



Thursday 11 March 2021

LIBRARIES TRANSFORMATION

Purpose of report:

To provide an update on the Libraries Transformation programme and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress.

Introduction:

1. The Libraries Transformation programme forms a key part of Surrey County Council's (SCC) wider, ambitious programme of transformation across many of its services to meet the needs of Surrey residents and provide greater value for money. It supports SCC's 'empowering communities' agenda, which seeks to stimulate local engagement and involvement, putting residents at the very heart of the design and delivery of local services.
2. On 26 November 2019, [Cabinet approved the Library and Cultural Services Strategy 2020–2025 and future model for service delivery](#). This included a clear commitment to maintaining 52 libraries across the county and to taking a local, co-design approach, that actively involves key stakeholders, residents and other services to shape the local library offer.
3. [Research underpinning the strategy](#) identified four particular groups as having the greatest social need in Surrey and consequently the potential to benefit most from a library transformation: children and young people; older adults – aged 75+; working age hardship amongst adults relating to low skills; health and wellbeing indicators including mental health. The programme aims to address the needs of these groups in particular, whilst continuing to provide a universal service which SCC has a statutory duty to provide. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the 1964 Act) sets out the statutory duty for all local authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service.
4. This research also indicated that although many older adults use Surrey libraries, a larger proportion of children and young people use the service compared to the overall population. By understanding community needs and working with a wider range of partners, the programme aims to appeal to a larger and more diverse

audience from across the county, including teenagers, working age adults and individuals with disabilities and from different ethnic backgrounds.

5. The transformation programme seeks to align with the government's vision and ambition for libraries nationally, which is detailed in the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) report [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021](#). This report recognises that "the way people use libraries and their expectations of public services are changing. Financial and demographic challenges are increasing. Standing still is not an option. Strong local leadership of libraries, focused on meeting community needs, is vital."
6. The role of libraries will continue to be to provide books, resources, learning and skills, information, culture and a centre for communities, however, the context in which libraries operate is changing rapidly. The challenges facing public libraries are set out in the [Library and Cultural Services Strategy 2020–2025](#). Libraries in Surrey need to modernise to respond to these changes and challenges.
7. The approval of the strategy laid the foundations for a journey of modernisation and a transformation programme was set up to deliver this. The recent bringing together of cultural services with other customer and community work and functions and the appointment of Mark Nuti as Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities (including libraries) shows both Political and wider organisational commitment to the importance of libraries within this context.
8. This is a significant and complex programme of change for the county that will take a number of years. Whilst COVID-19 has presented challenges to the programme, good progress has been made in other areas. This report highlights the positive progress made since Cabinet approval of the Strategy.

Aims of the Programme:

9. The ambition of the programme is to develop modern, inclusive libraries that build strong relationships with our communities and put the needs of our residents at the centre of everything we do.
10. Modern libraries are important shared public spaces within local communities. They are bright, inviting, flexible spaces that encourage reading and learning through providing valuable book collections and resources, a social space for cultural activities and community events, business support, a gateway to public services and much more. This will become increasingly important as the programme looks to respond to the multiple challenges experienced by residents in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Modern libraries are supported by improved digital platforms, effective IT and Wi-Fi infrastructure, extended opening hours using Open Access technology, a vibrant activity programme shaped to the

needs of the local area and maximised partnership and co-location opportunities. These library spaces and services will contribute - alongside other initiatives, investments and projects - to creating greater places for residents to live, work and learn.

11. The Programme aims to enact the DCMS [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 report](#), which describes what modernising library services means in terms of ambition. The ambition is for everyone to:

- choose to use libraries because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so
- understand what library services offer, and how they can make the most of what's available to them
- be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills and information they need to improve their quality of life
- receive trusted guidance through the evolving information landscape and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world

12. Responding to both the Library and Cultural Services Strategy 2020–2025 and Libraries Deliver ambition, the libraries transformation programme will enhance the valuable role libraries play in changing lives for the better, actively responding to local needs and issues and supporting COVID-recovery. It plays a clear role in supporting all four of the County Council's strategic priorities:

- Growing a sustainable economy
- Tackling health inequality
- Enabling a greener future
- Empowering communities

13. More specifically, the programme seeks to achieve the following seven key outcomes:

- **Improved user experience and a positive, welcoming, accessible service** (both physical and virtual)
- **Increased and improved service offer and initiatives**, designed to develop community skills and give more people access to cultural experiences and events

- **More inclusive and relevant service** to meet the diverse needs of everyone who lives, works and studies in Surrey
- **Increased partnership-working** with residents, funders, local businesses and organisations, other SCC services and external providers
- **“Greener” library model** – sustainable buildings and design, procurement and operating practices
- **Improved service efficiency and innovation** (reduced cost, increased impact)
- **Stronger workforce** - agile, diverse and motivated to better serve residents

Programme Progress:

14. Understandably, due to COVID-19, some of the Libraries transformation work has had to slow down, such as co-design work face-to-face with residents. However, a great number of achievements were celebrated. These included:

- Created new ways for users to enjoy and access library resources through the COVID-19 pandemic via the click and collect and ‘Ready Reads’ (this involves staff curating books or audiobooks to meet user preferences) service
- Developed a new and improved libraries’ digital offer, including access to an increased range of free online resources (including access to over 300,00 eBooks, eAudiobooks, newspapers and magazines) and an extensive online events programme via [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) (attracting over ¼ million views during a six-month period)
- [Cabinet agreement to rebuild Caterham Hill library, benefitting residents through providing an extended service offer](#)
- New partnership opportunities created to enable ideas, skills and knowledge to be shared for the benefit of residents e.g. joining the British Library’s Living Knowledge Network
- Library apprenticeships launched to support young people in Surrey
- Professional Accreditation for staff launched through partnership with Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals
- Developed plans and preparation for how local co-design will work, look and feel

- Consultation on proposed libraries staff restructure launched to empower frontline staff and enable leadership at every level
- £2.3m efficiencies achieved to date (of an overall £4m target over 5 years) whilst maintaining frontline services
- Initial analysis on all library buildings to help inform future modernisation plans
- Procured software to better support customer self-service

Programme Approach:

15. A structured programme has been established in order to manage the scale of transformation needed to modernise library services and successfully deliver the aims of the Libraries and Cultural Services strategy and the benefits for residents.

