

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

County Durham Libraries

20 December 2023



Purpose:

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.

Outline of Presentation

1. Overview and context of the Library Service
2. Library Transformation – update
 - a) Physical library network
 - b) Digital – content & infrastructure
 - c) Stock policy review
 - d) Outreach & participation
3. Summary and next steps





“Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore and achieve and contribute to improving our quality of life. Libraries change lives for the better.”

Sidney Sheldon

Public Libraries are a statutory service, as defined under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

Upper tier authorities have an obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient service'.

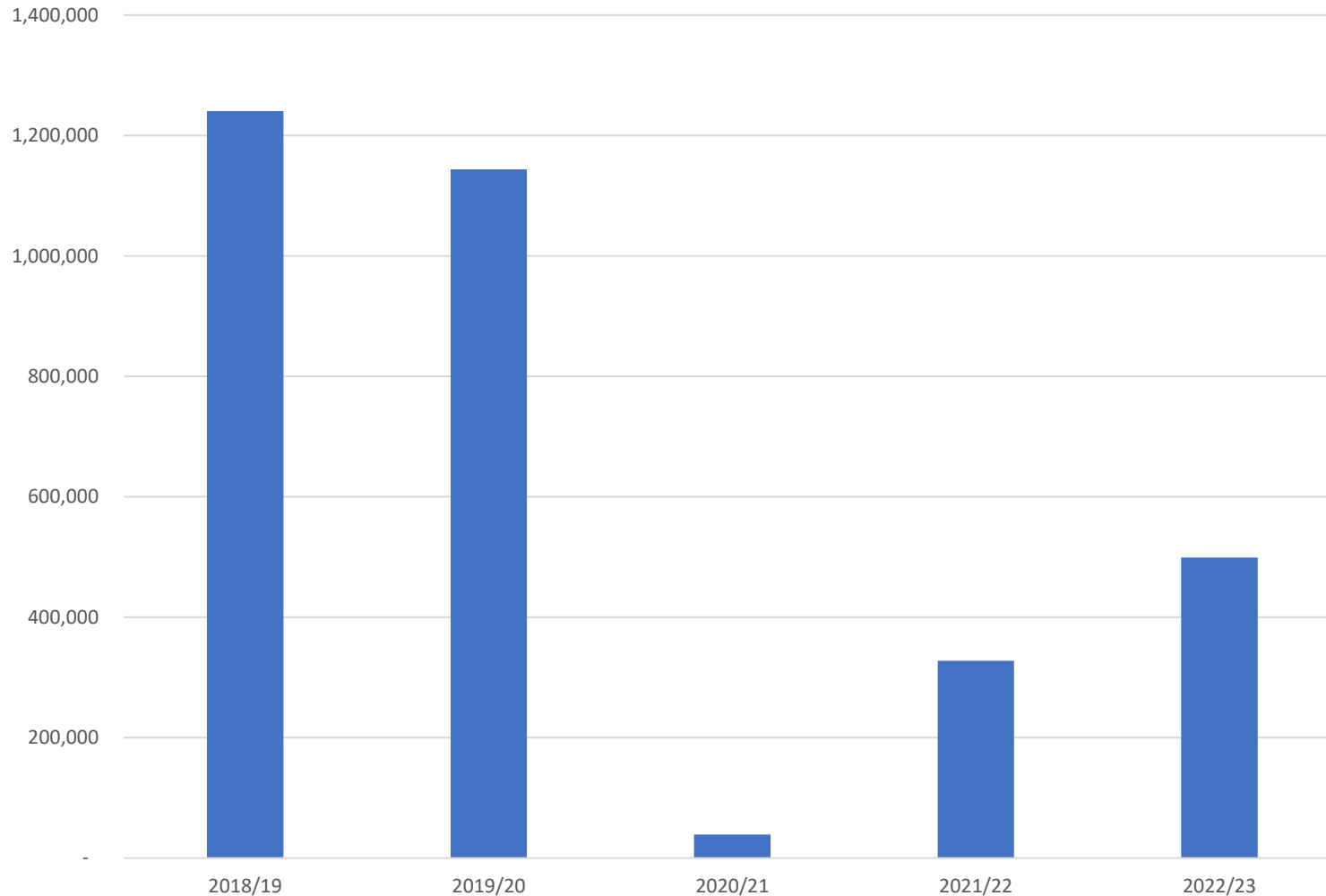


County Durham Libraries – an overview

- **39 libraries** - City Centre (1), town centre (11), community (27)
- **Books on wheels** – delivered services to over 150 clients own homes
- **Book bus** – vehicle calling at care homes to enable clients to choose their own books
- **Mobile library service** - delivering to over 80 settlements across the largely rural west of the county
- **Sevenhills – library HQ** - shared building with CYPS, from which stock support is managed, vehicles housed and distribution takes place, prison library service base, county bookstore, and Growing and Learning team base.
- **Online presence** – access to e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines, online book ordering and renewal



