

Report of the Director of Place to the meeting of Bradford South Area Committee to be held on 1 December 2022

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Subject:

Update on the work of libraries in Bradford South

Summary statement:

This report provides an update on Bradford Libraries Service since the previous report to this Committee about Libraries, in January 2022. It summarises overall developments in the Service since then, as well as a more detailed update on libraries in the South area.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

Bradford Libraries contribute to the 'Community' theme of the Council's equalities objectives, taking 'Action to support the creation of a place where everyone feels that they belong, are understood, feel safe and are able to fully participate in and contribute to the economic, social and civic life of the District.' By developing access to more services in libraries, local people will benefit from this more local support.

It also contributes to the 'Service Design' theme of the Council's equalities objectives, 'Ensuring that our services are designed in an accessible and an inclusive way including co-production with local people and organisations.' This principle has been used in the redevelopment of Wibsey Library and the creation of Development Plans with Community Managed Libraries.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Healthy People & Places

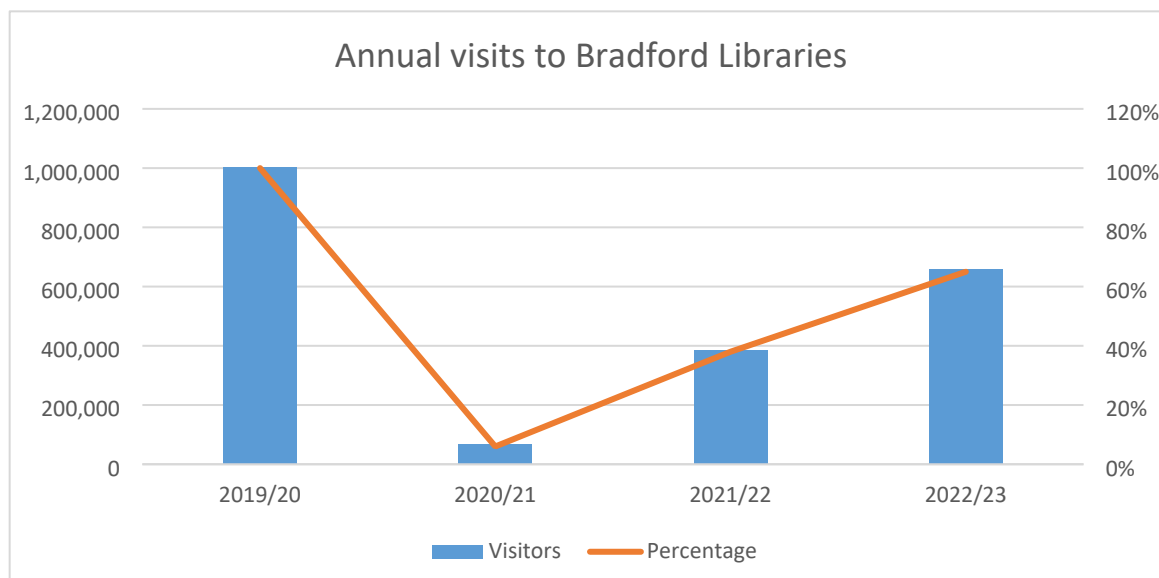
1. SUMMARY

The Library Service has made significant progress this year in terms of service recovery following the pandemic, in gaining investment for the service, and contributing to wider Council priorities and initiatives. The South area has particularly benefited from improvements to three of the libraries in the area, with the complete refurbishment of both Wibsey and Holme Wood Libraries and adaptations at Wyke Library, putting them in a strong position for the future.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Service Recovery

Libraries in Bradford resumed their normal opening hours, service offer, events and activities from September 2021, following national and local guidance, after a long period of service disruption during the Covid19 pandemic. Some community managed libraries have taken longer to fully resume normal services. The graph below shows the impact on visitor footfall since 2019/20 before the pandemic, and the steady increase in usage to a projected 65% recovery of the pre-pandemic level by the end of the current financial year 2022/3. The figures were also impacted by a number of library closures for refurbishment at Keighley, Wibsey, Holme Wood and Baildon. At the current trajectory, libraries are on track to recover close to pre-pandemic levels in 2023/4. The figures mirror national trends for libraries and local trends for other similar services such as museums.



