

Environment & Sustainable Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

December 2023

County Durham Libraries -

Library Transformation Update



Report of Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the development of the library service and an update on Library Transformation.

Executive Summary

- 2 This briefing report focuses on updating the committee on the development of the library service focussing on addressing the recommendations Phase One Libraries Transformation Programme.
- 3 Public libraries are a statutory service, as defined under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 with an obligation on upper tier authorities (County Council's) to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient service'.
- 4 Libraries are seen by many who currently use them as welcoming, free, safe, inclusive, and non-judgemental spaces that belong to everyone. They are recognised and valued as community hubs for a range of services, activities, events, and social interaction, at the heart of both rural and town communities.
- 5 The County Durham Library Service consists of 39 libraries including: a city centre library, eleven town centre venues and 27 community-based libraries. As well as outreach and peripatetic services. The library service is also contracted to provide Prison Library services to Deerbolt YOI, HMP Durham, and HMP Frankland.

- 6 In 2022/2023 almost half a million in-person visits were made to County Durham library venues with just under 43,000 active borrowers. This is a 52% increase in visits and a 22% increase in active borrowers compared to 2021/2022 usage.
- 7 The Phase 1 Library Transformation Needs Assessment identified nine key elements/actions for change in order to develop County Durham Libraries Service in line with public and staff feedback. These nine key elements are now informing the development of an innovative, modern and sustainable Library Service that meets the needs of communities within County Durham.
- 8 Work has begun on addressing and responding to the recommendations outlined in the Phase 1 Needs Assessment report. As a result of savings requirements, available resource to effect the entirety of the recommendations are very limited. Therefore in the short/medium term we will focus on the areas which can be undertaken within current budgets;
 - 1) desktop review of physical library network,
 - 2) digital content and infrastructure,
 - 3) stock policy review,
 - 4) development of strategic outreach and participation delivery.
- 9 Library venues cost £3.2 million in financial year 2022/2023. On average across the 39 libraries, staffing costs accounted for 70% of expenditure. In 2022/2023, the cost per in person visit across all libraries was £6.48. However, there is significant variation in cost per visitor between individual libraries.
- 10 Condition surveys for almost all library venues have been carried out between 2021 and 2022. The condition surveys grade the condition of each building; all of our library venues are graded between satisfactory and poor.
- 11 Further review to ensure value for money and impact are being delivered by the existing estate is required.
- 12 In Summer 2023, CounterCulture Partnership LLP were commissioned to carry out a detailed review of the challenges, issues and opportunities facing the Library Service as it works to understand how digital, in all its forms, can be used to transform the service offer and the way it is delivered.

- 13 The Library Transformation Digital Review report, included as Appendix 2, considered how our library services can experiment with and expand the digital offer.
- 14 The report describes and outlines what the library service plans to achieve and deliver in the next five years to meet its digital vision and goals and suggests what a set of digital goals for County Durham Libraries might look like pending further work on establishing a clear set of values and priorities.
- 15 12 recommendations were made for the development and delivery of a digitally transformed and forward-looking library service:
 - 1) Invest in core infrastructure and staff skills and training
 - 2) Develop and set a limited number of initial goals and priorities
 - 3) Review staff capacity for delivering the transformation and plan for contingency.
 - 4) Invest time in reviewing and discussing value and approach tools.
 - 5) Ensure the digital strategy is tied into the wider library strategy
 - 6) The library digital strategy should support the Council's wider digital ambitions.
 - 7) Measure the success of digital platforms and resources and Establish consistent and regular monitoring of KPIs
 - 8) Seek investment to enable and sustain change.
 - 9) Be bold, ambitious and proactive in digital thinking.
 - 10) Keep updated on market and sector developments.
 - 11) Consider moving away from developing in-house solutions
 - 12) Produce and promote clear guidance for staff about the processes, tools and templates for digital communications with customers.
- 16 The report proposes a digital framework and five year plan for digital transformation in our libraries. An early outcome of the digital review has been an application to the Arts Council England Libraries Improvement Fund to support the modernisation and introduction of essential and key digital library infrastructure.

- 17 Work on drafting a revised stock policy is underway. As part of the review and development of our stock policy we will be looking to sector best practice, learning from colleagues across the UK to take the best from good practice in the library, bookselling and publishing sectors. We will also be inviting sector experts to act as 'critical friends' to review our work in this area.
- 18 The phase 1 needs assessment recommended the development of vibrant and sustainable outreach, participation and partnership working. In response to this and as part of the wider Culture, Sport & Tourism restructure, a new Libraries Outreach & Participation team has been established with dedicated cultural and learning engagement roles.
- 19 The new team will manage and develop all aspects of library outreach & participation, including peripatetic library services, to deliver innovative library programmes and events with the aim of creating experiences that are intriguing and inspiring, widening participation and supporting audience development ensuring that our library service develops the capacity and agency of local communities to participate, meeting the current and future expectations of users and stakeholders
- 20 The Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN) Fund is a £30 million package of funding from the DCMS and the National Lottery, designed to widen participation in volunteering and tackle loneliness in 27 disadvantaged areas across England, of which County Durham is one. The Library service was successful in securing the maximum available grant (£88k) from this fund for an 18 month programme of work using reading for wellbeing to address chronic loneliness for residents served by the Stanley Library Cluster.
- 21 The project will work within the community, encouraging engagement with books, reading for pleasure, chatting/ meeting new friends, building relationships, social inclusion, improving wellbeing.