Programme Structure

16. The programme consists of a number of interconnected projects and workstreams, with the key ones focusing on Technology, Workforce, Property and Co-design, as summarised briefly below:

- **Technology & Operations** – investing in and promoting new technologies to improve access to services and provide more learning opportunities. This will support the SCC’s [Digital Strategy 2025](#).
- **Workforce Development & Remodelling Library Services** – delivering a new workforce structure and development strategy to empower frontline staff, enable leadership at every level, increase diversity and improve customer service
- **Property** – modernising buildings and providing more flexible, welcoming spaces that can accommodate a range of services and partnerships and deliver better value for money for residents
- **Co-design** – involving staff, residents, partners and organisations in the design, delivery and evaluation of their local library service to better meet their needs

Co-design Plan

17. A recommendation within the [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 - 2021](#) report is that local authorities “co-design and co-create their services with the active support, engagement and participation of their communities so services are accessible and available to all who need them.”

18. SCC are using a co-design approach to engage in conversations with the community, local organisations and partners to understand how we can create modern library services that respond to local needs and preferences.

19. The programme will adopt a six-stage process to co-design as set out in figure 1.

Figure 1

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Focus and steer	Profile people and place	Research community	Community participation	Design, develop and plan	Implement, evaluate, learn
Be clear on the breadth and depth of the conversation with local people and the question being asked	Collate existing data and information to find out about the place / community across a variety of related factors including economic, social, environmental and health	Collate existing data and information to learn more about the people who live, work and study in the location and the local area and gain an understanding of needs	Engage communities in conversations and involve them in activities to find out about their experiences, thoughts and ideas about libraries services and what they need	Working together with people and communities explore ideas and options and collectively create proposals to take forward into development and implementation	Deliver improved, collaborative services designed with local people for their area and community

20. The first library locations for co-design have been determined as: Caterham Hill and Valley, Redhill and libraries in the Guildford and Woking boroughs. Work has already started in a number of these locations around stages 1-3 of the co-design approach, preparing the way for full community participation.

Forward Plan

21. The programme has an ambitious forward plan of work that will include the following over the next six months:

- Start engaging with communities as part of our co-design work and develop co-design plans for other libraries in the county.
- Put a new library staff structure in place, based on staff consultation and conversations, that will strengthen and diversify our workforce, including through training and development.
- Join the Libraries Consortium to enable our residents to use their Surrey library card to access libraries in Essex and 18 London boroughs, giving them access to more than 5 million resources.
- Work on making our library spaces more efficient and effective, based on in-depth analysis.
- Implement more modern technology so that people can use library spaces outside of usual opening hours.

COVID-19 Impact on the Programme:

22. COVID-19 has slowed down aspects of the Libraries transformation work, in particular co-design work, but there have been a number of great achievements, including the acceleration of digital events, activities and resources for residents to continue to access services and cultural experiences.

23. Given the latest lockdown and government guidance, the key priority for the programme has been to ensure that libraries in Surrey remain open for key services and that these can be delivered in a COVID secure way for both users and staff. COVID-19 has caused a range of challenges to the programme including delaying co-design conversations with local communities.
24. The anticipated financial benefits from the programme have not been impacted by COVID-19 and the programme is still on track to deliver £800k efficiencies through the new library workforce structure during 2020-21. To date £2.3m savings have been achieved through increased efficiencies whilst maintaining frontline services. The programme is still working to the commitment of maintaining 52 libraries and continuing to improve the library service offer for residents.
25. The findings of SCC's [COVID-19 Community Impact Assessment](#) highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on households, local economies and businesses and indeed broader wellbeing. Faced with these challenges, the council recognises the key role of libraries as community anchors that are well placed to support recovery from COVID-19 with a particular focus on supporting local economies and promoting health and wellbeing.

Conclusions:

26. The Libraries Transformation programme aligns with the Council's wider commitment to transform services for the benefit of its residents. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 which has slowed delivery on some elements of the programme, good progress has been made to date and some areas have been accelerated.
27. The programme has a clear future direction which recognises the key role that libraries play in communities and its contribution to successful COVID-19 recovery.

Recommendations:

28. The Select Committee notes the progress of the Libraries Transformation programme and future direction.

Next steps:

29. Further review of the Libraries Transformation programme in winter 2021.

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Sources/background papers

Sources:

[Cabinet Meeting – 26 November 2019](#)

[Library and Cultural Services Strategy 2020-2025](#)

[Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021](#)

[Cabinet Meeting – 27 October 2020](#)

[Digital Strategy 2025](#)

[COVID-19 Community Impact Assessment](#)

Background papers:

[Carnegie Diagram](#)

[Libraries and Cultural Services Transformation Strategy Consultation Analysis - January 2019](#)

[CFLLC Select Committee Meeting – 12 September 2019](#)

[Cabinet Meeting – 18 October 2018](#)

[Cabinet Meeting – 16 July 2019](#)