

Joint Overview Committee

29 June 2022

Library Strategy Development

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Miller, Customer and Community Services

Local Councillor(s): ALL

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: The current library strategy was created under a predecessor authority and is over 10 years old. A new Dorset Council Library Strategy will guide how we develop and deliver our library service over the next 10 years, delivering services in line with the needs of our residents and Dorset Council's strategic priorities.

The new library strategy is being developed across two phases of public consultation: phase one Let's Talk Libraries consultation took place in October 2021 to January 2022 and heard from over 7,500 Dorset residents, partners, employees, Councillors and businesses. The feedback gathered during phase one has directly informed the draft library strategy (Appendix 1).

The phase two Let's Talk Libraries consultation will take place over 12 weeks during the autumn months of 2022 and will gather feedback from our communities, stakeholders and partners on the draft strategy. Responses and feedback received will help to refine the final strategy and will inform strategy implementation plans.

Recommendation: That the Joint Overview Committee:

1. Notes strong engagement and consultation with our communities during our phase one consultation, involving residents, partners, businesses, Councillors, our workforce and all council services. (Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5)
2. Recognise the benefits of having worked together to co-create our draft strategy by listening to views and feedback in addition to reflecting on community needs.
3. Supports and agrees that the draft library strategy and accompanying Strategic Needs Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment are publicly consulted on, as part of the phase two Let's Talk Libraries consultation. (Appendix 1, 6 & 7)

4. Supports and agrees with our strategy mission to “inspire, connect and enable our communities through our services”; strengthening our service to provide modern, sustainable and inclusive access to our services that are relevant, make a difference to people’s lives and improve future outcomes.
5. Agree a further report is brought back to Joint Overview Committee following phase two consultation. The report will present: phase two consultation feedback, recommended refinements to the library strategy, implementation plans, updated EqlA and associated financial implications.

Reason for Recommendation:

Dorset Council, as a library authority, has a statutory duty under Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964¹ “to provide a comprehensive and efficient” library service for all those who live, work or study in the authority area.

The draft library strategy 2023 – 2033, reflects the wealth of feedback received during our extensive engagement and consultation exercise undertaken during phase one of our strategy development consultation. (Appendix 2-5).

The strategy has an agreed set of ambitious priorities and aims that contribute to the Dorset Council Plan² objectives, national Library Vision³ and the council’s transformation priorities. With a clear vision, following the strong engagement with communities and partners during phase one, we now have a strong partnership platform and framework for phase two that will enable us to refine priorities and produce a clear, costed delivery plan with options.

1. Report

- 1.1 Local authority library services are a statutory service⁴ and our draft strategy meets our legal duties and responds directly to the voice of our communities and presents their views and what they have told us they need in the future. The strategy presents aspirational opportunities for the library service, and by using its already successful partnership approach, will deliver continuous positive outcomes for our communities.

Strategic Ambition

- 1.2 During the pandemic we adapted to new, inspirational ways of working and delivering services. We are now excited to imagine what libraries could look like, in 10 years’ time, with our communities. During consultation, our communities, partners and workforce confirmed the importance of looking wider than the traditional resources, events and activities we provide in buildings to ensure we include new and future ways of connecting customers with our services.
- 1.3 We heard how important out-reach services are, as well as, having somewhere to connect with other people and library services in modern inspirational spaces or virtually. This feedback will push us to explore how we provide services that are innovative, digital, co-located with others and in spaces our communities want to visit.

