

## Cambridgeshire Libraries: Review and Future Priorities

To: Communities and Partnership Committee

Meeting Date: 4 March 2021

From: Head of Libraries, Archives and Culture, Gary Porter

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The continued development of the New Libraries Model, agreed by this Committee, is vital to the economic and social potential of our county, and to the recovery in our communities from the pandemic. We want our libraries to be the beating heart of our communities, closely supporting the Cambridgeshire Local delivery model, and directly contributing to improving the social mobility of our residents.

Recommendations: The Communities and Partnership Committee is asked to:

- a) Agree to continue to use the New Libraries Model as the key vision for public libraries in Cambridgeshire;
- b) Note and comment on the progress made against the previously agreed New Libraries Model; and
- c) Consider additional inputs the service can make to support both the Cambridgeshire Local delivery model and the Social Mobility theme.

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# 1. Background

- 1.1 The New Libraries Model (NLM) is Cambridgeshire's in-house change programme focussed on the remodelling of the Library Service aligned to the Think Communities principles. The New Libraries Model was approved by this Committee in December 2019 and is summarised at Appendix 1. The Open Access Project plan was approved by the Committee in October 2020 with 5 pilot sites agreed.
- 1.2 The development and implementation of the NLM has been profoundly affected by the Covid Pandemic. This paper describes the work to date including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and opportunities going forward. The report also addresses how the Open Access project can connect with wider Council strategies including Cambs 2020 and Cambridgeshire Local, as well as refocusing the service to support Covid-19 recovery.

# 2. Main Issues

## 2.1 Cambridgeshire Local

- 2.1.1 Libraries are a key element of the Cambridgeshire Local approach. They are the trusted space in the heart of our communities that enable people to connect with each other. In practical terms the New Libraries Model is about optimising the use of libraries as a unique and precious community asset. The Library Service can be understood through the prism of People, Place, Systems and can evidence practical delivery during the year of the pandemic – see Appendix 2 for Library Vision Action Log.
- 2.1.2 Success for libraries and communities is about much more than the number of books borrowed and footfall in our libraries. In line with Cambridgeshire Local, the central focus of our work is to ensure that communities are connected and work together towards shared goals and feel that they are supported to help themselves.
- 2.1.3 There is a significantly important role for our library service to play in supporting the implementation of the Cambridgeshire Local model of delivery, and notably the work to tackle social immobility. Our libraries will become the centre for communities where information and opportunity can be found, supporting social connectivity, skills training, job searching, access to services, and opportunities to innovate. Library staff and volunteers will ensure that this new and increasingly diverse offer is embedded in communities, and is bent towards locally identified need.
- 2.1.4 Libraries too know most about what is happening within a community, who the key partners and community leaders are, and what issues, challenges and opportunities exist. We will be working side-by-side with our colleagues in other services to establish the ways in which they can use these unique characteristics to support their work, very much building on the principles of the specific Neighbourhood Cares project that operated from Soham Library. We want to explore with our colleagues new ways of commissioning and delivering services, at a hyper-local level, using the expertise of our library staff and volunteers.

## 2.2 Recent Activity

- 2.2.1 2020 has inevitably been an extremely challenging year and obviously not the one envisaged when the Committee approved the NLM in December 2019. Our library service

offer to customers has been determined by what is legally permissible and this changed throughout 2020 in line with the lockdown and tiering restrictions introduced by the government. All libraries closed on 24 March and were only allowed to re-open from July. From July until the present time we have only been able to offer an extremely limited physical service comprising: select and collect; reservations; limited access to PCs; mobile services on select and collect model; and Library@Home doorstep deliveries for vulnerable people. Under the law, customers cannot come into the library to freely browse, select and borrow.

2.2.2 During the first lockdown (March to July 2020) the Library Service responded proactively to the new priorities and staff were largely redeployed to the Covid Hub, making calls to shielded residents. A small core remained to work through business as usual and pivot the service to an expanded digital offer. Key successes during lockdown include:

- The Mobile Library built on connections with the Foodbank network to support access to hot meals, laundry, sanitary products and more for the homeless population in Cambridge through its vehicles
- A series of online activities including Rhyme Time, crafts, Twitter chats (with Elly Griffiths and other authors), digital escape rooms and a digital book club were developed. See Appendix 3 for infographic of full reach of the digital offer
- The new Sawston Hub was completed, a model that sees the building shared between Children's Services and the library as a hub for the community
- Successful work with Cambridgeshire Skills and the Good Things Foundation to deliver tablets to digitally excluded people
- 2 new Mobile Libraries were delivered including features to allow use in alternative community ventures outside of normal operation i.e. use by partners as a mobile health clinic
- We completed an update of all the Public PCs in libraries, alongside upgraded broadband and new printers to greatly improve the digital offer to residents when the buildings re-opened
- Histon Library was emptied to make way for a refurbished site, and community engagement work was used to find an alternative venue at the local Baptist Church for temporary mobile provision
- We secured £2k in Arts Council funding and diverted over £15k in book stock funds towards expanding our digital offer, including a new digital comic offer. The service has seen a huge increase in use