2.2 External income

The Service has been successful in attracting external funding and support. This included £200,000 from Arts Council England's Libraries Improvement Fund for adaptations to library buildings to make them more flexible and usable by partner services and community groups. This 2 year programme (April 2022 – March 2024) will enable the introduction of movable shelving, small meeting rooms or 'pods, equipment and furniture to 10 libraries across the District including Wyke Library. Libraries have also been allocated Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for the first time, which will support the Service to maintain, improve and extend the library service infrastructure.

2.3 Innovation

During the year, Bradford Libraries has been selected to participate in a number of national pilot projects. These include:

[StoryTrails - Reanimating public spaces across the UK \(story-trails.com\)](https://story-trails.com) Bradford Libraries was chosen as one of just 15 library authorities across the country to participate in the exciting project. On 22 and 23 July, City Library hosted the Story Trails experience and drew more than 3000 visitors into the library to view virtual and augmented reality content featuring hidden and unexpected stories about the city and district.

[How council library services can support children and families in the earliest years | Local Government Association](#) Bradford Libraries was selected to take part in this review conducted by the LGA into how libraries and early years services can work more closely together. Two good practice case studies from Bradford Libraries feature on the website covering our Rhyme Challenge and School Readiness Plan.

[BookTrust Storytime | BookTrust](#) is a national book gifting programme delivered through libraries. This year Bradford Libraries has taken part in the pilot project to enhance this with special Story Times encouraging families to read and visit their local library. The service has also teamed up with Bradford Royal Infirmary to provide books to newborns: [Bradford Royal Infirmary teams up with local library service to give babies the best start in life with books | BookTrust](#)

[Reading Friends](#) a funded project from The Reading Agency. It aims to tackle loneliness by bringing people together to read, chat and share stories. Bradford Libraries was included in the original pilot and received further funding this year to extend the project. This includes working with Anchor Housing to bring reading and engagement to their housing estates across the District, including a number in the South Area.

[Summer Reading Challenge | Reading Agency](#) This national annual programme has had a high profile in Bradford this year with the national launch held at the Science & Media Museum with the support of Bradford Libraries. The Service has also taken part in a pilot to trial auto enrolment of pupils into the scheme working with local schools, helping to ensure a higher level of participation.

2.4 150th anniversary: 2022 saw the 150th anniversary of the opening of Bradford's first public library in the city in 1872. The Service celebrated this milestone with the publication of a number of articles in the Telegraph & Argus newspaper as well as on the Library Service Local Studies web pages, which will culminate in the production of a booklet telling the history of the service, written by ex-Bradford Local Studies Librarian, Bob Duckett. A celebratory event for staff and partners was held in the Summer, as well as a design competition for children to design a special children's library ticket.

2.5 New vision and model: The previous report to this Committee updated councillors on the new vision and model for the Library Service, adopted by the Council's Executive in March 2020, and highlighted the work that was ongoing to implement the new model, with one of the pilots being in Wibsey. A full report on progress with the model will be presented to Healthy People & Places Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 6th December

2022, whilst an update on the Wibsey pilot is provided below. Both pilot projects (at Wibsey and Keighley) are now nearing completion. A Programme Support Officer post is being recruited to, to manage the roll out of the new model across the rest of the District, over the coming 18 months, with local engagement and development plans to be completed for all libraries.

2.6 Cost of Living Crisis: The Library Service is also playing a key role in the provision of 'Warm Spaces' this winter, as part of its contribution to helping with the Cost of Living crisis. All 10 Council libraries and many community managed libraries are offering libraries as a warm space where people can linger, use the IT, read a book, study, have a hot drink, and play a game or complete a jigsaw. This has been made possible by funding from the Household Support Fund and Public Health. Overdue charges have also been dropped as a way of supporting those on low incomes and encouraging customers back into libraries.

3. WIBSEY LIBRARY PILOT AND REFURBISHMENT

3.1 A Wibsey Library Working Group was established to guide and participate in the development of Wibsey Library as a pilot, in line with the new vision and model for the Service. The group has met regularly throughout the year and includes representatives of local councillors, library staff, library users, Adults and Children's services, Health & Wellbeing service, the Family Learning Service, and ward officers, with local organisations including health, Alzheimer's, local schools etc. also invited.

