

Library Service Annual Report

To: Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 11 January 2024

From: Executive Director of Strategy and Partnership

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: To provide Members of the Committee with an update on the performance of the Library Service in 2023, including its achievements and direction of travel.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to:
Note the contents of the report.

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1. Background

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with an annual update on the activities and performance of the Library Service in 2023, highlighting achievements and new initiatives, as well as providing a narrative on the direction of travel of the service and the ways in which libraries are supporting the wider priorities of the Council.
- 1.2 Organisational changes which situate the Library Service in a family of services (Cambridgeshire Skills and Communities) within the Council's Strategy and Partnerships directorate have proved beneficial, as evidenced by aligned and integrated working throughout 2023, and this will deepen and continue into 2024 and beyond to ensure services are delivered 'closer to communities'.
- 1.3 The Library Service continues its proven strong track record of innovation and success, as well as success in attracting external funding. Updates are provided on a number of projects and initiatives, including: EverySpace; Every Child A Member; Know Your Neighbourhood; Green Libraries; The National Databank Scheme; Libraries of Sanctuary; The Summer Reading Challenge; The Library Presents; and Business and Intellectual Property Service.

2. Main Issues

2.1 Performance

- 2.1.1 Library use continues to rise with active use (the number of unique people using their library card) up 14% last year to over 92,000, and 1.4 million visits over the last twelve months (September 2022 – August 2023). Regular users and those accessing local services have returned to pre-pandemic levels in most cases, while those in high street locations reflect the decline in retail footfall (for example, Cambridge Central matches the trend seen in Lion Yard, with visits around 70% of those recorded in 2019). Performance data for active users and library visits over the past year is shown in Appendix 1.
- 2.1.2 A change is being observed in how libraries are used, with fewer of the shorter but regular visits, (e.g. people briefly visiting each day to check emails), and more people staying longer but visiting less often, such as choosing to use the library as a work from home location or warm hub offer. Buildings therefore remain busy and well utilised, despite the metric of footfall being lower.
- 2.1.3 There is a move to interacting with the library online, and digital issues continue to grow. E-Books (and E-Audio) have exceeded 200,000 issues in the last twelve months, up from less than 20,000 in 2019/20, with over 500,000 newspapers and magazines viewed in the e-collections in the last year. This is a positive legacy from the pandemic era, when digital access to library services increased and physical access to libraries was greatly restricted. Social media interactions have decreased following the corporate takeover changes at Twitter/X, but other platforms continue to show strong growth. Performance data for E-Issues is detailed in Appendix 1.

2.2 Qualitative Performance - Customer Impact

- 2.2.1 To date, the Council's approach to assessing how well the Library Service is performing has been numbers-based, as evidenced by the service's key performance indicators (library visits, active users, digital engagements). Whilst this quantitative data is important, a qualitative approach to performance is also needed in order to understand the impact of the services and the difference they make to quality of life for people in Cambridgeshire. Frontline staff receive wonderful feedback all the time, but there has not previously been a systematic way of gathering and compiling this feedback to provide a richer performance narrative for the service.
- 2.2.2 To this end, a new customer impact survey has been developed and was launched for Libraries Week 2023, with a pilot period between 2 October 2023 and 30 November 2023. This short survey, attached at Appendix 2, could be completed in five minutes and was available through all digital channels, as well as in hard copy form. The survey provides intelligence on what people use their library for, visit frequency, what the library means for customers, and what benefits customers receive from using libraries, with a selection of customer comments attached at Appendix 3. This powerful feedback demonstrates the high value customers place on their library, and the multiple ways the service helps and enriches the lives of individuals and families. In all, 618 people completed the survey, and the learning from this pilot will be used to shape the service's ongoing approach to qualitative performance management. A priority in 2024 will be to use the findings from the separate Quality of Life survey to shape a service response.

