

Library Service and Archives Service Annual Report

To: Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 16 January 2025

From: Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides the Committee with an annual update on the activities and performance of the Library and Archives Service in 2024, highlighting achievements and initiatives as well as providing a narrative on the direction of travel of the services and the ways in which libraries and archives are supporting wider council priorities.

Updates are provided on a number of programmes, projects and initiatives: Library Plus, Service Performance, EverySpace, Every Child A Member (ECAM), Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN), Green Libraries, The Europe Challenge, The Summer Reading Challenge (SRC), The Library Presents (TLP) and the Archives Service.

The purpose of the report is to inform the Committee and seek feedback on the activities and direction of travel of services.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

Note the contents of the report.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

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

- 1.2 Section 3.6 (Green Libraries and Net Zero), as well as continued investment in the estate to install Air Source Heat Pumps and reduce the carbon emissions by libraries.

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

- 1.3 Sections 3.8 and 3.10 refer to Care Together and Know Your Neighbourhood activities supporting this ambition.

Helping People out of poverty and income inequality

- 1.4 Section 3.2.2 refers to LendIT and National Databank Schemes

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

- 1.5 Section 3.1 refers to Library Plus and Infrastructure Projects.

Children and young people have opportunities to thrive.

- 1.6 Sections 3.4 and 3.5 refer to Every Child a Member and Summer Reading Challenge.

2. Background

- 2.1 This report provides the committee with an update on the activities and performance of the Library and Archives Service in 2024, highlighting achievements and initiatives as well as providing a narrative on the direction of travel of the services and the ways in which libraries and archives are supporting wider Council priorities.

- 2.2 Library Plus is a new programme which commenced in 2024, and the component parts and future focus are outlined.

- 2.3 The Library service continues its strong proven track record of innovation, as well as success in securing external funding. Updates are provided on a number of projects and initiatives including Library Plus; Performance; EverySpace; Every Child A Member (ECAM); Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN); Green Libraries; The Europe Challenge; Summer Reading Challenge (SRC); The Library Presents (TLP).

3. Main Issues

3.1 Library Plus and Infrastructure Projects

3.1.1 Library Plus was approved by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on Tuesday 30 January 2024 and Full Council on Tuesday 13 February 2024. The Library Plus project is wide-reaching, helping the Council to meet multiple ambitions. In particular, the project supports ambition 6 (places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised).

3.1.2 The Library Plus project has been split into three workstreams:

- Workstream 1: Improving libraries for residents - adaptations and improvements to library sites and services.
- Workstream 2: Library spaces for Council officers linked to the requirements of the Accommodation Improvement Programme.
- Workstream 3: Creating a long-term strategy for a sustainable library service.

3.1.3 Library Plus is funded by £1.32m investment to help redesign what is delivered through libraries. This investment will improve the Council's libraries' facilities and equipment, to create greater flexibility and more opportunities for these spaces to be used by the community and a wider range of Council and partner services.

3.1.4 The Library service continues to make strong use of developer funding and a good working relationship with Property services to fund ongoing works to improve the estate. 2025 will see works on:

- Expanding Cambourne Library and adding air source heat pumps to the whole building.
- Improving Rock Road Library roof, including insulation.
- Air source Heat pumps at Bar Hill Library.
- Partial Refurbishment of Huntingdon Library.
- Planning for works at Whittlesey Library.
- Planned opening of Cherry Hinton Library.

3.1.5 The service will also be tendering for new self-service machines, a re-procurement of its e-lending platforms and exploring the shift of mobile libraries to greener options, with a new vehicle scheduled for 2026. Details of planned Library Plus Investment and Section 106 developer funding projects are summarised in Appendix 1.

3.2 Library Service Performance

3.2.1 The Library service remains a mass participation service, with just under 100,000 residents making use of their library card in the last 12 months and over 1.5 million visits. The service is set to hit a target of 4% growth on last year's performance.

3.2.2 A new KPI was introduced capturing a wider range of activity linked back to the Council's corporate ambitions, to highlight the range of ways the Library service helps deliver on the Council's ambitions.

Highlights include: the growth of digital support through the LendIT Laptop Lending scheme and National Databank sim card scheme available from libraries, through to the growth of support for Under-5s and their parents in an expanding offer for Rhyme Times.

3.3 EverySpace

3.3.1 EverySpace is centred around adaptable, co-managed spaces that bring services closer to the community by enabling people to connect, create, discover and share at Cambridge Central and March libraries. Through EverySpace, people will be able to get hands-on with new technology, including green screens, video editing and sound recording equipment.

3.3.2 Accessible design has been at the heart of the project and the available facilities are equipped to serve a variety of audiences, with flexible layouts to hold workshops and events, encouraging more people to visit their library and discover the range of services on offer.

