Assessment presents detailed information about library usage and demand both at whole service and individual library levels, along with demographic information. Benchmarking information from comparator local authorities is also provided.

At the whole service level, it is noted in the needs assessment that the number of:

- Active library users have reached a plateau with 33,378 registered users in 2022/23 compared to 33,121 in 2025/26.
- Visits to static libraries have seen reasonable growth from 596,080 visits in 2022/23 to 631,308 visits in 2025/26.
- Loans from static libraries has reduced considerably from a peak of 674,895 in 2022/23 to 594,134 in 2025/26
- Physical issues from static libraries have also fallen from a peak of 611,566 in 2022/23 to 531,949 in 2025/26.

- Number of E-loans from static libraries has stayed steady with 63,320 in 2022/23 compared to 62,718 on 2025/26, although the number of unique users has increased.
- Access to computer use remains a popular part of the service offer with over 24,000 delivery hours in 2025/26.
- Large growth in events attendance at static libraries peaking in 2025/26 with 82,257 attendances.
- 1,100 people make use of the 3 mobile library vans which offer a total of 232 stops over a fortnightly period.

Geographic data is presented in the needs assessment to note accessibility across the county. More than three-quarters of Shropshire's population (77%) live within a 10-minute drive of a static library, while only 1% face a drive time longer than 25 minutes. On foot access is also presented with nearly a third of members living within a 15-minute walk of their local static library, a figure that increases to over half when extending the walking radius to 30 minutes.

Demographic data indicates that women account for 65% of all users, with a greater proportion of children and young adults (25%) accessing the libraries than the base population. The proportion attributable to over 65s is also higher than the Shropshire base population (30% of all library users compared to 26% of the population). The 20-64 age band is under-represented, accounting for 44% of library users, compared to a base population of 54%.

In addition, the needs assessment also contains specific profiles of all individual libraries.

Library Service budget 2025/26

Table 3 Service Budgets

Source	Budget (£)
Service budget static libraries	1,493,230.00
Library Management & Support	345,170.00
Mobile Library Service	183,130.00
Corporate Landlord charge for assets	905,740.00
Internal Market charges	348,210.00
Non-controllable Budgets (Pensions adjustment)	262,130.00
Total budget	**3,537,610.00**

3.6 Budget distribution

Table 4 Budget Distribution

Service Expenditure
• 74% of the service expenditure for libraries is on the 6 main market town libraries
• 6% of the service expenditure is on the mobile library service

• 20% of the service expenditure is on the on the remaining smaller library branches
Property / assets
• 75% on libraries in our 6 main market towns
• 25% on remaining library branches

Further information on the budget breakdown for individual libraries will be provided in the consultation pack.

3.7 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) published in 2024 noted savings of £332,588 over a 2-year period. To date £239,278 has been achieved through increasing efficiencies and income without significant service changes. The remaining £93,260 is currently an undelivered saving. The proposals noted in this report may generate additional savings, and the ongoing refresh of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan will present to Cabinet and Council updated library savings that are reflective of the proposals and estimated savings noted in this report. Any further savings or efficiencies to the service's budget will only be confirmed after the consultation process and assessment of its findings has been completed, and dependent upon decisions made by Cabinet in a future report.

On the 14 May 2026, Full Council approved the new Corporate Plan*, Rebuilding Shropshire Together*. Alongside the Plan a set of delivery commitments were published. These included a review of libraries to ensure sustainable and efficient delivery for the future of the service. This report is a step towards meeting that commitment.

4. Consultation Proposals

4.1. Ahead of any proposals being considered by Officers for presentation in this report to Cabinet, key national guidance on library service delivery and expectations for appropriate consultation processes has been reviewed. Discussions have also taken place with the Department for Digital, Media, Culture & Sport (DCMS), noting their important role to consider any representations that local authorities may be failing in to meet their statutory duties for libraries. The needs assessments data have also been considered to support the formulation of proposals.