Recommendations

- 22 Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and during the presentation.

Background

- 23 Public Libraries are a statutory service, as defined under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964¹, with an obligation on upper tier authorities (County Councils) to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient

¹ [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#)

service'. They must do so in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available². What a comprehensive and efficient service means will differ between councils and will depend on the needs of each area Councils therefore have the freedom to design their library service, based on their analysis and assessment of local needs. Decisions made by councils about library services may also be subject to legal challenge by way of judicial review.

- 24 The County Durham Library Service consists of 39 libraries including: a city centre library, eleven town centre venues and twenty-seven community-based libraries. In addition, there are three types of outreach service: books on wheels; book bus; and the mobile library service. In addition, the library service is also contracted to provide Prison Library services to Deerbolt YOI, HMP Durham, and HMP Frankland. These services are fully funded by the National Offender Management Service of central government.

Key Insight Data

- 25 In 2022/2023 almost half a million in-person visits were made to County Durham library venues with just under 43,000 active borrowers. This is a 52% increase in visits and a 22% increase in active borrowers compared to 2021/2022 usage. Although the trend is upward, we are still some way from the number of in-person visits and active borrowers recorded at our libraries pre-pandemic; 44% and 85% respectively of 2019/2020 figures.
- 26 Quarter 1 & 2 data for the current financial year also suggest that growth in the number of in person visits is slowing with half year data for 2022/2023 at 51% of full year figures for 2021/2022.
- 27 Book issues, however, are growing with Q1& Q2 issues already at 105% of full year issues in 2022/2023. This shows that although the numbers of individuals borrowing from the service is not growing, active borrowers are borrowing significantly more items than last year.
- 28 In 2022/2023 7,679 public events and programmes were delivered across the library network engaging with 70,155 service users. These included exhibitions, creative workshops, digital support sessions, reading groups, formal learning, and school visits. As well as core weekly or monthly events such as toddler rhyme times, knit & natter groups, reading group meetings, "Chatterbooks" (children's reading group) sessions and digital support sessions, the library service have worked in partnership with both internal and external organisations to deliver events on a bigger scale and/or across multiple libraries or other venues including for example, Holiday

² [DCMS Guidance on Libraries as a statutory service update April 2022](#)

Activities with Fun & Food, World Book Day, the summer reading challenge, HiVIS fortnight (for library users who are visually impaired) with Sunderland & Durham RNIB, and the Durham Book Festival.

National Context – Government Libraries Strategy

- 29 In September 2022, Baroness Sanderson of Welton was appointed by government to chair an independent panel to help inform the development of a new national libraries strategy, and to help generate new ideas to improve library service and provision.
- 30 As part of this work, Baroness Sanderson visited a number of library services across the country to find out about their work. She has also undertaken a series of deep-dive discussion sessions at libraries around the country, attended by representatives from Arts Council England (the arms-length government body with responsibility for libraries), Libraries Connected³, and the cross-party Local Government Association, themed on different aspects of library services. The sessions covered culture and creativity, health and wellbeing, resilient communities, digital access and inclusion, learning, prosperity, reading and literacy, as well as exploring governance and blue-sky thinking and were completed in June 2023.
- 31 The report and recommendations from this independent panel will form part of a new government public libraries strategy to succeed the previous strategy which came into force in 2016. The report, which was expected in Summer 2023, will be considered by Lord Parkinson, the Libraries Minister following which the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) libraries team will draft a new Government strategy for public libraries. The draft strategy will then undergo further consultation with the sector prior to expected publication in 2024.

Re-cap of Library Transformation Phase 1

- 32 The purpose of the 'Needs Assessment' was to carry out an engagement exercise to gain a clear evidence-based understanding of how the library service within County Durham can better respond to the needs of the modern community and to inform the shape of service provision for future users, as Phase One of the Transformation Programme.
- 33 A comprehensive engagement exercise to engage with library users, residents, community groups, focus groups and stakeholders took place between 7th January 2022 and 1st April 2022. An External Reference

³ <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/about-us>

Group was also set up as an expert panel to provide guidance and advice on the delivery of the Needs Assessment.

- 34 The Needs Assessment identified nine key elements/actions for change in order to develop County Durham Libraries Service in line with public and staff feedback; summarised as follows:
- 1) A strategic review of the existing physical library network.
 - 2) A review of library opening hours
 - 3) Alignment of library outcomes with Council plans and priorities.
 - 4) Investment in technology, and digital content and infrastructure
 - 5) A workforce skills review and associated training
 - 6) A review of communications and marketing
 - 7) Develop and deliver a compelling, and accessible events programme
 - 8) Develop an ambitious plan for outreach and partnerships.
 - 9) A review of the current stock and content policy
- 35 The outputs of the engagement exercise and the nine key elements are now informing the development of an innovative, modern and sustainable Library Service that meets the needs of communities within County Durham.
- 36 Work has begun on addressing and responding to the recommendations outlined in the Phase 1 Needs Assessment report. As a result of savings requirements, available resource to effect the entirety of the recommendations are very limited. Therefore, in the short/medium term we will focus on the areas which can be undertaken within current budgets;
- 1) desktop review of physical library network,
 - 2) digital content and infrastructure,
 - 3) stock policy review,
 - 4) development of strategic outreach and participation delivery.