2.3 Library Infrastructure Projects

- 2.3.1 In October 2023, the final three Open Plus pilot sites opened. There is now an Open Plus library in each district of the county to trial uptake in different types of libraries, with Rock Road, March and Soham joining St Ives and Histon. The latter have run for just over one year, and have seen 3,648 members sign up, with 7,356 visits in open plus mode. No serious incidents have been reported, and technical issues that affected some use early on have been resolved, although the requirement of live CCTV monitoring on the hour remains a financial and logistical challenge. Performance data on Open Plus visits to St Ives and Histon is detailed in Appendix 4.
- 2.3.2 Open Plus is one of the ways in which libraries align with work around being closer to communities, with the library acting as the front door for a range of services. This could see family contacts, with baby weigh and other services being offered in more locations across the county in communities and away from corporate offices.
- 2.3.3 The service continues to invest in the buildings, with significant works carried out at Warboys and Ramsey library, where it has worked with the Property team to redesign and redecorate the spaces. Similar projects are due to be completed at Yaxley, Rock Road, Barnwell and St Neots libraries, as condition survey work is linked with available developer funding.
- 2.3.4 Darwin Green is a new library due to open in Cambridge in summer 2024, while work is ongoing with Cambridge City Council to re-provision Cherry Hinton library in the new Community Hub that they are building on the site of the old library, which is also due in summer 2024. Cambourne Library is due to expand to accommodate its growing use and

the increasing local population, with a reworking of space in Sackville House adding 50% more floor space to the library. The project is due in late 2024.

2.3.5 Finally, the Council has been investing across the estate to update library spaces and create more warm hub opportunities, as well as enhanced meeting room spaces, to improve community access to its libraries. This has been made possible by public health Covid-19 recovery funding and transformation funding.

2.4 EverySpace

2.4.1 The EverySpace project, funded by the Art's Council, continues to progress, with the EverySpace at March library to be delivered in spring 2024, followed by Central Library Cambridge in summer 2024. Jan Kattein Architects (JKA) have completed their design for both sites, and the Property team has appointed Eddisons as the principal designer to oversee delivery of the project at March Library. A request for a quotation has gone out to the Council's framework to secure a main contractor to execute the mechanical and electrical elements of the March design, while fabrication of the flexible, bespoke furniture has been awarded to AM System. The Council's commitment to social value continues, with its four Design Mentees visiting JKA's London-based studio to participate in design work and visit the company's sustainable Paper Garden development.

2.5 Every Child a Member – Auto-enrolment

2.5.1 Libraries have launched the first year of their Every Child a Member (ECAM) pilot scheme (April 2023 to August 2025). Securing funding through the Council's Education department, the aim of the pilot is to improve child literacy levels through sustained active library membership and increased reading for pleasure.

2.5.2 The pilot will establish a partnership between Cambridgeshire Libraries and Cambridgeshire Primary Schools through automatic library membership for primary school children and a commitment to joint engagement and promotion of the Summer Reading Challenge (SRC). Year 1 is focussing on schools in Wisbech, while Year 2 will focus on the Huntingdon area. A baseline dataset has been created for the purposes of evaluation. Libraries are working in partnership with teachers, headteachers, literacy leads and governors to progress the pilot.

2.5.3 A programme of promotional visits and outreach events is being undertaken in Wisbech to engage children and their parents/carers on the benefits of library membership. The process of automatic membership will commence in early 2024, with a view to promoting the SRC in early summer 2024.

2.6 Summer Reading Challenge 2023 – Ready, Set Read!

2.6.1 The SRC incentivises primary-age children (4 –11-year-olds) to continue reading over the summer holidays by collecting six specially designed stickers to add to a collector's folder. This year was successful and saw the number of children taking part return to pre-pandemic levels of engagement, with Table 1 showing a 69% increase on 2021.

	Starters	Finishers	New Members
2019	7290	4315 (59%)	747
2021	4138	2263 (55%)	517
2022	6020	3331 (55%)	667
2023	6981	3990 (57%)	568

Table 1: Summer Reading Challenge statistics

2.6.2 Parents and carers value the SRC as a fun way to not only encourage their children to keep reading, but to develop and broaden what they read. Children remain as enthusiastic as ever about collecting the weekly stickers and receiving their medal and certificate for completing the challenge. Feedback received, such as the following, underlines the value of the SRC:

- Alex & Jack (4 & 6 years old) – written by their parent
“We have had a lot of fun reading and the Challenge has helped us to keep coming to the library. We have really enjoyed it + told friends about it.”
- Parent
“Maria (6yrs old) was reading more each day, so she can finish the challenge. She loved coming back and getting new books. She found it difficult talking to the volunteers about each book but by the end she was more confident!”

2.6.3 This year’s sport theme enabled libraries to create programming in partnership with their local sports clubs, as well as organisations commissioned to deliver programmes to keep families active. Libraries in East Cambridgeshire and Fenland worked with Living Sport and Active Fenland to acquire equipment and run sports activities in libraries during the holidays. They also designed a local Active Mile Challenge centred on each library within their district. Libraries are now using the equipment from this partnership to engage adults to combat loneliness and support adults with additional needs.