4.2 This report does not present any decisions or predetermined positions on the future of the library service. Approval to consult is requested to allow a full consultation to take place seeking to identify the views of residents, communities and key stakeholders regarding the proposed changes, the potential impact upon them and their views on mitigations and other alternative delivery suggestions. The Council will seek to engage not only with current users, but also engage prospective library users, including children and young adults, and other key stakeholders. Consultation responses will be assessed and presented to Cabinet to inform any future decision making for the libraries service.

The consultation options presented below have considered all aspects of library provision – static libraries, mobile provision and the core library offer, within the context of the library Statutory duty, the context of the council's financial emergency,

and within the context of Shropshire's corporate plan and the important role that libraries deliver across our communities.

The Council's review of libraries recognises that:

- Libraries are a valued part of our community offer, providing safe inclusive spaces in our rural communities and dispersed population
- Library delivery is complex. Some libraries are delivered and funded solely by the Council, some in partnership with Town and Parish Councils TPCs or other delivery partners
- Assets arrangements are equally complex with some buildings council owned, some leased and some owned by other parties
- Libraries are also community hubs offering a range of events and other services – banks, health & prevention services, customer services etc
- Transport infrastructure for our rural services is poor, so transport times and routes for residents must be considered. Digital delivery options would not reach all our dispersed rural communities
- Library finances are also complex. Seven community branches are supported by TPCs, with three of those fully commissioned.

4.3 In this context, the following table provides a summary of the proposed public consultation proposals. It will be emphasised within the consultation documentation that the Council encourages consultees to suggest alternative options and mitigations for consideration, and to include their views on impacts of the proposed changes as part of their response.

Table 5 Consultation Proposals Summary

Description	**Estimated Savings**
Reduce opening hours of the 6 principal libraries (Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Bridgnorth, Whitchurch) to 30 hours per week – see section 4.4	£130,000
Closure of The Library at the Lantern – see section 4.7	£53,230
Closure of Gobowen Library – see section 4.8	£37,970
Closure of the mobile library service – see section 4.9	£183,500

Further information on each of the four proposals is provided below.

Reduce Opening hours at 6 principal Libraries

The table below sets out the proposed change in total opening hours for the 6 principal libraries.

Table 6 Proposed reductions in opening hours

Library	Current weekly opening hours	Proposed public consultation weekly opening hours	Reduced weekly hours
Shrewsbury	46hrs	30hrs	16hrs
Oswestry	45hrs	30hrs	15hrs
Market Drayton	34.5hrs	30hrs	4.5hrs
Bridgnorth	36.5hrs	30hrs	6.5hrs
Ludlow	34.5hrs	30hrs	4.5hrs
Whitchurch	30.5hrs	30hrs	0.5hrs

4.4 An example of what a 30 hour a week opening time could look like for the 6 principal libraries is attached at **Appendix B**, the aim is to provide consistency whilst responding to the specific needs and circumstances of each community. Two examples are given for each library each retaining a choice of opening times for customers across the week, late opening and on Saturdays. Alternative suggestions will be considered as part of the consultation process to inform future decision-making.

These proposals are presented reflective of the overall library budget position which demonstrates that 75% of the service costs sits within these 6 specific libraries, noting the council's overall reduced financial envelope for services as a result of its financial emergency and reliance on exceptional financial support.

The consultation will seek responses from all stakeholders to include current and future library users regarding proposed opening time reductions and views on how these reductions could be deployed to maximise use of these libraries, along with any mitigations or other alternatives suggested by stakeholders.

4.5 The Council will continue to explore with Town and Parish Councils, Community and Voluntary Sector groups and / or other stakeholders e.g. Friends of Libraries groups to consider any potential support to their local library delivery which may off-set any proposed reduction in opening hours. A summary of discussions held with stakeholders in the lead up to this report will be noted in the consultation pack. The consultation findings report will also report on any held during the consultation.