Physical Library Network

- 37 The Phase 1 Needs Assessment recommended a strategic review of the physical library estate that should feed into a wider capital investment strategy and transformation programme for library buildings,

to create modern, accessible, inclusive, and attractive buildings, encouraging people to visit, challenging current perceptions of County Durham Libraries as outdated and off-putting. This review of the existing physical library network should take into consideration the potential and current benefits of co-location and the need for capital investment.

- 38 A key point for discussion in relation to this recommendation is in challenging economic times what could, and should a modern transformation of our physical library estate look like?
- 39 An initial appraisal of the existing physical library network has been carried out. This desktop review considered data from the last full financial year (2022/2023) and looked at the full costs for each library building and onsite services, venue condition surveys, including repair and maintenance cost estimates, and library usage, both active borrowing and those visiting the library for other reasons/ uses.
- 40 Library venues cost £3.2 million in financial year 2022/2023. On average across the 39 libraries, staffing costs accounted for 70% of expenditure, however, in some venues this was as little as 36% (Pelton) and in others as high as 93% (Seaham).
- 41 For financial year 2022/2023, across the full library estate, the cost per in person visit was £6.48. However, there is significant variation in cost per visitor between individual libraries, from the lowest at £3.25 per visit (Newton Aycliffe) to the highest at £23.03 (Shotton). Although in general terms, the highest costs per visitor are seen in our least visited libraries, there is no direct correlation between the number of visits and cost per visit (Figure 2a.). There is however a weak correlation between the number of in-person visits and the overall annual expenditure of library venues (Figure 2b.). This suggests, that broadly speaking library venue expenditure is proportionately higher where our venues serve more residents, but also that the significant variation in value per in-person engagement in our less visited libraries deserves review to ensure value for money and impact are being delivered by the existing estate.