3.2 Key to developing the library as a hub for the South Area was ensuring that the building was made fit for purpose for the future and for use by partners and local community groups. The library closed in February due to emergency health and safety concerns with the floor, and over the intervening months a full programme of refurbishment works was planned and agreed. This included complete replacement of the floor and sub floor, replacement boiler and heating / cooling system, rewiring, new LED lighting, new insulated ceiling, new automatic opening doors, full redecoration, new flexible library furniture and layout, the installation of a fully accessible public toilet, refitted meeting room and meeting / staff room with kitchenette.

3.3 A preview for councillors and members of the Working Group was held on Thursday 22nd September ahead of reopening to the public on Monday 26th September. The formal launch of the refurbished library took place on Saturday 22nd October by the Lord Mayor and Leader of the Council. The Library now offers partners and community groups the opportunity to use the library space outside of opening hours (all the freestanding shelving and equipment is movable) and for smaller groups the opportunity to hire the smaller meeting rooms. The library will work much more closely with other services in future, including early years and family learning, with much interest in using the library to host more events and pop up services.

3.4 During the closure period, a public engagement exercise was carried out to seek local views on proposed changes to the library. There was a high level of support from respondents for changes made possible by the refurbishment, as well as many ideas and suggestions for activities people would like to see in the library. These ideas and input from the Working Group will form the basis of the library development plan going forward. Information is attached within Appendix 1 of this report.

4. WYKE LIBRARY

4.1 There have been 8917 visits to Wyke Library in the first 6 months of this financial year (April – September); if visits continue at this level to the end of the March 2023 (c17,800) this will equate to 80% of the library's pre-pandemic number (22,225 in 2019/20). These figures will have been boosted by displaced usage from Wibsey Library during the closure, nevertheless this represents a great achievement and well above the average for libraries across the District.

4.2 The figures have also been helped by the vibrant programme of activities put on in the library including events to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the Summer Reading Challenge, among others. Throughout the year the library hosts Knit & Natter, children's rhyme times and story times, coffee mornings etc. The staff are extremely proactive and were the first across the District to suggest activities for the Jubilee and for the Warm Spaces initiative.

4.3 As part of the Libraries Improvement Fund project, works took place at the library during the October half term week to create a much-needed small meeting room with kitchenette at one end of the library. This will enable partner services to offer 1:1 sessions in a confidential space, and the kitchenette will enable staff and partners to prepare and provide refreshments for activities and events. The room will also double up as a staff rest area.

5. HOLME WOOD LIBRARY

5.1 Holme Wood Library did not reopen during or after the pandemic restrictions, due to plans to completely refurbish the TFD Centre where it is located. As part of this project, it was agreed that the space formerly used by the library would be rented to IntoUniversity, a national education charity who deliver programmes that support young people to attain either a university place or another chosen aspiration through academic support, mentoring and tailored programmes.

5.2 The library has been relocated to another part of the building where it has been fully refurbished and benefits from an adjacent outside courtyard garden area. The library has been redecorated with new flooring, furniture and equipment, creating a bright, light and airy space. There is also a fully accessible toilet, kitchenette and staff / volunteer workroom. The outside area has recycled plastic planters and bench seating and has also been refurbished with new paving and paintwork, making it a more attractive space for readers, and for activities to take place outside.

5.3 The library is benefiting from working closely with other partners in the building including the neighbourhood team, youth service, health and social care services, as well as IntoUniversity, to make the most of the shared facility and serve the local community in a joined up way. Bradford Libraries are working with the Youth Service, Neighbourhoods' Team and OutLOUD Ltd. to help young people gain confidence by volunteering in the library and providing a space for local groups to use when the library is not open to the public. This is in line with the Library Service vision for *Building A Better Future*. Volunteers and staff are now gearing up to open the library with opening expected in November, with a focus on children and families.