3.3.3 The service was awarded a grant of £260k by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, delivered by Arts Council England. The grant is supplemented by £128,968 of Section 106 funding.

3.3.4 The official launch of March EverySpace took place on 20 September 2024, led by the Chair of the Council, and with representatives from Arts Council England and the Department for Media, Culture and Sport in attendance.

3.3.5 In November 2024, March EverySpace launched a partnership with 20Twenty Productions, an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation focused on improving the social mobility of children and young people in Fenland and Cambridgeshire. The partnership will deliver a range of ongoing programming to support young people in learning and developing digital skills, ranging from recording and editing music, to digital drawing and animation, to games development.

3.3.6 EverySpace at Cambridge Central Library is scheduled to be delivered in early 2025. This will see the reconfiguring of a third of the third floor at Cambridge Central adopting and adapting the same design principles used successfully at March Library.

3.4 Every Child a Member (ECAM)

3.4.1 Libraries have just completed the first year of their two-year ECAM pilot programme (April 2023 to August 2025). The aim of the pilot is to improve child literacy levels through sustained active library membership and increased reading for pleasure.

3.4.2 The recruitment of an ECAM Library Outreach Assistant has been essential to the success of the year 1 pilot. They have engaged with all sixteen schools, successfully building good working partnerships with ten. Headteachers nominated an ECAM contact, often from their senior team, to explore how the school and library could work together. School Heads reported that having a named contact from the library who can meet with school staff onsite has meant they were more likely to co-plan library visits and promote the library service with their children and parents.

3.4.3 Key outcomes:

- The ECAM Library Outreach Assistant's direct engagement with parents between February 2024 and June 2024 has encouraged over 260 children, plus carers/guardians, to join the library. This is a 170% rise on the number of new members for the same period in 2023 (97).
- Numbers of children taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge rose 22% compared to 2023, and 3% compared to 2019. Wisbech had the highest number of new library members in the county joining the Challenge: 149 - 161% more than in 2023, and 181% more than in 2019.

3.4.4 The key impact of the programme for Wisbech Library has been the proactive engagement from schools this Autumn term, such as an invitation to speak at a year 3 parent's evening and three schools requesting to bring their year 3 children to visit the library.

3.4.5 A year 2 ECAM Library Outreach Worker was recruited in September 2024. Currently they are gathering information about current engagement with local schools, co-designing promotional ideas with the Huntingdon staff and collating baseline statistics in preparation to reach out to the 14 Huntingdon Area schools.

3.5 The Summer Reading Challenge (SRC)

3.5.1 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 saw a slight (5%) reduction in the number of children taking part compared with 2023 – the new Cherry Hinton Library was not open and three of the Community Managed Libraries decided not to take part. A success to note this year was a greater emphasis on recruiting new library members alongside the Challenge and the programme of themed events. 1442 of the 6631 children participating were young people joining the library for the first time, 152% more than in 2023, and 92% more than in 2019.

3.5.2 A survey was conducted of families attending SRC events in the county's eight Hub Libraries over the holiday period to collect feedback on the programme. Feedback received underlines the value of this seasonal reading initiative. More than 96% of respondents rated the ease of participation and communication about the Challenge as Very Good (71.3%) or Good (26.3%). Over 80% of respondents rated the book selection Very Good (58.8%) or Good (38.8%).

3.6 Green Libraries and Net Zero

3.6.1 Cambridgeshire Libraries have participated in two national celebrations of green action in 2024: Great Big Green Week (10-18 June) and Green Libraries Week (7-13 October). Library programmes, including nature talks, eco-crafts and recycling activities, showcased the service's commitment to promoting environmental sustainability and nature restoration within communities.

3.6.2 Eco activities are ongoing in libraries throughout the year, highlighted with a leaf symbol in the What's On brochure. Repair cafes have been held at Ely, Clay Farm and Soham libraries. The service continues to expand its climate and environment book collection. Ely Library has developed as an "eco hub", working closely with East Cambridgeshire District Council and East Cambs Climate Action Network to host regular public engagement events

with invited partners on environmental themes. St Neots Library has hosted an eco-fair with the town council, Huntingdonshire District Council and local groups. Cambridge Central Library partnered with the University of Cambridge's Cambridge Zero team to host an eco-fair, followed by a networking event bringing together members of local sustainability groups, a representative of the Council's climate team and academic climate researchers to explore potential collaborations.

3.6.3 Libraries, Communities and Cambridgeshire Skills have developed a climate and nature strategy, with action plans for each service. The service has reflected on all aspects of its environmental impact and introduced measures (subject to regular review) that should enable it to reduce its own carbon footprint and inspire the public to do the same.