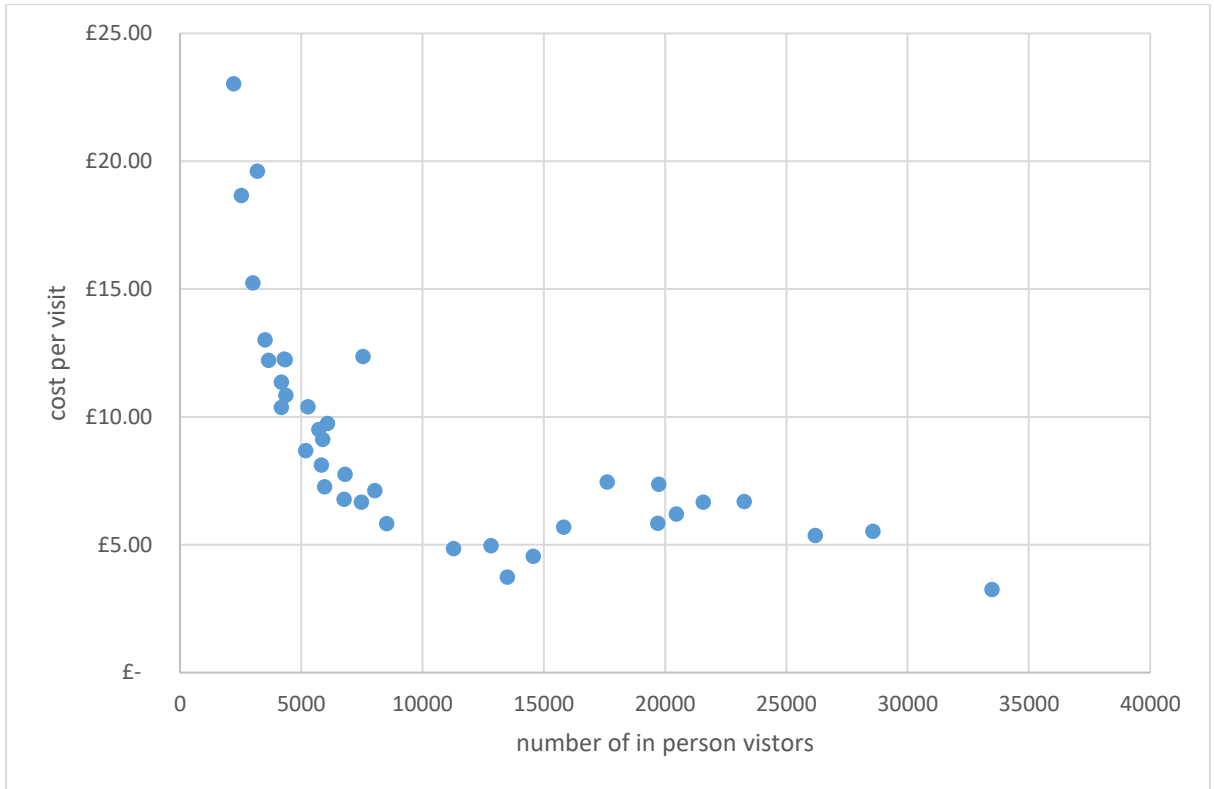


Figure 1a. cost per visit vs. total in person visits to library venues (excluding Durham Clayport). No linear correlation is observed; although the majority of the most expensive libraries per visit are generally those with the lowest overall visits the lack of a direct correlation indicates that other variables are influencing the overall value per user. N.B. data for Durham Clayport are excluded as a significant outlier, annual in person visits to Clayport totalled 96,109 in 2022/2023 with a cost per visit of £4.55.

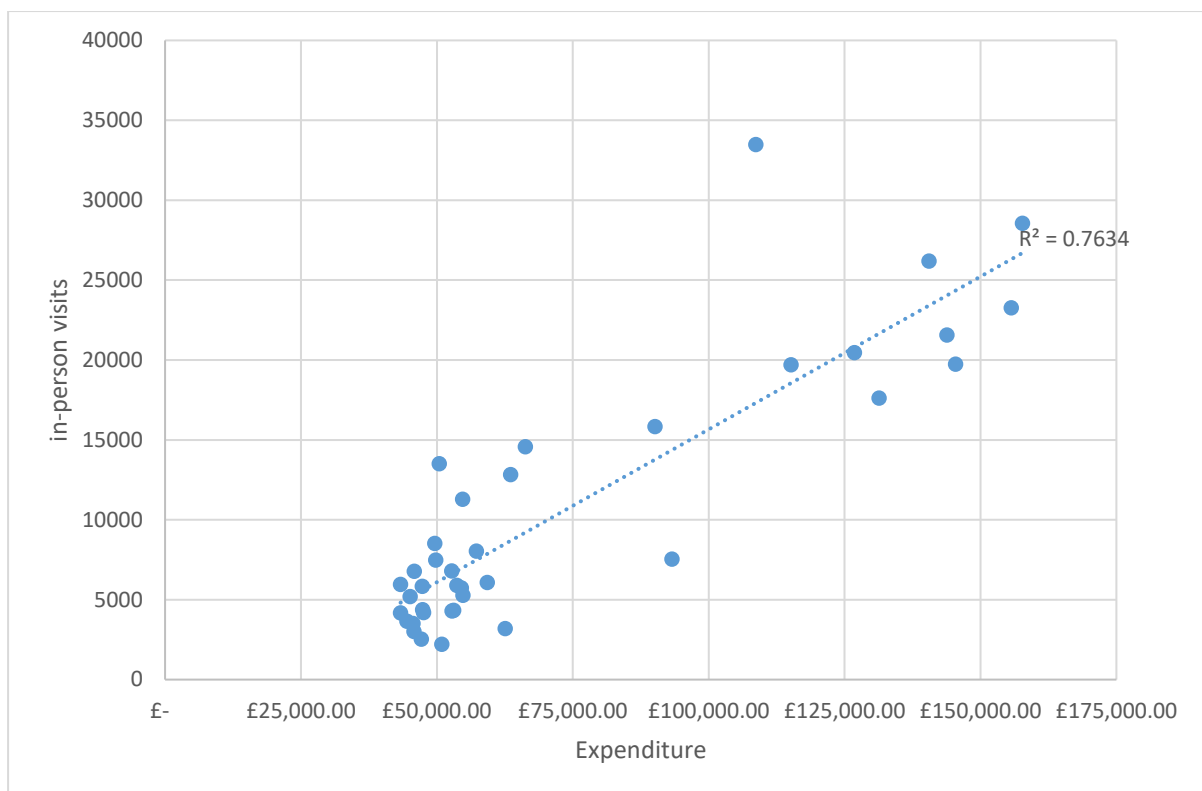


Figure 2b Total library expenditure vs. annual in-person visits (excluding Durham Clayport). A weak linear correlation is observed between the overall cost of each library venue and the number of visitors. N.B. data for Durham Clayport are excluded as a significant outlier, annual in person visits to Clayport totalled 96,109 in 2022/2023 with an annual expenditure of £437,154.

- 42 The review also explored the physical condition of the library estate. Condition surveys for almost all library venues have been carried out between 2021 and 2022, with the exception of Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe libraries which are co-located with leisure centres. The condition survey grades the condition of each building between A = Good, B = Satisfactory, C = Poor & D = Bad. All of our library venues are graded between B and C.
- 43 There is a need to consider, where it is appropriate, co-location with other Cultural, Sport & Tourism venues and/or other community assets/buildings. At the meeting of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in December 2022, Members recognised that the co-location of the library at the Louisa Centre, and at Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe leisure centres had worked well, however, this approach would not be acceptable to every community where a Leisure Centre is located. It was also acknowledged that there are opportunities to take advantage of community assets in those areas where there are no library buildings to expand provision where access to books and other learning materials is

needed. Table 1. summarises current and future co-locations of libraries.

