CHILDRENS, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE
SELECT COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2024

An Update on the Modernisation of the Libraries Estate as part of Libraries and Cultural Services Transformation

Purpose of report:

To provide an update about the modernisation of Library Estate as part of the Library and Cultural Services Transformation programme, including refurbishment of Epsom, Redhill, Staines and Woking and the impact of Open Access technology, and to set out the vision for the future of our library network.

Executive Summary:

- This report summarises the Transformation activity to date to modernise the library estate focused on the first phase of key libraries, explains the difference this will make for residents and how it will draw even more residents into using the service.

- This report provides an update about Super Access, using new technology to extend library opening hours, making them more accessible and encouraging residents to use libraries at times that suit them.

- This report confirms the benefits of the Transformation programme and includes Key Performance Indicators and financial benefits. The report also recognises and celebrates Surrey Libraries as an exemplar service nationally.

- This report sets out how evidence about user need is gathered regularly through data, co-design and resident feedback and is used by the library service to ensure it is meeting user need on an on-going basis.

- The report outlines the Library Service Budget and confirms the sufficiency to deliver the strategic aims of the service.

- The report includes a Future of the library service section that covers future challenges and sets out the plan to develop a new Library Strategy that would sit within a wider, holistic, 'One Surrey' place-based approach to the provision

of community services, anchored by key common principles but bespoke to each community.

- The reports sets out some conclusions, recommendations and next steps with a further update to the committee on progress in 2025/2026.

Introduction:

1. A multi-million pound investment into Surrey's libraries was approved by Surrey County Council's Cabinet in June 2023 to modernise services and create flexible, innovative and inclusive spaces. This investment was agreed to revolutionise the libraries offer, delivering the Libraries and Cultural Services Strategy 2020 - 2025 to ensure that Surrey libraries provide a service that is fit for the future and accessible to all.

2. The first phase of this work is focussed on key libraries including Epsom, Redhill, Staines, Woking and Weybridge with completion expected by the end of 2025. The plans include significant changes at each location, including the creation of additional community 'hubs' in Staines (relocating to a new improved site) and Weybridge (including a significant rebuild).

3. **Super Access** technology is being rolled out across Surrey's libraries, enabling residents to visit their library during additional unstaffed hours and self-serve with their library membership card. In many cases this is providing over thirty weekly hours of additional access per library. Technology is making library services more efficient, engaging, and accessible and provides more learning opportunities for those who live, work and study in Surrey.

4. This paper describes the progress to date of this programme of activity, how the library service is shaping its service offer through taking a collaborative approach with other services and co-designing with residents and partners. It also describes how the service will continue to evolve to meet resident need as part of the council's wider place-based work, creating a sustainable model and building on the positive impact of the transformation programme.

Modernisation of the Library Estate: progress to date

5. The Library & Cultural Services Strategy 2020-2025 sets out the Council's commitment to retaining 52 libraries, within their existing localities. The ambition was to deliver modern and progressive libraries that are bright, welcoming, flexible spaces creating vibrant hubs for each local community.

6. The Libraries Transformation Update and the Next Phase, Modernising Our Library Estate (agreed by Cabinet in November 2021), outlined how the transformation of the library estate would be achieved through a phased programme of work funded by capital funding as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The programme team worked hard in line with the

policy direction to ensure that this investment benefited all libraries regardless of size or location. This provided an equitable approach linked to community need, taking into account the condition of existing buildings and opportunities to deliver positive change with local partners.

7. Since the capital allocation was agreed, work has been undertaken with SCC Land & Property to determine the requirements for each library and a timeline for completion. The timeline for delivery will take us beyond the life of the original strategy.

