

Report of the Director of Place to the meeting of Regeneration & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 5 December 2023

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Subject:

Libraries Update

Summary statement:

This report provides an update on developments across Bradford Libraries service over the past 12 months, following the previous report to this Committee in December 2022.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

The Library Service follows the Council's Corporate Equality & Diversity policy and incorporates Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives in its Annual Service Plan. As part of the remodelling of the management structure earlier this year, a new part-time post of Access & Inclusion Officer was created to manage relevant services including the Home Library Service and services to the blind and partially sighted. Work is currently ongoing to prepare the Service for a bid to become '[Libraries of Sanctuary](#)' offering support to refugees and asylum seekers, as part of Bradford's status as a City of Sanctuary.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Regeneration & Environment

1. SUMMARY

This report provides an update on developments across Bradford Libraries service over the past 12 months, following the previous report to this Committee in December 2022. It provides an overview of service performance as well as service developments under the following themes:

- Delivering the vision and model for libraries
- Highlights from the past year
- City of Culture readiness
- Modernisation
- Green libraries

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The previous report to this Committee, in December 2022, set out how the Service was working to achieve the new vision and model for the Service (entitled *Building a Better Future*), agreed by the Council's Executive in March 2020. A summary of the vision and model is attached at Appendix A. This way of working is now embedded in the Service and considered to be business as usual, with work ongoing to continue to build on the support libraries provide and the impact this makes.

2.2 Beyond this, the Service follows a model of continuous improvement and modernisation, seeking to underpin an even wider range of Council priorities in partnership with others, and aiming to make the Service more sustainable.

3. PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

3.1 The table below provides an overview of Library Service Key Performance Indicators, showing comparisons between the last financial year, the previous financial year, and pre-pandemic levels. The final column shows the percentage recovery in 2022/3 compared to 2019/20.

	2019/20	2021/22	2022/23	% recovery
Visits	1,006,712	384,442	734,859	73%
Loans	945,432	495,154	601,347	64%
PC sessions	182,117	28,911	64,008	35%
New members	15,585	8,396	15,026	96%
Children's activity attendees	18,748	6,696	21,583	115%
Adult's activity attendees	15,446	8,314	20,193	131%

3.2 During 2022/3 the number of visitors to the service recovered significantly compared to pre-pandemic levels and improved markedly since the previous year, to nearly 75% of pre-pandemic levels. This is in line with the national picture for libraries. However, the recovery of loans is significantly lower than the national picture. Officers remain concerned at the very low level of funding for new stock for

libraries in Bradford compared to library services elsewhere, leading to a poorer offer which inevitably impacts on customer satisfaction and use.

- 3.3 The use of library computers has fallen dramatically since before the pandemic, and is in line with the national picture, although it is steadily increasing. It is likely that many people acquired their own devices and learned new skills during the pandemic, however the cost of living crisis now has a bearing on this picture due to the high costs of broadband, data and printing, and usage is starting to increase again.
- 3.4 The recovery in the number of new members last year to pre-pandemic levels is very positive, whilst the increase in engagement in events and activities significantly above pre-pandemic levels demonstrates the impact that the new vision and model has delivered.

4. DELIVERING THE VISION AND MODEL FOR LIBRARIES

- 4.1 The contribution of libraries to many of the key determinants of health and wellbeing has been further built upon over the last year. A remodelling of management staffing, which came into effect in February, included the appointment to a new part-time role of Development Officer for Health and Wellbeing. This post has already been instrumental in working with a wide range of partners to enhance what libraries offer. The post holder meets regularly with Public Health colleagues to update on progress and new initiatives. A summary of these developments and the huge range of partnerships and activities on offer in libraries can be seen in Appendix B.
- 4.2 The Library Development Plans drawn up for Wibsey and Keighley Libraries, which piloted the new model, are now being used as a template to create development plans for all Bradford Libraries; these will be in place by April 2024. They will also reflect the libraries' role in supporting locality plans drawn up for each Area and ward, which library managers are actively engaged in alongside the Council's neighbourhood teams.

5. HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR

- 5.1 **150th anniversary book**
2022 was the 150th anniversary year for Bradford Libraries, and was celebrated with special promotional materials, a children's library card design competition, and an anniversary event. Now, a new illustrated book telling the story of Bradford Libraries, *150 years of Bradford free libraries 1872-2022* by Bob Duckett (former librarian), has been published by Bradford Libraries and will be launched on 6th December 2023. Copies are available from Bradford libraries and for sale.
- 5.2 **Summer Reading Challenge**
The annual [Summer Reading Challenge](#) was a resounding success this year, with bumper figures for participation. 3,049 children took part (a 93% increase on last year), more than 72,645 books were borrowed during the Challenge (20,000 more than last year) and 837 children became new members of the library. 1,608 children

completed the challenge (an increase of 10% on last year) by reading six or more books over the summer period and received certificates and medals to celebrate.