2.2.3 The limited opening of libraries from July was enabled by staff returning from their Hub duties which allowed further service provision developments including:

- Engagement with over 60s online through interactive Zoom talks as the Engage programme moved online
- The planning for increased use of library venues to deliver Cambridgeshire Skills classes, with some limited delivery during the pandemic too
- Implementing the Cambridgeshire part of the Government funded expansion of the Business and Intellectual Property Centre service, receiving £230k this year to recruit to three posts and purchase extra resources to target business innovation through libraries (I partnership with Peterborough)
- Replaced flooring at Comberton Library and some additional shelving to create a

flexible space in a previously small and difficult to adapt library

- Setting up of a monthly Book Club with BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, initially to promote the BBC's '100 Novels that Shaped our World'
- The Library Presents delivered digital and outdoor arts events instead of live events in libraries. This extended the reach of the programme and was promoted in collaboration with Library.Live. 12,000 people engaged, over 40% of these were Cambridgeshire based, with many participating for the first time. Library staff and volunteers also supported a limited physical offer in autumn

2.2.4 With the introduction of the latest lockdown in November, library staff were officially designated as key workers. Libraries were able to remain open as 'essential services' by following Covid-safe practices to provide Select and Collect alongside limited PC access. Key developments during this period include:

- A new agreement reached to locate the new Think Community Team's Place Based Co-ordinators in libraries following recruitment
- Use of libraries to distribute emergency hygiene packs as part of the Winter Support offer
- Evolution of the 'Read a Little Aloud' into a new project to support isolated patients in Papworth hospital during the pandemic, funded by Papworth
- Successful bid to Reading Agency to secure £10k to further extend the 'Reading a Little Aloud' project to include telephone conferencing and reach out to isolated and excluded residents during the pandemic. This supports a wider Arts Council bid to see this project expanded in the new financial year and link further with social prescribers which if successful could bring in circa £50k of funding
- Business and Intellectual Property Centre new service offer – 'Reset.Restart' – was launched; a programme to help businesses transform, future-proof or grow their business through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Our first online webinar was launched in December 2020 with Anglia Ruskin University. The programme will run until March 2021 with the development of new corporate partnerships
- In addition, B&IP Centre virtual one-to-one business clinics are continuing to be offered to entrepreneurs and small business owners. The sessions are there to provide advice and support, including on protecting their intellectual property
- The service is represented on the Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership and taking part in laptop donations for school children as key community venues for the 'Digital Drive' campaign
- The Library Service is embedded in the Census 2021 preparation group in the Council
- Libraries have been used to deliver Covid safe services in the community for key partners such as Cambridge Hearing Help and Everyone Health
- Gained funding of £10k from the council's Early Years' Service to increase the number of children aged between 0 and 4 with library membership. The Library Service was identified as an essential partner to help empower parents to support their pre-school children's home learning. The project is initially focused in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, but could provide a pilot for wider county provision
- The launch of Library@Home Plus, a new project which calls older, more vulnerable customers who have not actively used the library service during the pandemic. In the first week library staff have made almost 100 calls to customers, bringing them up to date with the current library offer and ensuring they have access to services

including the expanded library at home service

## **2.3 Open Access Project**

- 2.3.1 Open Access is the technological option for allowing secure access to library buildings during unstaffed hours. As part of the business plan members have agreed £1,172k for the installation of Open Access technology across 31 library sites in the County, initially the 9 hubs and then extended to 22 other libraries.
- 2.3.2 This technological solution will provide greater access to the library estate where currently 60% is unused during a typical 9-5 working week. The project will allow the Council to maximise use of the library asset and embrace the Cambridgeshire Local strategy. Local people will have far greater access to their library and the resources it offers, while Council employees will be able to make more use of libraries to meet residents, partners or simply drop in and work, helping embrace agile working.
- 2.3.3 In October 2020 the Committee agreed to a pilot of 5 sites – St Ives, Sawston, March, Rock Road and Soham libraries. Procurement is complete with the awarded supplier due to be announced by early March which will allow detailed planning and implementation to take place. We are targeting a summer launch, if the pandemic allows, and reporting back to the committee at the end of the year on the pilots.