2.7 Libraries Week – Green Libraries and Net Zero

2.7.1 Libraries Week (2-8 October 2023) is an annual celebration and showcase of the best that libraries have to offer. This year’s Green Libraries theme enabled the promotion of Cambridgeshire Libraries’ role as green champions, supporting the Council’s Net Zero target. The service offers display space and event opportunities to highlight the Council’s actions on climate change. By sharing books, meeting spaces, computers, and resources it is already a key player in the circular economy. Through the book collections, public programming and partnerships, the service provides information and inspiration to help individuals and communities strengthen their own commitment to environmental sustainability. A talk during the programme on Greening Your Home by respected climate scientist Jonathan Gregory was broadcast live to venues across the country by the British Library on 7 October 2023.

2.7.2 Work has commenced working with colleagues from Communities and Cambridgeshire Skills to articulate the contribution these services can make to Net Zero and develop an action plan.

2.8 The National Databank

2.8.1 Promoting access to opportunities, bridging the digital divide, and promoting social inclusion is in the DNA of the library service. Digital and data poverty impacts people in many ways. People are cut off from contacting loved ones, from job interviews, from finding essential health or other information online, and cut off from digitised public services. The UK National Databank brings free mobile internet data connectivity to people who cannot afford it and who are often experiencing multiple inequalities.

2.8.2 The National Databank, provided by Good Things Foundation, is currently operating at four libraries, with Bar Hill, Cambridge Central, St Ives and Wisbech databanks launched in August 2023. These locations were chosen because of their proximity to hotels where new arrivals are guests, and the need was acute. At the time of this report's publication, 242 people have been supported with vouchers and SIM cards from O2, Three and Vodafone.

2.8.3 The service was be extended to Arbury Court, Barnwell Road, Cambourne, Ely, Huntingdon, March and St. Neots libraries in November 2023. Used in conjunction with the Council's LendIT laptop loan scheme, it can support people in data poverty to join or remain connected to the online community and experience the benefits it brings.

2.9 Libraries of Sanctuary

2.9.1 City of Sanctuary UK awarded Cambridgeshire Libraries 'Libraries of Sanctuary' status in August 2023. This national award recognises the service's work to demonstrate hospitality, solidarity and support to refugees and people seeking asylum. Libraries have taken positive action to ensure new arrivals are welcomed and included through library resources, events and learning opportunities. A particular focus has been given to those libraries nearest to hotels where new arrivals are guests, including Bar Hill, St Ives and Wisbech libraries.

2.9.2 Working in partnership with hotel operators and internal partners, special welcome sessions have been organised, where the Council's services are highlighted, including new offers such as LendIT (free loanable devices), the National Databank (free SIM cards with data) and ESOL resources. To mark the achievement of receiving the Libraries of Sanctuary award, a day of celebration was held at St Ives Library in October 2023. This provided an opportunity to celebrate Cambridgeshire's diverse migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking communities and what it means to be a place of welcome.

2.10 Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC)

2.10.1 As a result of funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport coming to an end in March 2023, the BIPC has been through a funding transition as of April 2023. The new key funding streams are as follows:

- BIPC Universal – Working with the Cambridgeshire Skills team to develop a model of support that will deliver sessions to residents across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority region.
- BIPC Plus – Working with the economic development teams from three district councils (East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire) to

deliver on UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) outcomes as determined by each district.

BIPC Universal

2.10.2 The collaboration with Cambridgeshire Skills has allowed the service to:

- Provide a consistent and uninterrupted service across the region for BIPC customers;
- Safeguard the roles of three BIPC colleagues;
- Reintroduce BIPC Jumpstart, a grants and support initiative that has benefitted nearly 200 local businesses to date; and
- Access a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, that will lead to a better understanding of customers, more efficient reporting, and overall better customer experience.

BIPC Plus

2.10.3 The BIPC successfully secured a total of £286,000 through East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire District Councils. As a result, the BIPC Plus service will contribute towards the Levelling Up Agenda, specifically UKSPF's 'Supporting Local Business' investment priority, through the provision of extra business support. This support includes:

- The enhancement of BIPC Jumpstart, providing an extra £50,000 worth of grant funding and support for new start-up businesses within South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. This is three times the size of past programmes.
- The development of a new programme, Get Set and Grow, aimed at growing businesses within East Cambridgeshire, South Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire. A new member of staff has been recruited to deliver this programme.