5.3 Rhyme Challenge

More than 5000 children took part in our annual [Rhyme Challenge](#) in which parents are encouraged to teach their child to learn 5 rhymes. This received extremely positive feedback, with 98% of parents saying it had improved their child's speech and language. 240 childcare settings got involved, as well as libraries across the district. The Rhyme Challenge Awards took place on 7th November at City Hall, where presentations were made to the winners by the Lord Mayor.

5.4 Create Connect Make

The [Create Connect Make](#) project at Keighley Library, funded by the [LEAP](#), concluded this year and is currently being evaluated with a view to creating a toolkit for other libraries to follow. A video is available featuring the Create Connect Make Fest event and showing the impact of the project on the library and the local people: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pgf33raWV4Q>

5.5 Business Support

Libraries' business support offer, part of the Leeds City Region / British Library Business & Intellectual Property Centres network, has expanded over the past year to include not just City Library but now also Keighley and Shipley Libraries. Staff have been trained to support people with access to key business databases, specialist book stock, and support for start ups including bookable 1:1 advice sessions, workshops and streamed events. The latest addition, Shipley Enterprise Centre, was launched on 24th November 2023 and was funded by Shipley Towns Fund.

5.6 Special events

As well as an extensive range of regular activities in libraries (rhyme time, story time, book clubs, knit and natter, job clubs, Learn My Way IT training, drop-in advice sessions etc.) this year libraries have delivered a large number of special events attracting larger audiences. These include the Intercultured Festival, Sisterhood Festival, Family Learning Festival, Bradford Writes, Library Palooza (Keighley), Bradford Zine Fair, and Open Mic sessions. City library hosted the finalists of West Yorkshire's Young Poet Laureate with the National Literacy Trust, Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, and Poet Laureate Simon Armitage. Local Studies and Archives have also delivered a number of events including Heritage Open Day and the Library Palooza in Keighley and a series of lunchtime lectures at Bradford, in association with the West Yorkshire Archive Service and the Friends of Bradford Archives & Local Studies. More information can be found on the libraries Facebook page and [Local Studies blog](#).

6. PREPARATION FOR CITY OF CULTURE 2025

- 6.1 Both the Library Service and the City of Culture team are keen to see libraries used to host City of Culture events and activities, and the Service is working to increase libraries' capacity to do this. Whilst the Library Service has not directly benefited from City of Culture funding, the status associated with being the UK City of Culture in 2025 means that funding bodies are keen to work with us and expect us to come

forward with funding bids.

- 6.2 The Library Service has already had success with a £200k funding bid to Arts Council England's *Libraries Improvement Fund*. This is enabling adaptations to 10 library buildings across the district, making them more flexible and usable by partner organisations and community groups, for meetings, activities and sessions of all kinds. The funding has allowed the introduction of small meeting pods for 1:1 advice sessions, small meeting rooms, and movable shelving in libraries to enable spaces to be used for larger meetings and events. The libraries have also benefited from digital screens, new meeting room equipment including tables, chairs and refreshment facilities, and key safes so that trusted partners can use library buildings outside library opening hours.
- 6.3 Community Infrastructure Levy contributions to the Library Service are adding to this, enabling wider refurbishments of some libraries. These combined resources will result in a range of improvements, increased accessibility and meeting room facilities in the following libraries: Ilkley, Manningham, Eccleshill, Keighley, Clayton, Laisterdyke, Bingley, Menston, Shipley and Wyke.
- 6.4 A range of exciting project ideas for libraries in 2025 and beyond is being developed in partnership with other organisations. In particular, we hope to build on the success of previous projects including the exciting [StoryTrails](https://story-trails.com/locations/bradford/) project (<https://story-trails.com/locations/bradford/>) which presented hidden Bradford stories in a unique way using cutting edge virtual and augmented reality (<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-storytrails-the-peoples-map-bradford-2022->) and saw 3000 people visit City Library for that event, and [Create Connect Make](https://createconnectmake.co.uk/) (<https://createconnectmake.co.uk/>) "a creative collaboration between Keighley Library, local creatives and Keighley people to grow, test and support new ideas for community-led creativity and culture".
- 6.5 A key priority is the development of City Library into a Central Library offer fit for a city and district the size of Bradford and in keeping with the aspirations of City of Culture. This would see the library space increased to include more meeting and events space, as well as new technology and facilities that will appeal to younger audiences. The Council has an opportunity to exercise a lease break on the current building at the end of 2026 and is currently considering a range of options for the future location of the library.