44

Library	Co-location	notes
Peterlee	Leisure centre	The first library to be co-located with a leisure centre. Co-location delivered through leisure transformation programme. This is the 5 th most visited library in the network (23,261 in-person visits 2022/23)
Newton Aycliffe	Leisure centre	Second most visited library after Clayport with 33,477 in-person visits in 2022/23
Spennymoor	Leisure centre	The most recent co-location delivered by the leisure transformation programme. The new library includes significantly improved provision for community programmes with a dedicated and well-equipped community room.
Stanley	Leisure centre	
Bishop Auckland	Bishop Auckland Town Hall	11277 library visitors were recorded in 2022/23, this equates to 14.6% conversion rate for visitors to the town hall.
Clayport (Durham City Library)	Customer Access Point	
Barnard Castle	Customer Access Point	
Future co-locations		
Woodhouse Close	Leisure Centre	Construction work will begin in early 2024 as part of the leisure transformation programme

Consett	Customer Access Point	Feasibility work is underway to look at options to create space within the library at Consett for the Consett Customer Access Point.
---------	-----------------------	--

Table 1. Co-located libraries across County Durham.

Digital Content & Infrastructure

- 45 The Phase 1 Needs Assessment identified a need to develop a clear digital strategy for the library service which encompasses both operational and service delivery needs and digital content. The report recommended that such a strategy should identify the investment needed for digital infrastructure that enables the modernisation, transformation and expansion of provision and access to services.
- 46 In Summer 2023, CounterCulture Partnership LLP were commissioned to carry out a detailed review of the challenges, issues and opportunities facing the Library Service as it works to understand how digital, in all its forms, can be used to transform the service offer and the way it is delivered.
- 47 CounterCulture Partnership LLP's scope of work included a review of the use of technology and the online presence for County Durham Libraries, and production of a digital framework for the service, including a clear digital framework for the next five years encompassing both operational and service delivery needs and digital content. The specific objectives of this work were to identify:
- 1) The investment needed for a digital infrastructure to enable the modernisation, transformation and expansion of provision and access to DCC library services
 - 2) The investment needed in digital operational technology including but not limited to a Library App, Self-Service options, online payments.
 - 3) The requirements and options for a library website so that the service is brought up to the same standard as other library services across England
 - 4) Production of a framework strategy to ensure a vibrant digital offer, providing increased relevance to existing customers and an understanding of how to attract new customers.
- 48 The Library Transformation Digital Review report, included as Appendix 2, considered how our library services can experiment with and expand the digital offer. Underpinning this was consideration of the staff and

customer skills needed to support an enhanced and ever-changing digital environment. A long-term approach to digital infrastructure and innovation was taken in this work, moving towards platforms and ways of working that can continue to develop and adapt as technologies and needs change.

49 Counterculture carried out an analysis of the current digital services and infrastructure. This included:

- 1) Reviewing existing policies and strategies, including DCC's Digital Strategy, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) Digital Strategy 2022⁴, the Digital Universal Library Offer⁵, DCMS Culture is Digital⁶ policy and recommendations.
- 2) Reviewing data on digital use, digital needs and recommendations identified in County Durham Libraries Needs Assessment report, as well as updated or other relevant data and documentation produced since this work was completed. This included reports on computer use and Wi-Fi use in County Durham Libraries.
- 3) Producing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) matrix based on user feedback that focuses on operational and service delivery needs, as well as customer needs and content.
- 4) Mapping and reviewing the digital platforms, tools and services in use, suppliers and contract arrangements, and an options analysis for alternatives where appropriate.
- 5) A comparator analysis within the libraries sector to provide a benchmark of potential digital solutions and activities and the investment needed.
- 6) Reviewing digital marketing, communications and brand building with existing and new customers in mind.
- 7) Understanding existing staff skills and reviewing of sector evidence for digital skills in libraries.

50 Desk research accompanied an online focus group with customers and one with staff, as well as online one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders including library users, staff and sector leaders in digital development of libraries. These activities built on the engagement carried out during the Phase 1 Needs Assessment.

⁴ [UK's Digital Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/strategies/digital-strategy-2022-to-2025)

⁵ [Information and Digital | Libraries Connected](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/information-and-digital-libraries-connected)

⁶ [Culture is Digital - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/culture-is-digital)

- 51 After a period of stasis in digital development and progression, introducing any change will be transformative for staff and customers. It will improve operations, interaction, visibility, promotion and experience across physical, digital and peripatetic services.
- 52 The report describes and outlines what the library service plans to achieve and deliver in the next five years to meet its digital vision and goals and suggests what a set of digital goals for County Durham Libraries might look like pending further work on establishing a clear set of values and priorities. It proposes the following digital goals:
- 1) Expand access
 - 2) Improve and enhance services
 - 3) Deliver innovation and improvements
 - 4) Optimise investment and resources
 - 5) Maximise data to inform decision making and drive change
- 53 With these goals in mind the report makes 12 recommendations for the development and delivery of a digitally transformed and forward-looking library service:
- 1) **Invest in core infrastructure and staff skills and training** - Focus on the foundations and getting the basics right for improved customer experience and greater effectiveness for staff. This means acquiring, implementing and using with confidence hardware and software that will deliver a good modern standard of service, at the same level as other library services in the UK.
 - 2) **Develop and set a limited number of initial goals and priorities** as part of a phased approach that will be reflected upon and iterated over the next five years. Prioritise the core needs of service delivery, and focus on how digital tools and technology can improve internal systems and processes and external engagement, as well as bring efficiencies and cost savings or other benefits.
 - 3) **Review staff capacity for delivering the transformation and plan for contingency.** It will require a lot of time in the preparation and implementation of new ways of working and, at the same time, there will be expectations for business as usual.
 - 4) **Invest time in reviewing and discussing value and approach tools** such as the *Digital Culture Charter*⁷ and the *Guide to Digital*