## **2.4 Future Libraries Initiative - Civic**

- 2.4.1 The partnership between Civic and Cambridgeshire Library Service aims to imagine and design future models for all libraries across England. Recognising libraries as unique community spaces and coupled with the council's ambition to ensure our libraries are at the heart of the community, the programme is an ideal test bed for new ideas and aims to develop blueprints for libraries that are replicable and scalable across the UK and beyond.
- 2.4.2 Covid has inevitably had a major impact and paused activity but provided the opportunity to refocus on digital. The following have been key outcomes of the project over the last 12 months:
- Library.Live website – the development of a new library space online, making use of expertise to produce a more enticing environment to find and share information
  - Digital collections on wellbeing and health resources hosted on Library.Live
  - What's On program interfiling library and local events into a single offer
  - Support and expertise to develop the Open New Doors website for Cambridgeshire Skills
  - Partnership with Bonnier books to link online reading group with authors and support
  - Platform to allow The Library Presents digital offer to remain within a library environment
  - Cambridge University partnership for bold ideas on architectural concepts for the flagship libraries
  - Support in developing a Communications Strategy for the library service

## **2.5 Future Planning**

- 2.5.1 As described above, the service will play a vital role in both the rollout of the Cambridgeshire Local delivery model and in the work to improve social mobility and to level

up our county. Additionally:

- *Open Access* creates new opportunities for supporting key Council strategies and by its very nature increasing access to libraries
- Libraries will be the contractual base for the new place-based workers that form the Cambridgeshire Local team. Open Access will allow libraries such as Soham and Sawston to be used for this activity all week, rather than the current limited access to three weekdays staffed
- The increased opening created via the Open Access investment presents an opportunity for staff to drop into the library and use the staff Wi-Fi and access customer printing. We see this as providing an important support to the increased home working model, allowing staff to continue work if home equipment/broadband fails and/or providing an alternate quiet environment for work
- We are exploring links to the market town strategies commissioned by the Combined Authority. For example, in March town there are plans to open up the river area which will make the library visible from the new look high street. Combined with Open Access this brings opportunities to improve promotion of the service and the breadth of its offer

2.5.2 The vision for libraries also leaves them uniquely positioned to actively support the COVID-19 recovery agenda, and we have already begun work to support key areas such as:

- Supporting business and start-ups through our Business and Intellectual Property Centres through the Reset, Restart programme
- Reaching out to the lonely and isolated through our 'Read a Little Aloud', Home Library and volunteering offers
- Working with Cambridgeshire Skills on a commission to support the Census delivery in the County
- Receiving national funding to roll out our successful Books on Prescription service to support improved mental health on to new digital platforms, expanding the use and availability of these resources
- Physically hosting partners such as Hearing help, Everyone Health and the Tax office
- Using our new digital reach to signpost key partners and messages such as our partnership in the Cambridgeshire Against Scams initiative that has been highlighting Covid-19 related scams in recent months

### 3. Alignment with corporate priorities

#### 3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

The new vision and model for Libraries is integral to ensuring a good quality of life for people in Cambridgeshire by providing them with opportunities to develop their individual agency, resilience and prospects, and connecting them to information, resources, activities and other people.

#### 3.2 Thriving places for people to live

The new vision and model for Libraries is integral to ensuring the communities in which people live are thriving, by providing opportunities for communities to connect in a safe, accessible shared place, and increasing community agency.

### **3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children**

The new vision and model for Libraries is integral to providing the best start for Cambridgeshire's children by providing universal free access to early literacy development and encouraging reading for pleasure, proven to be fundamental to improving children's life chances. Library staff are working closely with the Best Start in Life project to maximise the role that libraries can play.

### **3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050**

Libraries will continue to play a role in advocacy and signposting. Each building is also being assessed and having upgrades to its heating systems where relevant to reduce their carbon footprint.

## **4. Significant Implications**

### **4.1 Resource Implications**

There are no negative resource implications currently for the Council arising from the New Libraries Model. Alongside the ongoing investment the council is already making in libraries, external funding is being secured to meet our agenda as can be seen in examples included above. There is expected to be a positive impact on resources through increased use of libraries.

### **4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**

There are no significant implications in this category.

### **4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications**

There are no significant implications in this category.

### **4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications**

Libraries act as a 'social equaliser' and the new model and vision for Libraries continues this theme in a modern, relevant context. Libraries are free, open and accessible to all. Efforts have also been made this year to ensure less-heard voices are engaged and included.

### **4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications**

There are no significant implications in this category.

### **4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

Local members will continue to be involved during the relevant phases of the vision, for example at the five pilot Open Access Libraries. Members of this Committee will be kept regularly updated through updates on the vision and individual projects.

#### 4.7 **Public Health Implications**

The new model and vision for Libraries is expected to bring health and wellbeing benefits for Cambridgeshire people and communities, for example by working with partners to promote healthy living, by reducing social isolation and supporting mental health, and by providing community space for activities including cultural and physical activities.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes  
Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? Yes  
Name of Officer: Gus De Silva

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes  
Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes  
Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? Yes  
Name of Officer: Christine Birchall

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes  
Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? No  
Name of Officer:

### 5. **Source documents guidance**

#### 5.1 Source documents

None