4.6 The responses to this part of the consultation will be carefully analysed and assessed to inform any future decision making recommended to Cabinet.

4.7 Closure of the Library at the Lantern

The Library at the Lantern is located in northeast Shrewsbury, within a community building delivering a broader range of services that features bookable rooms, a cafe, and on-site parking. The proposal is to close the library, not the entire building or other services that are delivered from it.

A detailed profile of the library is available in the needs assessment. The needs assessment notes that there are 801 active users during the 2025/26 financial year. This is equivalent to 2.4% of all Shropshire library users. 7.9% of the Lantern catchment population are active users, which is lower than the Shropshire average.

This demonstrates that the library catchment areas covers approximately 143 hectares which is less than 0.1% of the county's land mass. The catchment is also entirely within the catchment for Shrewsbury's main library, with Shrewsbury the only town that has two libraries. Almost a third of library users living in the catchment use Shrewsbury library.

Shrewsbury main library is located 2.1 miles away from Library at the Lantern, with good transportation links via road and bus. Shrewsbury is the only town in Shropshire with two libraries.

If the consultation is approved, we will explore the impact, mitigations and alternative delivery opportunities for residents through the consultation. Mitigations could include consideration of targeted outreach provision at the Lantern, and we would welcome suggestions on this from the community. We will also explore through the consultation a detailed assessment of impacts for people who use the Library at the Lantern, particularly those with protected characteristics as part of our Equalities and Social Health Impact Assessment. We recognise that the area around the Lantern is within one of the most deprived 20% of the country, and we will therefore ensure targeted efforts in our consultation process to reach this community through a range of routes, listening carefully to their views to help us assess the impacts fully.

We acknowledge the significance of this proposal and very careful consideration will be given to the consultation responses before making a final recommendation to Cabinet.

4.8 Closure of Gobowen Library

Gobowen is a small town in the north-west of Shropshire, close to the Wrexham border, just north of Oswestry; the library is located in the centre of Gobowen.

A detailed profile of the library is available from the needs assessment. This demonstrates that the library is open 15 hours per week, over Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The library had 262 active users in the 2025/26 financial year. This is equivalent to 0.8% of all Shropshire library users, with Gobowen library catchment the smallest in terms of population size.

The closest library to Gobowen is Oswestry library, a principal library, which is located 3 miles away. Almost as many users in the Gobowen catchment use Oswestry library as they do Gobowen. Oswestry is the most frequently visited

alternative library. Travel from Gobowen to Oswestry, as the nearest alternative library, is approximately an 8-minute drive, with good bus links which takes approximately 20 minutes. Gobowen library is second only to the Library at the Lantern in terms of closeness of a community branch library to another principal library.

If the consultation is approved, the Council will explore the impact, mitigations and alternative delivery opportunities for residents through the consultation. Council has explored with Selattyn and Gobowen Parish Council the opportunity for the parish council to consider running the library; at this time the parish council has declined to pursue these conversations further. We remain open to considering this again through the consultation should the Parish Council wish to re-open discussions. We will also explore through the consultation a detailed assessment of impacts for people who use Gobowen Library, particularly those with protected characteristics as part of our Equalities and Social Health Impact Assessment. We recognise that the area around Gobowen Library is within one of the most deprived 20% of the country, and we will therefore ensure targeted efforts in our consultation process to reach this community through a range of routes, listening carefully to their views to help us assess their view and opinions, and the impacts fully.

We acknowledge the significance of this proposal and very careful consideration will be given to the consultation responses before making a final recommendation to Cabinet.

4.9 Closure of the Mobile Library Service

Shropshire Council operates three mobile libraries covering 232 stops ranging from 10 minutes to 2.5 hours on a fortnightly rota. The mobile library service operates for 46.75 hours per week and 2,431 hours per annum with 1,110 active borrowers in 25/26, noting a small decline in active users from 2021/22. The number of visits to the mobile libraries peaked in 2024/25 with 23,052 and in 2025/26 this had reduced to 20,532. Number of loans have also reduced from a peak in 2021/22 of 60,298 to 53,039 in 2025/26.