⁷ <https://digitalculturecompass.org.uk/charter>

*Transformation in Cultural Heritage*⁸ to agree a shared set of underlying principles that will frame the digital approach across the service now and in the future.

- 5) **Ensure the digital strategy is tied in to the wider library strategy** and contributes to delivery of the overall vision for the service.
- 6) The library digital strategy should **support the Council's wider digital ambitions**. There are opportunities for County Durham Libraries to play a role in delivering other digital strategies and policies by working with partners or managing initiatives, such as Digital Champions, to help achieve DCC's vision for the County and for particular libraries to help target the people and communities who need more support with digital inclusion. County Durham Libraries should look across other Council digital services to ensure alignment with the broader digital offer.
- 7) **Measure the success of digital platforms and resources**. Establish consistent and regular monitoring of KPIs such as user journeys on webpages, social media activity, eResource popularity, public PC and Wi-Fi use, and other online operations in and for each library.
- 8) **Seek investment to enable and sustain change**.
- 9) **Be bold, ambitious and proactive in digital thinking**. Consider how County Durham Libraries could lead the way within DCC in the approach and application of digital activities. This might be through training opportunities for staff and communities, responding to customer needs in new ways, or seeking funding and partnerships that will enable change and deliver new services.
- 10) **Keep updated on market and sector developments**. Visit some of the case studies, suppliers and services highlighted in this document and learn from their experiences; build relationships with suppliers to understand how to make the most of the equipment and resources; attend conferences and training to build and share knowledge and to learn what technology is available now and what may be available in the near future; participate in networks to share knowledge across DCC and beyond and to discover funding opportunities.
- 11) **Consider moving away from developing in-house solutions** as these do not benefit from supplier updates or support and may

⁸ <https://digipathways.co.uk/resources/guide-to-digital-transformation-in-cultural-heritage/>

omit the specialist features that other library services use. In-house solutions will take longer to develop and implement than readily available packages and are likely to reach end of life earlier. Technologies designed for the sector can offer several integrated systems, allowing for a single supplier to provide several platforms working together seamlessly, for example an LMS, an app and a front facing platform or website.

- 12) **Produce and promote clear guidance for staff about the processes, tools and templates for digital communications** with customers. These guidelines should clarify when and how corporate communications and other teams should be involved, how to use content effectively to engage and grow audiences across different platforms, and how to use branding and tone of voice to build trust and recognition for County Durham Libraries.

54 The report proposes a digital framework and five year plan for digital transformation in our libraries. The first part of which is the development of a roadmap to align thinking. This will form the basis of service planning and digital work for the library service in the coming year. This work will include considering where initial 'quick wins' might be developed to build confidence of customers and staff. Reviewing staff skills, structure and capacity for the transformation and designing a change management plan, and communications plan for staff and customers. Building the business case for digital investment and identifying opportunities to seek external funding as appropriate. Reviewing supplier frameworks and soft market testing products with a view to agreeing the specifications for new digital offers. Exploring opportunities for partnership working both internally and externally and continuing to review excellence in the sector and opportunities for learning and development.

Libraries Improvement Fund

55 An early outcome of the digital review has been an application to the Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF) to support the modernisation and introduction of essential and key digital library infrastructure. The LIF is provided by the DCMS and administered by Arts Council England. The aims of the fund are to:

- 1) Enable libraries to develop more flexible, more commercial spaces.
- 2) Increase and improve digital access within communities.
- 3) Connect libraries to their communities.
- 4) Increase potential for transformation.