7. MODERNISATION

- 7.1 **Self-service technology:** Building on the IT and other developments reported last year, the Service is continuing to strive to make library systems and processes more modern, efficient and effective for customers to use. A new generation of self-service kiosks will be installed in Council libraries in December 2023, incorporating new features including promotional features on the screens, and chip and pin payment facilities. The latter will be important to enable payment for planned wi-fi enabled printing and could also be used for other Council payment transactions in future if required. A second bid to Arts Council England's *Libraries Improvement Fund* has been submitted for digital improvement to libraries, which if successful will enable the acquisition of wi-fi enabled self-service printing in all

Council libraries, and self-service in-library loans of digital tablets in two libraries. Successful projects will be announced in February 2024 for implementation from April onwards.

- 7.2 **Online services:** Managers have also worked closely with the Council's Web Team to develop new online services for room bookings and local history research. These new services are expected to go live in January, and will enable upfront payment for services, as well as customer benefits such as self-service room bookings. All these improvements, along with the increase in spaces available for hire, should assist the Service in increasing much-needed income.
- 7.3 **Opening hours review:** A comprehensive review of opening hours for the 10 Council libraries was undertaken during August – October 2023. This was in response to an unprecedented level of ad hoc library closures, which revealed a lack of staff capacity to maintain advertised library opening hours since the restructure in 2019, combined with exceptionally generous evening opening hours. A public consultation was carried out during August – September on proposals to reduce the number of evening sessions, with an overall 76% response in favour of the proposals. The changes are planned to come into effect from 4th December, enabling a more reliable public service. This also means more evenings can be made available for community and partner hire of library buildings.
- 7.4 **Management restructure:** In Spring 2023, a revised management structure was implemented following staff and union consultation and engagement. The new structure is based on the 5 constituency areas of the district, aligning management of libraries with other area-based teams. This change added capacity to an overstretched operational management team, moving from 3 Team Leaders to 5 Area Managers, each responsible for a smaller number of Council libraries alongside community managed libraries in their area. It also created the opportunity to create a new part time post of Development Officer for Health & Wellbeing, to co-ordinate activity and projects aligned with the Public Health priorities embedded in the new model for the Library Service.

8. GREEN LIBRARIES

- 8.1 Libraries are also making efforts to promote environmental sustainability. There are plans to replace the two current service delivery vans with electric vehicles as soon as possible, which will see Bradford Libraries as one of the first library services in the country to operate using EVs.
- 8.2 Bradford Libraries was one of just 6 services across the country to win funding for a [Culture Nature](https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/10/04/reconnecting-communities-with-nature-through-local-libraries/) project (<https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/10/04/reconnecting-communities-with-nature-through-local-libraries/>) funded by Natural England to help local libraries “play a pivotal role in helping individuals rediscover nature, enhance their mental wellbeing, and contribute to nature's recovery in urban landscapes”. The project will take place at Manningham Library before April 2024 and will involve development of the library garden, nature walks and crafts. Partners in the project include Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, [JU:MP](#) (Join Us: Move Play), and local nature-inspired artists Sponge Tree.

- 8.3 Laisterdyke Library garden has also had an inspiring artist-led redevelopment with the installation of a [‘living wall of peace’](#) mural. Shipley Library’s garden is also being refurbished with the assistance of funding and support from Shipley Town Council and local organisations. The Library Service plans to find ways to upgrade all our library outdoor spaces where possible, and to invite local communities to make more use of them as civic spaces for relaxing and promoting health and wellbeing.

9. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The Library Service gross budget is £2.232M in the 2023/4 financial year, including an income target of £177k. This budget is currently projected to overspend by £358k, representing an outstanding unachievable saving of £350k and additional pressures, particularly in terms of premises costs. Additional premises related costs are recharged at the end of the financial year, last year resulting in a total budget of £3.922M.

Efforts are being made to increase revenue income, as described above, from increased venue hire in libraries, upfront payment for room bookings and new local history research charges.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

No significant issues have been identified.

11. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There is a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 on local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service”.

12. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

12.1 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

See section 8.1 above. The replacement of the two current library delivery vans with electric vehicles will serve to reduce carbon emissions and bring them into line with the Clean Air Zone.

13. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to note and comment on the progress made by Bradford Libraries over the past year, on service recovery following the pandemic, and the implementation of the vision and model for the Service.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Overview of the Vision and Model for Bradford Libraries

Appendix B: *Building a Better Future* Summary Update

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Previous report to this Committee in December 2022:

<https://bradford.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=402&MIId=7903&Ver=4> see item 46.