A detailed profile on the use of the mobile library service is available in the needs assessment.

The Council recognises that mobile libraries provide a valuable service to a relatively smaller number of library users. The Council also recognises that these library users may have particular needs that make it harder for them to access static libraries – there may be older people who rely on the proximity to home to access the mobile service, conversely there maybe parents of young children with limited access to transport who may also rely on accessing a mobile offer to meet their access needs. The consultation will support the Council to better understand the needs of the mobile library service users, their views on potential mitigations through such Community transport Dial a ride schemes to support access to a static library and their views on potential alternative delivery options such as the Home Library Service. These are explored in more detail in the mitigations section below. The Council will use this information to also update its Equalities and Social Health Impact Assessment for this proposal.

It is also important to note, however, that the costs of the mobile library service are relatively high compared to the average costs of the static libraries.

If the consultation is approved, the Council will explore the impact, mitigations and alternative delivery opportunities for residents through the consultation.

We acknowledge the significance of this proposal and very careful consideration will be given to the consultation responses before making a final recommendation to Cabinet.

4.10 Combination of Proposals

Shropshire Council recognises that, taken together, the proposals may particularly impact some library users to a greater extent than others. We recognise, for example that in the Oswestry and Shrewsbury areas, there is both a proposed reduction in opening hours of principal libraries, and proposed closures of library branches in the nearby vicinities of Gobowen and Library at the Lantern. We also acknowledge that a proposal to close the mobile libraries provision whilst at the same time reducing the opening of principal libraries may compound access for some library users more so than others. The Council would like to understand this more through the consultation process, and assess the potential impacts, particularly for those users with protected characteristics, and those users with socio-economic circumstances which may make accessing libraries more difficult, or the impact on health and other factors more detrimental.

The Council acknowledges that whilst these proposals are difficult, at this time it is viewed that they represent the least detrimental option to maintain a good quality of overall delivery within the context of the Councils' overall financial position.

The Council will listen carefully to the consultation responses and feedback, updating its Equalities & Social Health Impact Assessment ahead of recommending any decision to Cabinet in a future report.

4.11 Asset review

Shropshire Council's library service aims to provide spaces that are vibrant, modern environments that fit the changing needs of the local community. Cabinet is asked to also endorse Council officers to undertake a strategic asset review of the Library Service assets arrangements and to provide further reports to Cabinet on this work. It is further proposed that this review aligns with the broader review of all Council assets currently being planned by the Council. Subject to Cabinet's approval, Officers propose to include some questions in the main library consultation to explore with library users their views of the existing assets and any considerations they would like to make to inform this work. There is also an opportunity to consider stakeholder views on opportunities to expand access to our available assets during periods when the library may be closed, so they can be used as a community resource. No decisions have or will be made about assets until this work is undertaken and any requirement for any additional public consultation considered and undertaken as required.

4.12 Asset transfer & commissioned library models

Transferring over the management and the lease of a specific library to a Town and Parish Council ("TPC"), local community group, charity, or social enterprise is a model which has worked well in Shropshire, supporting financial efficiencies for the library delivery and enabling greater local control of the running of the library in our rural community branches. This approach has been adopted at Shifnal, Albrighton and Broseley. The libraries at these locations are busy, popular and highly cost efficient to Shropshire Council. At these locations the following arrangements are in place as part of a commissioned library model:

- The Town or Parish Council staff manage daily operations of the branch at their expense.
- Shropshire Council manage and fund infrastructure costs for book stock, computers, network connections and advisory support.
- Shropshire Council remain as the library authority with responsibility for the statutory duty to provide the service.

TPCs interested in considering this approach for their local library branch are encouraged to participate in the consultation and to discuss specific opportunities with officers.

The consultation pack will provide further information on ongoing discussions with TPCs with the report on consultation findings also noting discussions held during the consultation period.