3.7 The Europe Challenge: Meet, Eat, Art

3.7.1 The Europe Challenge is an initiative run by The European Cultural Foundation that brings together libraries and communities across Europe to address pressing challenges in their local areas. The programme offers a series of online and in-person workshops and mentoring sessions, up to €10,000 of funding and additional peer-to-peer exchange opportunities, networking, and travel.

3.7.2 Following a successful application, Cambridgeshire Libraries formed the "Meet. Eat. Art." project to promote social cohesion and wellbeing for families seeking sanctuary at Cambridge Bar Hill Hotel and the wider community. With limited funds and no access to cooking facilities or purpose-built communal spaces, new arrivals were disconnected from community, culture and opportunity.

3.7.3 The team delivered a monthly community kitchen and arts programme running from April 2024 to September 2024. Working closely with the community, as well as securing food donations from Cambridge Central Mosque, residents and new arrivals cooked for each other, with 40 people sharing a communal meal each month, before taking part in arts activities delivered by The Library Presents at Bar Hill Library. The food ranged across various cultures, such as Iranian, Tunisian and each was thoroughly enjoyed throughout the project.

3.7.4 The arts programme was chosen by new arrivals and residents, free and open to all. The programme spanned options such as music, theatre, arts, puppetry; all performances were inclusive, and barriers of language and age limits were removed.

3.7.5 The new arrivals that cooked reported a sense of restored pride and agency, sharing their culture and love of food. Intergenerational and inclusive, the team created a safe space that brought together a centenarian and a newborn baby, people in poverty, a wheelchair user (who took the time to teach English words to two girls), and a family with a child with Downs Syndrome, taking part in a community event for the first time.

3.7.6 The project team created an atmosphere of trust, belonging and joy, building friendships and community connections. As one resident remarked to the team, "Do you realise what a great thing you are doing?" The service has been heartened by the impact this project has had; having a wider and lasting impact on all corners of the community. The legacy of the project continues, as the community wishes to champion the work already done to move the project forward, with the guidance and support of Cambridgeshire Libraries.

3.8 Know Your Neighbourhood Fund

3.8.1 The Library service secured £88k of funding 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 – 2024 has been the year of delivery which is due to complete in March 2025. Fenland is one of 27 pilot areas in the country. Pilots are tasked with exploring ways to promote social connectedness by experimenting with different approaches and assessing their impact.

3.8.2 Outcomes to date:

- Community cafes, which saw 800 people visit Chatteris Library over 2 days, and 341 in March.
- Surveys to find out what the communities would like to attend - from the feedback a wide variety of groups have been setup.
- Dementia group, established in partnership with Fenland Dementia Working Group.
- Library Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) hours - exclusive access to the library for families with SEND members.
- Social activities - Gardening Friends, Chess Club, 4-week courses including wellbeing, Drama and Acting for Adults – this being such a success, the group is seeking grant funding to continue in the new year.
- Successfully getting funding from MIND to start a retro gaming club that runs weekly for adults - in the first few weeks of this, new members are already using the Library spaces and especially men.
- A video production of short clips to showcase Library events and Volunteering opportunities is underway for completion in December 2024.

3.8.3 Learnings from the KYN pilot include:

- Difficulties of attracting volunteers who wish to commit and stay on long term.
- Learning that short courses attract more people who then build on their connections and make the decision if they wish to continue. Using libraries as the jumping off point to make new connections and attend other events such as The Library Presents.
- Accommodating people with extra needs or vulnerabilities by making sure people are welcomed and buddied into groups by volunteers or staff in the early stages.
- Persisting in the early weeks with new activities to give them time to establish.
- Responding to interest in volunteering should be quick and easy and adaptable to the individual (i.e. not leaving people waiting for an opportunity).
- The value of leafleting every household in the local area, reaching people that were previously unreachable through online advertising of events.

3.9 The Library Presents

3.9.1 The service is now in the second year of this funded programme, enabling it to continue to bring great arts to local venues - 46 arts events featured in the Spring 2024 season, taking place in 19 different venues across the county. Ticket sales for the season were lower than usual at 72% ,so the service reviewed and altered the communications approach. Audience feedback indicates the most frequently cited means of communication is through libraries. Feedback also indicated that 43% of participants were attending for the first time.

- 3.9.2 The Autumn season is now underway, with a varied programme of 44 events between October and December 2024. Ticket sales were at 78% mid-way through the season (13 November), so there is an evident improvement. As always, the events are a mix of performances and workshops, appealing to participants of all ages.
- 3.9.3 Participant comments have been extremely positive, with the following samples in response to the Spring 2024 programme:
- Great to see the library used for such events and bringing communities together in their local area.
 - Excellent production and performance. Interesting content.
 - The tutor was amazing - approachable, patient, knowledgeable and brilliant with my children.
 - Very welcoming and accepting of needs. Thank you.
- 3.9.4 16 of the 46 Spring Season events were badged with the Green Leaf logo, highlighting the activities with environmental themes.
- 3.9.5 Surveying attendees indicates a range of motivations including: 'to be entertained' and 'to spend time with friends and family'. 'To do something different / out of the ordinary' continues to grow as the primary motivation.
- 3.9.6 The Library Service has been invited to apply for funding for a further year of delivery, which would enable continued delivery until March 2027.