- 5) Increase library use.
- 6) Increase sustainability of libraries.
- 56 An application to the LIF has been submitted by the service to support the development of our digital library infrastructure including procurement of a new Library Management System and new digital products and services.
- 57 One of the core issues affecting the digital aspirations of our current library offer is the age and specification of the current LMS. The service relies upon a bespoke, in-house constructed LMS, which while forward looking at its creation, now suffers from significant limitations and chiefly is at risk due to its age, compliance to modern standards and ability to adapt and interface with the speed and pace of digital opportunities that a more modern LMS might offer. The service requires a new LMS which will address these limitations and provide increased resilience.
- 58 A new LMS will also serve as a catalyst for more radical digital innovations and a more holistic review of our digital offer improving the service, we are able to deliver. A more modern LMS will enable the development and integration of other technological upgrades which would benefit both our staff, through efficiency of back-office process, but also deliver improvements to front end users, for example, it will improve the access and visibility of our library collections and services through user self-service interfaces, Web and application-based access. This approach will ensure our library services are fit for the future, can be accessed via a greater range of options, particularly outside traditional operating hours, that our services will be more diverse and more attractive to a wider range of audiences, and will support our library offer especially in the more rural west of the County.
- 59 A more mature digital offering will also support a more inclusive offer. With a more modern array of systems to support our library offer, we can take our collections and services into schools, community groups and rural communities. For example, through the use of tablets, kiosks, and pop-up library provision. Improved digital systems will also give us increased access to relevant data supporting us to make more informed, evidence-based choices about service delivery.
- 60 If successful, the bid will deliver match funding of £499,999 towards a programme of capital and digital works totalling £1.974 million which include the procurement of a new Library Management System (LMS), introduction of digital self-serve options in library venues, and costs associated with the co-location of Woodhouse Close Library in the new leisure centre being delivered through the Leisure Transformation programme.

Stock Policy

- 61 In addition to digital transformation the Phase 1 Needs Assessment also identified a need to review the stock policy of the service; the current stock policy being last reviewed in 2012. The Needs Assessment identified that an attractive and wide-ranging selection of books and other resources is a fundamental part of the service offer and it recommended that a review of the current stock and content policy should be carried out to respond to feedback about the need for book stock to be 'bigger and better', with a wider selection of books across all ages and categories.
- 62 Work on drafting a revised policy is underway. The aim of the revised policy is to outline and direct how we choose the books and other materials stocked in our libraries. How we maintain, promote and facilitate access to those materials. How we circulate stock across the library estate and peripatetic services to ensure the widest choice of reading. As well as why and how we decide to keep some items and withdraw others. It will also describe our position on censorship and explain how we will measure the performance of stock and library resources. The objectives of the Stock Policy are to:
- 1) Promote a unified approach in stock selection and management.
 - 2) Improve and develop our stock.
 - 3) Enable increased efficiency and effective management of our bookfund.
 - 4) Present, provide and improve the stock which is relevant and attractive to library users.
 - 5) Increase the use of our stock.
 - 6) Promote literacy and reading.
- 63 The policy will ensure we are able to successfully support access to reading, literature, information and learning for everyone in line with the primary aims of the Durham County Council Vision, of more and better jobs, long and independent lives, and connected communities.
- 64 These objectives are set within a wider context for the development of the library service to attract and retain library users by providing the

best possible choice of materials in a wide variety of formats, which reflect the different interests and tastes of the whole community. They will help us to ensure we consider and protect the requirements of special or minoritized groups, maximise the funds available by obtaining the best value in contracting arrangements, maximise the use of stock through a structured approach to stock management and maximise access to resources by cataloguing and circulating them in an organised way.

- 65 As part of the review and development of our stock policy we will be looking to sector best practice, learning from colleagues across the UK to take the best from good practice in the library, bookselling and publishing sectors. We will also be inviting sector experts to act as 'critical friends' to review our work in this area.

Outreach & Participation

- 66 The Phase 1 Needs Assessment recommended the development of vibrant and sustainable outreach, participation and partnership working. In response to this, and as part of the wider Culture, Sport & Tourism restructure, a new Libraries Outreach & Participation team has been established with dedicated engagement roles to help to ensure our venues are recognised and valued as community hubs for a range of services, activities, events, and social interaction, and that our programmes are at the heart of both rural and town communities in County Durham.
- 67 The new team will manage and develop all aspects of library outreach & participation, including peripatetic library services, to deliver innovative library programmes and events with the aim of creating experiences that are intriguing and inspiring, widening participation and supporting audience development, ensuring that our library service develops the capacity and agency of local communities to participate meeting the current and future expectations of users and stakeholders
- 68 The team includes a specialist Reader Development role to lead on a countywide reader development and literacy programme delivered as part of the year round Durham Reads initiative linked to the Durham Book Festival. This new role is tasked with managing the development and delivery of high-quality, comprehensive library programmes which develop literacy skills, acting as a lead advocate for reading, including development and support for grassroots reading groups, literature festivals and family reading programmes. They will work with colleagues in the wider service to establish creative, contemporary, enjoyable and community-focussed programmes that meet the current and future expectations of users and stakeholders.

- 69 New dedicated Library Engagement Support Officer roles have also been created to support and deliver engagement activities across the life course. These roles will develop, deliver and contract high-quality, engagement activities and events across the county and support and contribute to engagement activities and audience development working closely with employees in individual libraries, community partners and the wider library sector.
- 70 The team will embed Libraries Connected's Universal Library Offer⁹ which is focussed around four key areas: Reading, Health and Wellbeing, Digital and Information, and Culture and Creativity.
- 71 The creation of this team will ensure we have a strategic approach to programming that both recognises both the need for a more targeted universal offer across the county's library service while also being mindful of individual library demographics and the needs of the individual community our libraries serve. This approach will enable the service to encourage sharing of best practice, provide greater opportunity for professional development within our teams, and sharing of resource and staff capacity for coordinated delivery of programmes.
- 72 An early target for the engagement team's work is increasing our reach to target low literacy levels. Development of key partnerships has begun to address this including work with Family Hubs, NHS Foundation Trust and Early Years Team to get BookTrust toddler, pre-schooler, additional needs and dual language packs into homes and settings across the county. The team have also begun working with the Literacy Trust to contact teachers from across the county about the library offer, and to look at ways libraries can work in partnership with local schools to increase the reach of The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge 2024.