4.13 Public Consultation Plan & Timeline

The Public Consultation will use a range of engagement / feedback methods, including printed and online surveys, focus groups, public meetings, key stakeholder meetings, and promotion via social media and other channels.

The consultation will offer digital engagement surveys via the Council's Get Involved webpage with access to hard copies on request at all Libraries. Public meetings will be held during the consultation period at The Lantern, Gobowen Library and the principal libraries. Targeted promotion will also be undertaken to current users of the mobile library service through hard copies available of the survey on the mobile vans, along with leaflets and posters.

4.14 A core component of the consultation process will be undertaken to seek the views of children and young adults, as key users of library provision. Existing links within communities, such as schools, nurseries, home education groups, Community and Family Hub partners, will be used to encourage responses from children and young people. Those attending libraries will also be advised of the consultation and supported to participate.

4.15 If approval is given by Cabinet to consult the proposed timelines for the consultation are shown below. Please note that timings are approximate and subject to change.

Table 7 Indicative Consultation Timeline

Action	Due date
Cabinet Meeting	18/11/26
Consultation commences for 12 weeks	30/11/2026
Consultation closes	21/02/2027
Consultation analysis	22/02/2027 – 21/03/2027
Pre-decision consultation outcome report to Economy & Environment Scrutiny	Date To be confirmed
Cabinet report regarding consultation findings.	May 2027

5 Alternative Service Delivery Options & Mitigations

5.1 Shropshire Council is keen to continue to explore stakeholder views on alternative service delivery options and mitigations as part of the consultation process. We are particularly keen to explore the following but welcome all suggestions as part of the consultation process.

5.2 Town and Parish Council / third sector support

In line with Shropshire Council's corporate commitment to further strengthen working arrangements with Town and Parish Councils, the Library Service has continued to engage with TPCs to consider opportunities for joint working and funding agreements on library delivery, building on the successful agreements that are in place with 7 TPCs. Conversations remain ongoing and TPCs are encouraged to participate in the consultation process and to reach out to Officers throughout this process to discuss all opportunities. Shropshire Council is grateful to those TPCs who support the delivery of their local library as this helps us to maximise delivery and access to the service across our County.

Voluntary Sector, Community groups and Friends of Library groups and organisations also support delivery of libraries across Shropshire. As key stakeholders they are also encouraged to participate in the consultation process and discuss with Officers where they may be interested in further supporting library delivery. Shropshire Council is also grateful to all the community and voluntary groups, organisations and volunteers who support the library service across Shropshire.

5.3 E-library solutions

In line with other sectors library delivery has seen growth in both e-library options and usage. The cost of digital provision, however, can be more expensive than physical books, due to the licences. Understanding stakeholder views on balancing a physical book offer with E-library offers within the available budgets will be of assistance to us, particularly given the E-library can support access for some individuals where they are not able to access a static library or prefer a

digital offer. This needs to be balanced with the availability of digital infrastructure and digital skills to enable uptake of this across Shropshire.

5.4 Home Library Service

The library service currently offers a targeted home library service principally delivered by volunteers in a small number of libraries, whereby books are delivered to library users who cannot access a static library. We will be seeking feedback as part of the consultation whether we should seek to grow this offer, particularly as a mitigation for any decision made to close the mobile library offer.

5.5 Community transport

Shropshire's travel and public transport infrastructure is an important consideration in terms of access to library services, and the consultation will explore this theme. As part of this the Council would like to consider options to work with community transport providers to support access into our static libraries, and Officers would welcome the opportunity to discuss this through the consultation.