¹ The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/59)

² DC Plan: [Dorset Council's Plan - Dorset Council](#)

³ DCMS, 2018: [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728222/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021.pdf)

⁴ The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/59)

- 1.4 Our strategy will encourage us to think commercially and support economic growth. Businesses, partners and colleagues presented commercial initiatives for generating income and support for small and medium enterprise business. We have been asked to create more space for local people to work, collaborate and receive business advice.
- 1.5 In 2021 the council integrated essential customer services in four of our libraries to provide a 'one council front door' (this will increase to five libraries by the close of 2022). This initiative ensured that local access was available when most needed. Our customer access points have proven popular, have supported people with council enquiries which increases awareness and use of our libraries for cultural activity, reading and learning which in turn improve health and wellbeing outcomes. In future we want to encourage health providers to socially prescribe our services and ensure those links to us are supported and strong.
- 1.6 Our strategy must now explore how we provide customer services more consistently across our libraries network, even in our smaller libraries, to ensure the communities in most need have essential access to the advice and information they need to support their life journeys.
- 1.7 During February and March 2022 we were honoured to be part of a Local Government Association (LGA) peer review⁵ of how Libraries and Family Hubs can collaborate to improve outcomes for our children and families. As part of the review we published a case study of how we implemented an initiative to support early language development in Portland which will now form the basis of a further roll-out across the Dorset library network.
- 1.8 Our strategy will provide opportunity for the LGA's peer review recommendations to be incorporated within libraries and our integration with family hubs. Including how we might create space for speech and language professionals to work and meet with our families, as well as developing new activities for our children with special educational needs and disabilities. Our strategy, in collaboration with children's services and partners, will consolidate our offer to enlighten, stimulate and improve life chances for our young people.
- 1.9 Transformation funding, supported by Dorset Councillors, provided an opportunity to commission Shared Intelligence⁶ to support a rich programme of engagement with groups in our communities who are seldom heard, including our non or lapsed library users, young, future members, our schools and communities with protected characteristics.
- 1.10 The research revealed opportunities for library services to have greater impact on communities within Dorset. More importantly, the research and engagement process revealed the willingness and appetite of council and community services to work more closely with the library service to achieve shared priorities and meet community needs both now and in the future.

Further Strategic Opportunity

- 1.11 The paragraphs and sections that follow will detail our consultation approach, research, highlights from the needs analysis and the approach we have taken to developing our strategy. We will then move to summarise the draft strategy vision, mission, aims and themes that we intend on taking back to our communities for phase two consultation.
- 1.12 Our consultation has informed us that our future strategy must not only consider how to ensure we provide fair and equal access to services, in a more consistent way across our network of libraries, but also how our offer needs to fit individual community needs. Our strategy will

⁵ LGA Peer Review: [Dorset Council Libraries: Toddler Time and Talk | Local Government Association](#)

⁶ Shared Intelligence Research: [ca07decf-8de5-abec-dca3-e45fedc01633 \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](#)

explore ways to open our doors to communities wishing to use space outside of existing and future opening hours.

- 1.13 Within the '*local need*' section of our draft strategy we start to develop our presentation of a tiered library model which, following consultation with communities, will be shaped according to local need, including the size of library, services provided and co-located, number of opening hours and where services are offered by our teams, volunteers or wholly community managed.
- 1.14 Our strategy, within phase two consultation, will offer greater opportunities to build on our already successful community managed library (CML) network. Our CML's are held as a National exemplar by Department of Culture, Media and Sport and by extending an offer to expand the network, our communities can open up a conversation with us about taking responsibility for smaller libraries in lower need community areas.
- 1.15 Following our phase two consultation, when we have considered, and listened to, the streamlined priorities of our communities, we will produce a delivery plan for transformation, investment and partnerships.
- 1.16 We are committed to working with our partners, services and agencies operating in our communities to deliver shared goals and objectives, delivering value for money whilst meeting community needs.

2. **Background**

- 2.1 Our phase one consultation approach was to have an open conversation with our communities, stakeholders and partners, exploring what they value about the service, what would make them use the service in the future and identifying new opportunities for collaboration.
- 2.2 Analysis of phase one consultation survey responses have been brought together with the findings from engagement workshops and evidence around local need, to inform this draft library strategy.
- 2.3 Following an extensive promotion and marketing exercise. We received over 7,500 responses to a full public consultation titled "Let's Talk Libraries". We conducted three consultation surveys: one for children up to age 15; one for everyone over 16 and one for employees, partners and business. The survey analysis reports are included in Appendix 2-4.
- 2.4 Engagement workshops and interviews were commissioned to compliment the survey data. This important work supported our ambition to engage with those in our community who are traditionally underrepresented during library consultations: Dorset residents who do not currently access library services or individuals and communities with protected characteristics.
- 2.5 This allowed us to better understand the barriers individuals face when trying to access our services and how we can better meet their needs in the future. The contracted research agency also facilitated some deeply insightful workforce, peer council support and external partner workshops. The findings of this work, in terms of identified need and recommended action, is presented within Appendix 5.