8. In June 2023 Cabinet agreed the business cases to deliver the five major transformation projects at Epsom, Woking, Redhill, Staines, and Weybridge libraries. The current timeline for these works is:

   - Weybridge: works started June 2024; Library due to open March 2025 (wider hub due to be completed by May 2025)
   - Epsom: Works started August 2024; due for completion Jan 2025
   - Staines: Works started September 2024, due for completion May 2025.
   - Redhill: Works started October 2024; due for completion June 2025
   - Woking: Works started July 2024, due for completion December 2024

9. The five priority projects account for 24% of current users and will provide hub facilities in their communities with a potential reach of over 300,000 residents. They will all offer a fully flexible layout enabling the furniture to move around to create space for events and performances, partner organisations, community use and exhibitions alongside meeting spaces and modern furniture to provide welcoming and adaptable facilities.

10. In parallel to the development of business cases for the projects and works at all other libraries have been completed. Modern furniture is being put into libraries to make them more comfortable, welcoming spaces and residents are involved through co-design in the changes at their local library. This includes the introduction of flexible shelving on wheels that allows the library space to be transformed to suit a huge range of events and activities from author events to dance performances. It will also facilitate the space being used for other purposes and services, creating multi use environments.

11. The Surrey Library Service offer in each location will also be enhanced through improvements to technology with the provision of digital screens and refreshment facilities adjacent to comfortable seating areas. The rollout of these facilities is about to start, with the aim of drawing even more residents into our libraries and appeal to all by providing an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming service at the heart of our local communities.

Super Access in Surrey Libraries

12. The Library and Cultural Services strategy also included a clear commitment to encourage as many residents as possible to use their local library. To encourage greater use, the library service is also in the process of rolling out Super Access, as a means of extending the opening hours of libraries by

enabling self-managed access, outside staffed opening hours using the library membership card.

13. Super Access has been successfully installed at 7 locations across the county enabling an increase in opening hours and accessibility to residents. Residents can use libraries from 8am to 8pm 7 days a week including bank holidays. To date over 2400 residents have signed up for Super Access. Plans are in place to install Super Access at 7 further locations as part of the libraries wider transformation works.

    See Annex A for details of where Super Access has been installed and is planned.

14. There will be a full review of the first phase of Super Access following the completion of first phase of rollout in all 14 locations, but to date, feedback has been very positive. Comments the service has received highlight the ability to study, support residents who work and accessibility on previously closed days:

    "So useful to be able to go in outside opening times, often take kids on a Sunday morning to swap out their books!!"

    "Thank you all so much for Super Access at Horley Library. My son was able to meet up with a like-minded friend to study for GCSE's. He was so motivated by being able to study with a friend rather than on his own."

Benefits of the Transformation programme

15. The Library and Cultural services transformation programme has delivered significant benefits to residents since its strategy was approved in November 2019. This has included changes to enhance customer service, new technology (PCs, Wi-Fi, Super Access, and self-service) and improvements to some buildings leading to an increased range of events and activities.

16. A large part of the library transformation has been about ensuring staff are fully trained and understand the key role they play within their local community. Staff can signpost residents to the full range of Surrey County Council services and engage customers with an inspiring array of events and activities, groups, and clubs, including digital literacy courses, campaigns and promotions including regular scams awareness sessions and so much more.

17. The result of these changes is that Surrey Libraries are now one of the busiest library services in the country. In the last 12 months library events have increased by 56% to 1,095. Events attendees are up by 43% to 244,704 and registered library borrowers up to 322,325, the highest since 2017.

18. The Library Service has also been recognised nationally as an "exemplary Library Service" confirmed by a recent internal benchmarking exercise with

other similar library authorities. This achievement should be celebrated, as recognition of the hard work and the support of the county council.

19. **The Table below shows the Library Transformation benefits delivered by 2023/2024**.

Library Service Transformation Benefits	Actual	Total v Target	Net % v Target
Increased number of physical visitors* (face to face total).	3,020,961	87%	-13%
Increased online engagement via virtual visitors.	1,122,137	117%	+17%
Increased number of book issues. Increase book issues will assist in increasing literacy rates and the wellbeing of local communities.	3,403,689	128%	+28%
Increased number of repeat library visitors.	112,221	103%	+3%
Increased number of e-audio, e-books, e-comics, e-magazines, e-newspapers	567,229	267%	+167%
Increased number of events in libraries and through outreach	1,037	1071%	+971%
Increased participation through events in libraries and through outreach	54,686	446%	+346%

*Visitor numbers were impacted in 23-24 by one off events/closures to Redhill due to RAAC, the Super Access installation at 4 libraries, Frimley Green roof issues as well as other building related closures for minor works.