6 Alternative Options in relation to the Consultation Proposals

6.1 Council Officers have considered a range of options ahead of making the proposals in this report to Cabinet, these included:

6.2 Option 1 Do nothing

This option was discounted as library usage is changing and evolving as shown in the needs assessment. The service model needs to adapt alongside to ensure the Council continues to meet the statutory duty. This option would also not allow the service to meet an existing undelivered saving. In addition, the Council's financial position, with a declared financial emergency, and the imperative to reduce reliance on Exceptional Financial Support from the government, means all services need to be reviewed to ensure the most cost-efficient delivery and best value duty is achieved. The do-nothing option does not allow for service review or financial efficiencies.

6.3 **Option 2 A substantial and significant service reduction** that could include closure of a significant numbers of libraries. Modelling was completed to consider a North, Central and South operating model for library delivery which would have proposed reducing the static library estate to a total of 9 libraries. This option would allow asset disposal and capital receipts to support the council's financial position. The service budget under this model would have required re-basing, but indicative savings were estimated at over £0.5m recurrent, plus the value of capital assets receipts for those library bases the Council owns and could have considered for disposal. This option was also discounted due to the recognised role libraries deliver as community hubs across our dispersed rural communities, and the need to ensure we meet our statutory duties for libraries. This option could also be subject to public and legal challenge, potential intervention from DCMS, customer dissatisfaction, and corporate reputational damage.

6.4 **Option 3 – Recommended option.** The consultation proposals recommended in this report have provisionally considered all aspects of library provision –static

libraries, mobile libraries and the core library offer, within the context of the library statutory duty. It seeks to offer an intermediate position between either Option 1 or 2 above, to ensure that Shropshire libraries continue to meet community need for all current and future users, whilst also ensuring that best value is achieved for the public purse and Shropshire's reduced financial resources. The consultation will test this out in terms of community and stakeholder responses, to include impacts, mitigations and other alternative delivery suggestions received. These will all be carefully considered and assessed ahead of any decisions being presented to Cabinet for consideration. This will include an updated Equalities Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment.

7 Key risks and Opportunities

7.1 Shropshire Council in seeking to consult on making changes to the way it delivers its library service. It faces potential legal, financial, and reputational risks during and after the public consultation, primarily concerning its statutory duty and procedural compliance.

7.2 The table below sets out these risks and offers mitigation.

Table 8 Risks and Mitigations

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Public challenge and Judicial Review	The Public Consultation will consider the four key stages as set out in The Gunning Principles: • **Formative stage:** Consultation must happen when proposals are still open to change and a final decision has not yet been made or predetermined. • **Sufficient information:** The public body must provide clear reasons and enough detailed information so that people can understand the issues and respond intelligently. • **Adequate time:** Participants must be given enough time to consider the proposal and submit their feedback. In this case a minimum 12-week consultation period is to be offered. • **Conscientious consideration:**	Governance, performance and financial weaknesses

	Shropshire Council must genuinely and openly take the consultation responses into account before making a final decision regarding the future of the library service. An Equality, Social Inclusion, Health and Impact Assessment has been completed ahead of the proposed consultation and can be found at Appendix C. The ESHIA will be updated in line with the consultation feedback to assess impacts, mitigations and alternative delivery opportunities ahead of any decisions being recommended to Cabinet.	
DCMS intervention	Pre-Consultation Engagement has taken place with DCMS. Officers will officially notify the DCMS at libraries@dcms.gov.uk before opening a public consultation if the Cabinet approves the commencement of public consultation.	Governance, performance and financial weaknesses
Equality Act 2010 breach and related Armed Forces legislation breach	An initial Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been completed ahead of proposed consultation (Appendix C). An additional ESHIA will be completed following analysis and assessment of consultation responses to inform any future decision making. Carrying out ESHIAs will, as far as possible, ensure that the Library Service is taking actions to meet the general equality duty placed on Shropshire Council by the Equality Act 2010, and to thus demonstrate that the three national equality	Governance, performance and financial weaknesses

	aims are integral to our decision-making processes. These are: eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations. The duty to have 'due regard' to the needs of veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families, as per Armed Forces legislation, will be met through inclusion of this undertaking within the ESHIA template.	
Failure to deliver savings and achieve efficient library delivery	Future budget settings will allow sufficient time for consultation, feedback, service change initiation when considering savings.	Achieving long-term financial sustainability
Needs Assessment is not fit for purpose.	A Needs Assessment has been developed and updated annually with support from Shropshire Council's Business Intelligence and Insights team.	Governance, performance and financial weaknesses

8 Council Priorities

8.1 This report sets out how Shropshire council will deliver a comprehensive core library service that fulfils its statutory duties while actively supporting the Corporate Plan and Local Government Outcomes.