3.10 Care Together

- 3.10.1 Libraries are part of the Care Together programme. The Library Service has a great deal to offer older people, which will help them remain 'happy and healthier at home for longer' including digital inclusion, social connection, timely and accessible signposting and cultural opportunities.
- 3.10.2 The key Care Together commitments are:
- A membership drive for older people to make sure they have knowledge of the services and facilities the Council offers.
 - Continuing to improve the service's social offer for older adults following a successful model at March Library.
 - Expanding the Library@Home service by recruiting more volunteers.
 - Networking through districts, including place-based forums to promote collaborations with other groups and agencies.
 - Rolling out Dementia Support Groups in all districts following the model established in Huntingdonshire.

3.11 Archives Service

- 3.11.1 The service has been concentrating on delivering education sessions to students and schoolchildren as part of its objective to encourage and assist education providers to use archive sources for teaching.

- 3.11.2 The service has led archive resource sessions for schoolchildren from primary schools and have hosted training sessions for secondary school history teachers.
- 3.11.3 The service hosted a stall (for the first time ever) at Cambridge University's Student Dissertation and Research Fair, aimed at students who are mainly in their final year of their undergraduate degree and are planning their MA or PhD. A group of students studying the History component of the Access to Humanities qualification at Cambridge Regional College visited the Ely Archive Centre in October 2024 and the service also hosted visits for Ely U3A groups.
- 3.11.4 These education-themed activities have been held alongside more traditional local history-based events, such as hosting archive resource sessions for members of Huntingdon Dementia Community Group and various local history groups.
- 3.11.5 The service is making good progress on work to catalogue the papers of the Duke of Manchester's Kimbolton estate at Huntingdonshire Archives. This £23k project is entirely funded by grants from local community groups and individuals, including generous grants from the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society, the Goodliff Fund of the Huntingdonshire Local History Society and the Kimbolton Local History Society.
- 3.11.6 Members of these societies also provide the majority of the volunteers who index and transcribe the records, under the supervision of a professional archivist. By funding and participating in this project, the members of these community groups learn more about the history of the county, enhance their palaeographical and research skills, enjoy engagement with other volunteers and Council officers, and feel a sense of achievement with the quality of work they are contributing to. There are now 6,975 item or piece level entries for this collection on the Archives service's online catalogue.
- 3.11.7 On 20 May 2024, the NHS Infected Blood Statutory Inquiry published its final report. This ended a long engagement between the Archives service and the Inquiry's research team, which began in July 2019 when the Inquiry's team visited the service to consult the records of the East Anglian Regional Health Authority, which are held at the Archive Centre in Ely. From 2019 onwards, the team regularly contacted the service to inform of specific documents they were intending to share with victims as part of evidential release and asking permission to do so.
- 3.11.8 The service often provides information to Members and to other teams at the Council. To improve the speed and quality of responses, the service has over the past two years been cataloguing the surviving minutes and agenda paper bundles of the Council's committee and sub-committee meetings from 1974 onwards. To date, the service has catalogued the records of 275 such post-1974 meetings, comprising 2,809 volumes or bundles.

3.12 Looking Ahead 2025

- 3.12.1 The Library service will continue to deliver the programmes detailed in the report and proactively seek out opportunities which arise in 2025 for funding aligned to service and council priorities.
- 3.12.2 Library Plus will be a major focus. This capital investment will help the library service unlock the potential of buildings, adaptations and improvements which will enable increased

partnership and service delivery opportunities. This in turn will help the service meet local community needs and expand access to library facilities and services. This evolving approach will be articulated through a new strategy for the Library service in 2025.

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 This annual highlight report demonstrates the many ways in which library and archive services are delivering for communities in Cambridgeshire. The service is outward looking, opportunistic, creative, able to seek out opportunities which align with council priorities and bring these to fruition. The service is also future oriented recognising the changing demography and needs of communities and the new ways the council will respond in terms of service delivery – these will be taken forward in the Library Strategy

5. Significant Implications

5.1 Finance Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.3 Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

The service routinely monitors its impact using the Council's Equality Impact Assessments. This helps it to consider implications for people in protected characteristics, and in addition to the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010, the Council has adopted additional characteristics to treat as 'protected' including care experience, rural isolation and poverty. An overarching assessment on the Library Plus project has been completed and the service is committed to revisiting further impact assessments, alongside changes that may come about because of the works.

7. Source Documents

- 7.1 None