2.11 Care Together

2.11.1 Libraries are part of the Care Together roll-out countywide following the pilot in East Cambridgeshire. The Library Service has a great deal to offer older people which will help them remain 'Happy and Healthy at Home for Longer' including digital inclusion, social connection, timely and accessible signposting, and cultural opportunities.

2.11.2 The Council's key Care Together commitments are:

- A membership drive amongst older people to make sure they have knowledge of the services and facilities the Council offers.
- Continuing to improve the Council's social offer for older adults, following a successful model at March Library.
- Expanding the Library @ Home service by promoting volunteering to staff at the Council.
- Networking in districts to promote collaborations with other groups and agencies.
- Rolling out Dementia Support groups in all districts, following the model in Huntingdon District.

2.12 Know Your Neighbourhood Fund

2.12.1 The Library Service has secured £88k from the government's Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN) Fund for work in Fenland. The purpose of the fund is to boost volunteering and help people connect with others in disadvantaged areas. The project commenced in January 2024 through to March 2025.

2.12.2 The KYN project is happening in 27 deprived areas in the country, including Fenland. The aim is that libraries explore ways to promote social connectedness in these areas by experimenting with different approaches and assessing their impact. The end result will be a toolkit for all Library Services to use when planning activity to reach out to lonely people. All participating services are on a learning curve. Questions to be explored include what are the barriers that stop people being able to connect and participate, and can the Library Service help overcome barriers for those experiencing loneliness and isolation. The project will be delivered by a new Project Officer, the library management team and the volunteering team.

2.13 The Library Presents (TLP)

2.13.1 In April 2023, the service embarked upon a newly funded programme, enabling it to continue to bring great arts to local venues for another three years.
<https://www.library.live/the-library-presents>

2.13.2 Participant comments have been extremely positive, such as the following:

- “Absolutely brilliant - Fantastic, funny, lovely, informative.”
- “It was fun and so good to be with a group of different ages.”
- “We socialized with other families, that was good for our wellbeing.”

2.13.3 The short Summer Season (July and August) comprised 28 events in 18 locations, 15 of which were in libraries across the county. 90% of available tickets were sold, with 910 attendees. Many of the events were selected as being family-friendly, to be part of the SRC.

2.13.4 Of the 144 public feedback samples for the summer:

- 100% said that the quality of the events was good or very good
- 100% said the staff welcome was good or very good
- 98% said they would recommend TLP

2.13.5 This year, there is a focus on increased accessibility to the events, with a minimum of 30% of TLP activity having increased accessibility measures. There are still further improvements to consider around accessibility barriers. Two comments mentioned lack of accessible toilets and problems with parking, but several people highlighted the ease of access in their comments:

- “One of us was a wheelchair user – no access issues. Thank you!”
- “The accessibility was brilliant and inclusive for us to attend.”

2.13.6 The five main motivations for attending were:

- to be entertained;
- to do something new/out of the ordinary;
- to spend time with friends/family;
- to entertain my children; and
- to educate/stimulate my children.

2.13.7 The Autumn Season was successful, with a much larger and more varied programme – 70% of tickets were sold with 18 events selling out.

3. Alignment with ambitions

3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

There are no significant implications for this ambition. Please note 2.7 Green Libraries & Net Zero, activity to date.

3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced.

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs.

There are no significant implications for this ambition. Do note 2.11 and 2.12 for projects Care Together and Know Your Neighbourhood as activities supporting this ambition.

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality.

There are no significant implications for this ambition. Do note section 2.10 on BIPC offer as activity supporting this ambition.

3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

There are no significant implications for this ambition.

3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.

There are no significant implications for this ambition. Do note 2.5 ECAM and 2.6 SRC as activities supporting this ambition.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.7 Public Health Implications

Access to libraries provides users with information about their health and wellbeing but also initiatives to offer support for skills development or warm hubs to address the wider determinants of health.

4.8 Climate Change and Environment Implications on Priority Areas

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: No Impact

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: No Impact

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: No Impact

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: No Impact

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: No Impact

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral

Explanation: No Impact

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: Positive

Explanation: See 2.7 for examples of information and support available.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? No

Name of Financial Officer:

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

No

Name of Officer:

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

No

Name of Officer:

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? No

Name of Officer:

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Val Thomas

If a Key decision, have any Climate Change and Environment implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

5. Source Documents

5.1 None