Strategic Needs Assessment

- 2.6 Dorset Council are committed to working in partnership with communities and stakeholders to design and deliver services around local need. Allowing our services to be shaped by local

needs is a key design principle when developing Dorset Council's library service, this approach is supported by Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) Library Strategy for England⁷.

- 2.7 We have looked at a series of measures to determine where need is greatest. In recognition of the broad range of interventions which a library service can help support, we have taken a range of measures which indicate need across the breadth of society and an individual's life course which is presented within our Strategic Needs Analysis Appendix 6.

Headline insight, data and research that will inform our strategy

- 2.8 We estimate from data for the southwest region that library users make up around 27% of the 16+ population and around 38% of the 5–15-year-old population (Appendix 5).
- 2.9 We know from our own Dorset library demand data that behaviours and trends have changed significantly over the past 5 years which will have been impacted by the pandemic but also in terms of customer preferences.
- 2.10 Physical library use has declined since 2016 by between 25% – 30%, when we consider active users and physical items borrowed. Comparatively online resources for e-books and audio books has increased by over 350% and continues to increase as we come out of the pandemic (Appendix 6).
- 2.11 We have seen new trends in accessing content, events and activities online and although people are returning to preferred "in-person" activities and events, we remain aware that the online library requirement must be embedded in our future thinking.
- 2.12 Our CIPFA value for money indicators (2019/20) provides graphs that show we operate with more libraries, per 100,000 population, than the average. However, we also have the highest number of active users and above average number of items borrowed compared to our nearest comparative authorities (Appendix 6).
- 2.13 Overall, the wide-range of indicators that were tested across our needs assessment identified a great number of areas where library services, delivering at the heart of our communities, could improve life outcomes for the people of Dorset.

3. Developing Our Draft Strategy

- 3.1 With our member led Library Strategy Steering Group we have considered, based on the vast evidence gathered, how we could prioritise our existing core library service offer and develop newly identified targeted services.
- 3.2 The strategic opportunity this has presented will enable us to design and rebrand our service as a modern, sustainable, and enabling service. Through transformation and collaboration we will create services and spaces that our customers and future generations value, connect with and want to use. And our community partnership offer will be attractive for new partners to want to join us too.
- 3.3 We know that the modern ways in which we all interact continues to transform our lives. Dorset library service will provide a fresh outlook that enables people of all ages, to be informed, get online and ensure they have the relevant skills to navigate the digital world

⁷ DCMS, 2018 [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/714242/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021.pdf)

safely and securely. This will enable cost savings for the Dorset Council and greater interactions and satisfaction for our communities.

The strategy framework

- 3.4 Our strategy framework will envisage library services delivered differently than today; perhaps from different buildings located with other council services or new partners; investing in community spaces that bring access to resources and people where we need it the most. Importantly it needs to be a service that is responsive with a future focus to remain relevant and meet the needs of our community.

Our strategy vision, mission and aims

- 3.5 Our vision for the library service is:

“Trusted community spaces for everyone, with services to inspire your future”

- 3.6 Our mission statement is:

“To Inspire, Connect and Enable our communities through our services”

- 3.7 We have structured our strategy around three strategic themes that came out of our consultation and research:

- **Inspire:** To enrich lives through universal access to information, knowledge, learning and literacy
- **Connect:** To connect with and meet the needs of our communities
- **Enable:**
 - **our communities** to create accessible, inclusive spaces for our communities to share and use
 - **our library teams** to invest in the development of our workforce and volunteers to deliver services that meet future community needs and exceed customer expectations

4. Our Strategic Aims

The following section will delve deeper into our strategic aims and how they answer the main themes that have come out of our consultation.