In 2024-25 and 2025-26 the visitor numbers will be heavily impacted by the substantial property works across five major libraries. This has been profiled into service targets. The benefits from visitors will start to be seen from 2025-26.

Financial Benefits: Savings delivered by the Transformation Programme

20. The table indicates the reduction in budgets achieved through the transformation programme that successfully delivered reduced cost and increased impact. However, that does limit the scope for further major changes without taking a whole council approach which is the focus for our next steps and vision for the future.

Year	Staffing costs £000	Operating costs £000	Total target £000
2019/20	1,500		1,500
2020/21	600	200	800
2021/22	600		600

2022/23	280	270	550
2023/24*	0	0	0
Total	**2,980**	**470**	**3,450**

*Revenue savings achieved by the Library Service in 2023/2024 sat outside the transformation programme of activity.

Data, Co-design and Resident feedback

21. The Library Services strategy and approach was designed to deliver a county-wide service that also meets local need. The service uses a combination of best practice, data, and co-design to continuously improve its service to provide better outcomes for residents, building customer trust, confidence, and satisfaction.

22. Libraries have a rich data set of anonymised information from its membership database, and this is combined with locality-based data from Surrey-I and other council information sources to develop a deep understanding of each local community. This is applied in each library location to enable the service to provide a targeted offer to meet the needs of users and the community.

23. Alongside the data, a co-design methodology is applied to all resident engagement to achieve insight and input into all aspects of the service offer. This co-design activity takes place in all libraries across the county and covers the refurbishment of libraries, new programmes of events and activities and new service offers.

24. This approach is tested through user satisfaction surveys which the service has completed over the last two years. The findings from these surveys confirms the Library Service understands and continues to meet the needs of users. Of the 5832 people who completed the survey in Jan 2024:
    - 96% of surveyed achieved what they wanted to do when they visited the library.
    - 83% said the customer service they received was good or particularly good.
    - 70% use a library for book borrowing,
    - 49% attended a library event of which 78% thought the event was 'good' or 'very good'
    - 60% of those who were lonely said the library helped to reduce their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Library Service Budget

25. The budget for the library service is set with sufficiency to deliver the strategic aims and there are no current barriers to the development of the service.

There are three main parts of the budget in control of the service. These are Staffing, resources, (book fund) and supplies and services.

24-25 Budget:

+£6,996,300   Staffing budget.
+£904,000   Resources budget (book fund).
+£471,000   Supplies and Services.
-£245,600   Income - Recovery of Costs of commissioned services
-£636,700   Income – Fees & Charges
+£7,489,000   Total Net Budget.

The Future of the Library Service

26. The Council has an unobstructed vision and ambition to be able to bring together resources and people in locations to ensure that we can meet a wide range of needs and are able to deliver our vision that No-one is left behind. This has been captured through the Towns and Villages approach set out in the Cabinet report of 28 March 2023, included in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and our Prevention and Customer Transformation Programmes. This is aimed to support a strategic approach of delivering in partnership in towns, to address key priorities for residents, communities, partners, and the County Council.

27. The Council's vision for multi-purpose hubs in local communities and provision of flexible community spaces accessible to all, the libraries transformation is of vital importance and becoming a reality in a number of key locations. This is being expanded and to test new offers for the community which can be scaled up and rolled out in an iterative approach to enhancing the local offer.

28. Library premises are well located, play a critical part of the existing community infrastructure, and have staff with developing skills to be able to support a wider range of customer's needs. Our ambition is to embed a wider range of services and partners into these facilities where appropriate to expand the hub network and approach.

29. Our existing investment means we have the potential to deliver a dynamic network of connected services all supporting the Council's vision to ensure No One is Left Behind.