8.2 The Corporate Plan priorities are:

- **A financially sustainable council, with clear priorities and purpose, and a workforce supported to excel:** Focuses on financial discipline, spending on needs rather than wants, closing the budget gap, and supporting staff.
- **Communities connected by well-maintained roads, accessible transport, and infrastructure:** Aims to improve local transit, physical networks, and regional connectivity.
- **Opportunities for everyone to be healthy and thrive at every stage of life:** Centres on public health, prevention, reducing demand on social care, and supporting wellbeing of the local population across demographics.
- **A thriving economy that benefits everyone:** Promotes inclusive economic growth, job opportunities, productivity, and local skills

9 Financial Implications

9.1 This report is presenting proposals for consultation for Cabinet to consider approving. As this is not a decision paper, there are no direct financial implications to note arising from this report. Funding for the consultation process will be met within service budgets.

10 Legal and HR implications

10.1 Legal

10.2 Shropshire Council has a legal duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who "live, work or study and want to access the service" in the Shropshire Council area as set out in Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

10.3 Shropshire Council also has a legal duty to consider requirements within the Equality Act (2010), and the Public Sector Equality Duty in Section 149. When exercising their functions, public authorities must have due regard to the need to: eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct; advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. An initial Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment has been undertaken and attached to this report as Appendix C

10.3.1 Pre-Consultation Engagement has taken place with DCMS. Officers will officially notify the DCMS before opening a public consultation. The Needs Assessment (Appendix A) will provide how the service after consultation serves the population of Shropshire.

10.4 Judicial Review: Communities or individuals can challenge council decisions in court if the consultation process was flawed, pre-determined, or failed to consider statutory duties.

10.5 Human Resources

10.6 As this report is requesting Cabinet's approval to commence a public consultation, there are no direct staff implications. Staff who may be impacted by the proposals have been informed prior to publication of this report. Following the public consultation, a future report will be presented to Cabinet regarding any decisions on the library service. A decision stage report will consider any impacts on staff and ensure that appropriate HR processes are adopted in any service staffing changes.

11 Electoral Division Implications

11.1 The library service is accessible to all, therefore the recommendations in this report have implications for all Divisions. All members have been invited to attend a member briefing sessions on the service and the proposals contained in this report.

11.2 Under the local member briefings protocol, separate briefings were arranged for the local members for Library at the Lantern and Gobowen Library given the specific proposals outlined in this report.

12 Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

12.1 Shropshire library service aligns with the Council's Health in All Policies approach by acting as a non-health community support partner that supports the social determinants of health and collaborates across multiple public sectors to build resilient communities.

12.2 Library services across the County offer a range of provision seeking to continuously improve the service's provided. The specific offers provided at individual libraries will vary depending on the specific circumstances of each library and the community it serves. Examples of some of the areas of development within libraries, noting not all of these will be available at all libraries, includes:

- Provision of safe inclusive spaces rooted in communities, with access to events and services, supporting delivery of placed based Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) & Action Plans. The JSNA is a statutory requirement for local authorities and NHS Integrated Care Boards to assess the current and future health and wellbeing needs of its population. This is a separate and distinct assessment from the Library's needs assessment.
- Promoting reading for pleasure, improved literacy levels and confidence to read through developing, delivering and promoting creative reading activities.
- Promoting health, wellbeing and prevention opportunities through access to community hub services and events.
- Embedding the *Ask, Assist, Act* approach so residents are supported to access the right service at the right time.
- Ensuring residents and communities can access quality digital services, including digital skills training – building confidence and safety online.
- Enabling communities to enjoy quality arts and cultural experiences through libraries supporting their wellbeing.