Inspire

- 4.1 We asked existing library customers what 3 words they would like to use to describe the service in 10 years' time. The word *“inspiring”* was used 74 times (Appendix 3). This theme also came across clearly in the service led strategy vision workshops.
- 4.2 We aim to inspire more people to read, gain knowledge and share their enjoyment of learning with others. Strong literacy skills provide long term social and economic benefits and libraries are at the forefront by providing free access to books and other reading materials, IT, events, and activities.

The outcome-based aims that sit under the “Inspire” heading that we will consult upon are:

1. Support language and literacy for everyone through lifelong learning; acquiring knowledge; developing skills and pursuing personal goals
2. Host and deliver events & activities to inspire cultural connection and new experiences
3. Support people to develop digital skills, removing digital barriers and building confidence
4. Support an innovative and thriving Micro and Small Medium Enterprise business network

5. Inspire, inform and facilitate climate and ecologically positive actions and decisions.

- 4.3 Key themes from the phase one consultation which this priority seeks to address:
- valued role of libraries in supporting learning, speech and literacy
 - importance of resources which meet residents' interests, (i.e. quality and range of physical and digital stock for borrowing)
 - cultural enrichment and the positive impact of library activities and events (including online and outreach)
 - libraries as digital spaces, providing access to digital equipment and supporting digital skills
 - libraries providing space for enterprise and community spaces for growth
 - libraries as enablers of climate positive actions (including events which encourage the reuse or borrowing of items)

Connect

- 4.4 Throughout engagement workshops there was a clear theme that library services offer a highly valued sense of connection; whether that's connection to communities, connection to friends, connection to opportunities or connection to services and trusted information. As a largely rural county, with 30% of our population aged 65 or over (compared to 19% across England and Wales), having local access to a friendly community space to connect was really important.
- 4.5 We believe that the library service is more than just a place to borrow books, it is a service which brings people together to interact and connect with other members of their community, fosters culture and creativity and helps people to learn and develop lifelong skills.

The outcome-based aims that sit under the "Connect" heading that we will consult upon are:

1. Residents and partners are aware of everything the library service has to offer
 2. Our service is designed to meet customer needs and supports community connection
 3. Local libraries thrive as part of a co-ordinated network of libraries including Dorset's Community Managed Libraries
 4. Our open and inclusive service will ensure access is barrier free
 5. Libraries are at the heart of delivering council services to communities, acting as the council's front door.
- 4.6 Key themes from the phase one consultation which this priority seeks to address:
- promote the library services more effectively, building a greater understanding of the services available at libraries
 - customer focused library service design and delivery
 - a more inclusive, consistent and accessible user experience
 - libraries as places of human help and trusted information

Enable - our communities

- 4.7 Dorset has a strong, vibrant and thriving community and voluntary sector, they have played an active part, in supporting the development of this strategy. We want to include our community partners at the heart of everything we do, from supporting early preventative actions, social prescribing and community-based activities.
- 4.8 Delivering a modern, sustainable and responsive library service, that meets the expectations of our communities requires facilities that are fit-for-purpose and reflect the quality of services being delivered.

The outcome-based aims that sit under the “Enable” heading that we will consult upon are:

1. Create inviting, flexible, well used spaces
2. Provide safe trusted spaces
3. Sustainable buildings which keep pace with community growth
4. Library services form part of community hubs
5. Provide space where residents can connect with health and wellbeing opportunities

- 4.9 Key themes from the phase one consultation which this priority seeks to address:
- more flexible use of the library spaces (including community use of the space and cafes)
 - libraries providing safe face-to-face spaces
 - fit for purpose library buildings
 - co-location of library services with partners and other council services (one front door)
 - positive role in supporting mental health and wellbeing

Enable- our library teams

- 4.10 Our workforce and volunteers provide the passion for delivering better outcomes for our communities.
- 4.11 We know that to respond well to the future needs of our communities, and to deliver high quality, modern and transformational services our individuals need the right skills and opportunities to develop and achieve their future potential.