Total in person library visits to County Durham libraries in the last 5 years



2022/2023

- **500,000** in-person visits to libraries
- **43,000** active borrowers
- **106,000** books issued
- **7679** public events, workshops, groups and activities



Phase 1 Needs Assessment recommendations

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



Initial areas of focus

1. Desktop review of the existing physical library network
2. Review of technology, digital content and infrastructure
3. Review of the current stock and content policy
4. Develop an ambitious plan for outreach and partnerships, and development of a compelling and accessible events programme



“When in doubt, go to the library.”
JK Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of
Secrets

Physical Library Network

Desktop review looked at:

- Venue costs
- Building conditions
- Repairs and Maintenance
5- year projections

**In challenging economic times
what could, and should a modern
transformation of our physical
library estate look like?**

Headlines:

- Venues cost £3.2 million in 2022/2023
- Cost per visit £3.25-£23.03
- Condition of library venues graded as satisfactory or poor



Digital Content & Infrastructure



- Counterculture LLP commissioned to review digital challenges, issues and opportunities
- 12 recommendations and a framework to take forward digital transformation over the next 5 years
- Application made to ACE Libraries Improvement Fund for £500k to support digital work – outcome expected March 2024



Key digital tasks 2023/2024

- 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
- Continuing to review excellence in the sector and opportunities for learning and development.



Stock Policy Review

Objectives of the Stock Policy are to:

- Promote a unified approach in stock selection and management
- Improve and develop our stock
- Enable increased efficiency and effective management of our bookfund
- Present, provide and improve stock which is relevant and attractive to library users.
- Increase the use of our stock
- Promote literacy and reading





'How to Survive an Agatha Christie Novel'
 A "choose your own adventure" journey with author Kate Jackson
Durham Clayport Library
Monday 27th November 2.00pm

Imagine waking up in the universe of Agatha Christie's mysteries. Would you have what it takes to survive? You, the audience, will vote on which location to visit next and which actions you wish to take. Some of these decisions will have immediate effects, whilst others will have delayed consequences. Will you make the right decisions and reach a happy conclusion or will your journey end in murder?

This is no ordinary author talk!
Free. Please book your place 03000 265524

Signed copies of Kate's new book, 'How to Survive a Classic Crime Novel' will be available for purchase



Outreach & Participation

- New outreach and participation team created in CST phase 2 restructure
- Embedding the Libraries Connected Universal Library Offer
- Developing strategic approach to programming
- Better linkages to DBF through year round Durham Reads initiative
- Secured £88k (maximum available grant) from DCMS Know Your Neighbourhood programme



Be Scam Aware

FREE Scam Aware Information Event

Protect yourself or your loved ones from the dangers of scams with a little help from Home Instead and our public education programme, which helps educate older people and their families on how to avoid falling victim to fraud.

We will raise awareness of the types of scams that are targeted towards older people online, by phone and unsolicited mail.

Home Instead Durham are holding **FREE Scam Aware Talks** for older people, family members, family carers and people throughout the community, who may be vulnerable themselves, or know or work with people who may be a target for scammers. Come along and find out how to keep safe.

To find out the date and location of the next session in your area and to reserve

Thursday 30th November
 10.30 - 11.30am
 Chester le Street



Summary

- Work has begun on addressing the recommendations outlined in the Phase 1 Needs Assessment report
- Initial areas of focus are:
 - (a) desktop review of physical library network,
 - (b) digital content and infrastructure,
 - (c) stock policy review,
 - (d) development of strategic outreach and participation.
- External funding has been secured from the KYN fund (£88k) and an application has been submitted to the ACE LIF (£500k) with an outcome expected in March 2024.



Next Steps

- Explore further opportunities for co-locations to ensure the most efficient use of physical assets and staffing resource
- Take forward work on implementing recommendations and year 1 key tasks from the Digital Review, noting that some of this work is subject to external funding bids
- Complete works to co-locate Woodhouse Close library with the leisure centre as part of leisure transformation
- Complete stock policy review
- Embed the universal library offer in outreach and participation programmes
- Deliver Durham Reads linked to our NPO funded Durham Book Festival
- Explore further funding opportunities to deliver against Phase 1 recommendations





“You want weapons? We're in a library. Books are the best weapon in the world. This room's the greatest arsenal we could have. Arm yourself!”

The Tenth Doctor