12.3 The library service is committed to the development of the Council's "Child friendly" Status. The service aims to offer and develop libraries that has the rights of the child at the centre of the way it works. All four of the key rights are considered by the development and delivery of the library service.

12.4 The library service has a long tradition of providing space for exciting child focused learning activities, including Rhyme Times, creative workshops with musicians and poets, reading groups, school visits and craft events. The service has supported and provided activities funded by the national Holiday Activities and Food Programme to enrich the school holiday experience. A recent bid to the Arts

Council has been successful in securing funding to improve our physical children's library offer.

12.5 To drive sustainable economic and community growth, the library service will continue to work strategically with partners across the business, education, culture, and health sectors to develop flexible, inclusive, and vibrant multi-functional spaces. By engaging directly with local communities to deeply understand their needs, the service will align agendas with other council departments and external organisations to ensure long-term, targeted impacts.

13 Equality and Diversity Implications

13.1 An initial Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been carried out as per legislative compliance requirements and good practice. This is attached as **Appendix C**.

13.2 Ahead of the consultation, the overall likely anticipated impacted of the proposals is that these will be low negative across the whole community, with potential for medium negative impacts for some individuals and groupings impacted by specific proposals. This may include some negative impacts specifically focusing on the nine Protected Characteristic groupings defined in the Equality Act 2010 and intersectionality across these groupings e.g. Age and Disability, provided that intended enhancement and mitigation actions are put in place.

13.3 These potential impacts will be tested through the consultation, to include consideration of mitigations and alternative delivery options.

13.4 The proposed service changes seek to take in to account social inclusion, the rurality of the county, opportunities to expand the digital offer, public access to multiple services from community venues and the promotion and continuation of local libraries as free, high-quality venues.

13.5 Proposed service reductions may impact adversely on all groupings given reduced opening hours, with adverse impacts noted for the users of two libraries proposed for closures and for the users of the mobile library service. The impacts will be particularly assessed as part of the consultation process, to include potential to mitigate with other delivery options.

13.6 Other individuals or groupings may experience a neutral impact, low negative impact or low positive impacts. Potential growth in the e-library offer may improve access for some, including for the additional groupings of people that we think about in Shropshire, of Social Inclusion, Carers, and Young People Leaving Care. The Council also considers veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families, in a separate grouping, in order to visibly demonstrate that 'due regard' is being given to people in this grouping, as per the requirements of the Armed Forces Act 2021. At this stage, it has been recorded that potential impacts could be low negative in regard to social inclusion, due to reduced ability or perception of reduced ability to access and signpost services and referral opportunities.

13.7 Our additional categories help us to seek to ensure that we consider the needs of the following: rural households; households on low incomes; households in fuel

poverty; and those we may consider to be vulnerable. This includes refugee families, people living in fuel poverty, people fleeing domestic violence, and those who are rough sleepers or at risk of homelessness for what may be a variety of circumstances.

13.8 Efforts will need to be made during the consultation process to obtain feedback from as wide a range of people and stakeholder organisations as possible, in order to seek to gauge the depth of potential adverse impacts as well as ways to enhance any positive impacts. Feedback will then be factored into considerations and recorded in a follow up ESHIA, demonstrating ongoing engagement across stakeholders and communities and enabling views to be taken into account in decision-making processes about the proposals.

14 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

14.1 This report is presenting proposals for consultation for Cabinet to consider approving. As this is not a decision paper, there are no direct climate change, biodiversity or environmental implications.

15 Background Papers

15.1 None

16 Appendices

Appendix A - Shropshire Libraries: Needs Assessment October 2026
Appendix B - Examples of 30 hours a week opening times for 6 principal libraries
Appendix C – Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)