The outcome-based aims that sit under the “enable” heading that we will consult upon are:

1. Each employee feels valued and empowered, with career opportunities in the library service and Dorset Council more broadly
2. Flexible resourcing across our library network, allows employees to develop a range of skills and experience
3. We offer inclusive routes to employment and development opportunities via apprenticeship programmes
4. We have a strong partnership with, and wholly value the contribution of, our volunteers to the library service. We have a framework in place for supporting future partnerships to build on their success.

- 4.12 Key themes from the phase one consultation which this priority seeks to address:
- valuing and investing in the development of library employees and
 - celebrating volunteer contributions.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The strategy remains in draft and does not include a costed implementation plan at this stage.
- 5.2 Phase two consultation will allow communities to feedback on what strategic aims should be the service priorities. Financial implications of delivering the resulting priorities will be incorporated into the next report to the Joint Overview Committee. Existing library budgets and cases for investment will be used to deliver the library strategy.

6. **Climate Implications**

- 6.1 The draft strategy includes a strategic aim 1.5, which proposes that libraries have a role in inspiring, informing and facilitating climate and ecologically positive actions and decisions which would have a positive impact on our unique environment and carbon footprint reductions. The service are also committed to increasing the number of solar and low carbon solutions on our libraries network.

7. **Well-being and Health Implications**

- 7.1 The draft strategy includes a strategic aim 3.5, which proposes that libraries provide space where residents can connect with health and wellbeing opportunities which would have a positive impact in terms of improved accessibility and improved health outcomes in our communities.

8. **Other Implications**

Property & Assets

- 8.1 The Assets & Property Service have been engaged in the development of this draft strategy and will be a key partner in strategy delivery. The service will provide a full review of assets as part of the wider Dorset Council assets and estate review to identify and support a future investment and development plan.

Voluntary Organisations

- 8.2 This draft strategy seeks to deepen our connection with our communities, including voluntary organisations. We propose a business partner model to work more strategically with partners and clearly define the delivery of shared priorities.

Human Resources

- 8.3 Library employee views and ideas have directly helped to shape the draft strategy including the "Enable" [our teams] strategic theme. Employees have contributed via employee surveys, workshops and strategy development task and finish groups.
- 8.4 Regular whole service meetings include strategy development updates and we are supporting any employees who may feel this is an uncertain time, signposting to the support available via the Council's wellbeing offer.
- 8.5 The draft strategy commits to develop our workforce and will continue to work with our HR & Organisational Development colleagues to support current and future workforce development plans.
- 8.6 The service continues to engage and consult with trade unions throughout the strategy development process.

9. **Risk Assessment**

- 9.1 There are no risks associated with this report as there is no decision required. However, it should be noted that by developing the library strategy across two phases of public consultation, this helps to mitigate the risk of failing to effectively engage with our communities.

9.2 This risk is mitigated further by the development of a comprehensive phase two consultation and engagement plan. The level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Accepted. Tolerate- monitor the risk with contingency planning in place.

10. Equalities Impact Assessment

10.1 A draft Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) accompanies the draft strategy, available at Appendix 7.

10.2 The strategy and the EqIA will be refined and updated in light of the feedback received during the phase two consultation.

10.3 The EqIA will be updated again, when delivery plans are developed. All strategy plans will consider protected characteristics.

11. Appendices

- Appendix 1 Draft Library Strategy
- Appendix 2 [Ages 5 to 15 public survey consultation analysis report](#)
- Appendix 3 [16years+ \(Main\) public survey consultation analysis report](#)
- Appendix 4 [Employee, partner and business survey consultation analysis report](#)
- Appendix 5 Shared Intelligence Report: [Research to inform a new library strategy for Dorset Council](#) and accompanying [appendix](#)
- Appendix 6 Draft Strategic Needs Assessment
- Appendix 7 Draft EqIA for Library Strategy

12. Background Papers

- Informal Joint Overview Committee session 4th April 2022 presentation- available to Dorset Council Councillors on request.