Know Your Neighbourhood

- 73 The Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN) Fund is a £30 million package of funding from the DCMS and the National Lottery, designed to widen participation in volunteering and tackle loneliness in 27 disadvantaged areas across England. The target areas were identified using data on:
- 1) people and local economy factors (for example, household incomes, local labour markets, economic and multidimensional deprivation)

⁹ [Universal Library Offers | Libraries Connected](#)

- 2) strength of civil society and community factors (for example, depth and breadth of local VCSE activity and funding, level of volunteering and community participation)

County Durham is one of the 27 target areas.

- 74 Libraries Connected is one of three delivery bodies working in partnership with Arts Council England to deliver £5 million of the KYN Fund to arts and culture organisations. The other organisations are the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) and Creative Lives.
- 75 The funds allocated to libraries in target areas under Strand One are being managed and distributed through Libraries Connected. Applications for grants up to £88k were assessed in summer 2023 with projects delivering for the remainder of the 2023 to March 2025.
- 76 The County Durham Library service was successful in securing the maximum grant for a programme of work using reading for wellbeing to address chronic loneliness for residents served by the Stanley Library Cluster. The proposal builds on a successful pilot programme delivered in Stanley in 2022/23 that highlighted issues of loneliness and was funded by Public Health and local author Ann Cleeves.
- 77 During the pilot a common issue for participants were feelings of isolation and depression. Feedback has shown that engaging with the project reduced loneliness and improved wellbeing.
- 78 Understanding of the community has also grown through the development of the pilot. The 2022/2023 work focused on connections with local organisations, building an understanding of the needs of the locality where library participation is low. We worked closely with many local groups, including LGBTQIA+ group, older people with mental health issues and families visiting the local food bank.
- 79 The areas included in the Stanley library cluster are all areas of high deprivation. Large parts are in the top 10-20% most deprived LSOA's nationally for overall, employment, health and income. Recent DCMS research 'Investigating factors associated with loneliness in adults in England' has found that people with disabilities/longstanding health conditions were three times more likely to experience chronic loneliness as those without. These are all significant problems across the area. Additionally, Age UK data shows that people living within the Stanley areas are at high risk of loneliness.
- 80 The KYN funded project will target vulnerable groups within the community, working with community centres, nursing homes and foodbanks. The project aims to reduce the proportion of chronically lonely people by enabling them to engage in activities and build social

connections. The project will take an intergenerational approach, tackling loneliness by embedding the principles of Community Wellbeing, through engagement with libraries and participatory arts. It will also work closely with healthcare providers to ensure that it is part of Social Prescribing offer locally.

- 81 The project will work within the community, encouraging engagement with books, reading for pleasure, chatting/ meeting new friends, building relationships, social inclusion, improving wellbeing. It will also promote the wide range of activities we offer in libraries and community spaces, reaching people who will gain the confidence to visit their local library/ or community space to access services, and hopefully signpost to volunteering opportunities.

Summary

- 82 Work has begun on addressing and responding to the recommendations outlined in the Phase 1 Needs Assessment report, with initial areas of focus including:
- 1) desktop review of physical library network,
 - 2) digital content and infrastructure,
 - 3) stock policy review,
 - 4) development of strategic outreach and participation.
- 83 As a result of savings requirements, available resource to effect the entirety of the recommendations are very limited. Therefore, in the short/medium term we will focus on the areas which can be undertaken within current budgets. However, good progress is being made where possible and external funds have been secured from the national Know Your Neighbourhood programme to deliver outreach and participation work in the Stanley Library cluster. It is hoped that a funding application to the ACE administered Libraries Improvement Fund will bring in an additional £500k of external funding to support digital improvements and co-location of Woodhouse library.
- 84 Libraries continue to be seen by many who currently use them as welcoming, free, safe, inclusive, and non-judgemental spaces that belong to everyone. They are recognised and valued as community hubs for a range of services, activities, events, and social interaction, at the heart of both rural and town communities.

Background papers:

None

Contact

Alison Clark

alison.clark@durham.gov.uk

Sarah Glynn

sarah.glynn@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Covered in report

Finance

Covered in report

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Any proposals will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Although not specifically detailed in this report, climate change and sustainability will be key considerations in further review of the physical library estate.

Crime and Disorder

Although not specifically detailed in this report, it is still expected that libraries will have a positive contribution to overall social value, which will include crime and disorder, but also a much broader and holistic impact across a number of dimensions.

Staffing

Not impacted at this stage

Accommodation

Not impacted at this stage

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Any procurement in relation to this programme will be undertaken under the Council's contract procurement rules and with advice of the corporate procurement team

Appendix 2 Counterculture Library Transformation (Under Separate Cover)