30. A new Library Strategy would sit within a wider, holistic, "One Surrey" place-based approach to community services providing accessible advice, guidance, and support, anchored by key common principles but bespoke to each community for example, including prevention, independent living, digital inclusion, economic development, and cultural engagement. This would build on the current Libraries and Cultural Services Strategy which sets out the three tiers of library:

- Library Plus e.g. Woking and Staines
- Library e.g. Weybridge and Reigate
- Community Led Library e.g. Stoneleigh and Tattenhams.

See Annex A for details.

31. An example of this in practice is community initiatives such as the "Warm Welcome" offer. As well as offering a free, heated space, libraries deliver a range of other support, including entertainment, cultural activities, free hot drinks, and advice sessions on topics like household budgeting. Other initiatives include providing free warm clothing and blankets, sanitary products.

32. The Warm welcome as well as the Independent Skills Programme are examples of "commissioned services" that allow libraries to extend their offer, helping to support residents to stay independent for longer. Surrey Libraries have been commissioned to provide services like these which help combat social isolation, including reading groups and the 'Independent Skills' programme which residents are referred to that covers topics such as mental wellbeing, digital inclusion, and financial advice.

33. Commissioned services provide a new income stream for the service, allowing it to extend its facilities and service offer in ways which would not otherwise be possible. The ambition is that the commissioned offer will build over the next few years to improve the customer experience in line with our mission and our organisational priorities.

34. Work will progress over the coming months to develop a countywide approach and ensure that the current Libraries and Cultural Services Strategy transitions seamlessly into the next phase of development aimed at improving outcomes for our residents.

Future Challenges

35. Cost of living and Covid have impacted income levels due to changing customer habits e.g. uptake of streaming services such as Netflix rather than hiring physical DVDs. We will continue to explore new income generating opportunities including donations and new service commissions.

36. Most of the libraries' controllable costs are staffing (76%). Ensuring staff have effective leadership and delivery skills for a rapidly evolving service, being active in their communities and encouraging people to get involved with their library is a key focus for the service now and in the future.

37. We want to continue to provide access to a wide and diverse range of current material for education and leisure; books, newspapers, journals, and reference material although the demand is increasing, and book inflation is rising which in turn makes that ambition challenging.

Conclusions

38. The Libraries and Cultural Services successful transformation formally came to an end at the end of March 2024. Whilst the formal programme has ended the work continues to deliver improvements across the county as the service offer continues to evolve. Over the next 2 years, the modernisation of the library estate will continue, providing extra hours of access, improved facilities, co-designing with residents and partners and ensuring every library is fit for the future, increasing impact, and reducing cost.

39. The successful transformation of the Library Service can form a key component of the councils' towns and villages ambition to create a network of interconnected community services with the resident at its heart.

40. A table listing all the physical libraries across Surrey – by division – with the future plans is listed in Annex A. A table with all libraries listed by division comparing footfall is provided in Annex B. A table setting out the building condition is currently being developed by SCC Land & Property.

Recommendations

41. To note the progress of the modernisation of the Library Estate. Library Transformation programme and future programme activity for the library service.

Next steps

To provide a further update to the committee on progress in 2025/2026.

Report contact

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Annexes

Annex A: Libraries by Division, planned and completed transformation works

Annex B: Table listing all the physical libraries across Surrey by Division – comparing physical footfall

Sources/background papers:

[Libraries transformation update and the next phase, modernising our library estate](#)
Cabinet report November 2021

[Increasing access to Library buildings](#) Cabinet Report June 2022

[The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee](#) update on
Libraries Transformation report. March 2021

[The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee](#) update on
Cultural Services

[LIBRARIES AND CULTURAL SERVICES: OUR NEXT PHASE, Cabinet Report 2019](#)

[Libraries and Cultural Services Strategy 2020-2025](#). November 2019.

[Surrey County Council Digital Inclusion Strategy.pdf](#) June 2024.

[Delivering in Partnership: Towns - The Next Phase](#) March 2023