6. QUEENSBURY LIBRARY

6.1 Queensbury library has 853 active registered users and has reported 817 visitors to the library in the 6 months since April this year. The library has 8 volunteers and is currently open 8 hours per week. The Community Libraries liaison team has worked with the volunteers to develop a comprehensive Development Plan for the library.

6.2 Queensbury Library opened as a Community Managed Library in October 2017 in the former Bank building on the High Street. Queensbury Community Programme (QCP) are the accountable body for the library, responsible for volunteer recruitment and day to day operations, supported by Bradford Libraries.

6.3 The library is accessible from the High Street and there is also access at the side of the building for people with disabilities and families with prams, on request. There is a kitchen/café area which is freely available for library users on a Saturday morning. This space can also be used on arrangement with the QCP on other days for class visits, story times, activities and for private/confidential space. Upstairs there is the 'Bentley Room' which can also be used on arrangement for class visits and other events/activities. On the ground floor there is an accessible toilet available for all, plus a unit for baby changing. The library has Wi-Fi and two PCs for customer's use, provided by QCP. Printing can also be provided by the QCP office on request.

6.4 Queensbury Library provides services in line with Bradford Libraries' Core Offer, including events and activities for families such as story times and class visits. They support many Bradford Libraries organised events including the Summer Reading Challenge and promote library services on social media. There is clear scope for library users and volunteers to connect with other QCP community events and activities taking place on site. These include art classes, jewellery making, creative writing, guitar classes, making soft furnishings, Spanish classes, gentle exercise, Man Cave and walking group.

6.5 Library volunteers are integrated into the life of the library and play an active role supporting the local community. Their innovative response to the recent Covid restrictions included organising Ready Read book packs for local families and a Walking Library for those unable to visit the library. The team are committed to providing a warm and friendly welcome to all, ensuring the Library space is an inclusive, safe, and family friendly environment.

7. GREAT HORTON LIBRARY

7.1 Great Horton Library is located in Great Horton Village Hall on Beldon Road. The library is currently open 10 hours per week and has recorded 809 visits in the 6 months since April. The library offers self-service for customers to issue and return books, as well as story times and help with computer use - access to the computers is free. The Village Hall meeting rooms can be booked via the library volunteers.

7.2 The Community Libraries liaison team has worked with the library volunteers to create a development plan for the library.

8. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

8.1 The net budget for the Service is £1.75m which includes an income target of £175k. The Library service also receives funding from Public Health, totalling £700k.

8.2 The largest elements of expenditure are employees at just over £2m and premises at just under £600k. The Service is currently reporting more than £500k projected overspend to the end of this financial year. This is made up of an unachieved saving of £350k (representing the balance remaining from the original £1.05m savings requirement for the service in 2020/21 partly met by a £700k investment by Public Health) and £150k pressures particularly in relation to premises costs.

8.3 Work is ongoing to look at how these pressures can be met and will be considered as part of the Council's overall budget planning for 2020/21 and beyond.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

9.1 No significant risks have been identified.

10. LEGAL APPRAISAL

10.1 No legal risks have been identified.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

11.1 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Library managers have been involved in the development of Locality Action Plans across the District, and are committed to libraries contributing to the priorities of each local area as appropriate. There is great scope for libraries to contribute In the South Area, for example:

- Wibsey Library acting as a hub in the South Area for the community
- Library activities to reduce loneliness and isolation
- Dementia friendly training for library staff
- Early Years support and activities
- Libraries connecting people to other organisations and services locally

Library staff have attended a Bradford South Area Team meeting to discuss opportunities for working together. For example, the Youth Service has offered to work with libraries to encourage young people to volunteer in libraries, with a view to boosting opening hours of community libraries if possible.

12. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

12.1 None

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 Members are recommended to note the progress that has been made since the previous report to this Committee and ways in which local libraries can contribute to the priorities in the Local Area Plan.

13.2 Libraries to work closely with local Councillors and Neighbourhood Teams on the development of local library plans.

14. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

14.1 Previous report to Bradford South Area Committee [Bradford Council - Agenda for Bradford South Area Committee on Thursday, 27th January, 2022, 5.30 pm \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) see item 65.

15. APPENDICES

15.1 Appendix 1 - Survey response – support for planned new facilities and activities in Wibsey Library