



Foreword

Shropshire Libraries are a vibrant service at the heart of our communities. We provide environments that allow people to feel safe, where generations of people meet freely in a public space and where learning, discovery and innovation are encouraged.

Shropshire has a strong tradition of communities coming together when the need arises, and this has been evident with the Covid pandemic when working in partnership to deliver their local public services.

We are grateful to all the community partnerships in these challenging times whose continued commitment, time and resources enable the delivery and future development of library services.

This library strategy outlines our promise as Shropshire Council, and sets out the priorities we will focus on to deliver a commercial, contemporary and adaptable community service for the future.

It outlines our vision and strategic objectives, highlights the importance of libraries within the community, describes our core offer and provides a clear direction for the future of Shropshire Libraries. We see corporate and community collaborations as being integral to the long-term sustainability of the service. We will work together with our friendly, highly skilled and experienced staff, to build on our offer around Reading, Information, Digital, Health, Learning, Culture and Creativity.

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place, Tourism & Transport

“Our Library and Information Service forms an important part of a broader culture and community service offer, which is now positioned within our Place Directorate. Shropshire Libraries are the first choice of the Council and community partners for providing information, assistance, and services within local communities.

The Library and Information Service is always seeking new opportunities to support Shropshire Council’s wider corporate priorities and help build resilient and prosperous communities; reflecting how we are all living and our-developing community need.

The Library and Information Service responds well to changing situations and is currently moving to help in stimulating economic growth, together with local community access to learning, knowledge, health and wellbeing, whilst increasing the invaluable support from our volunteers.”



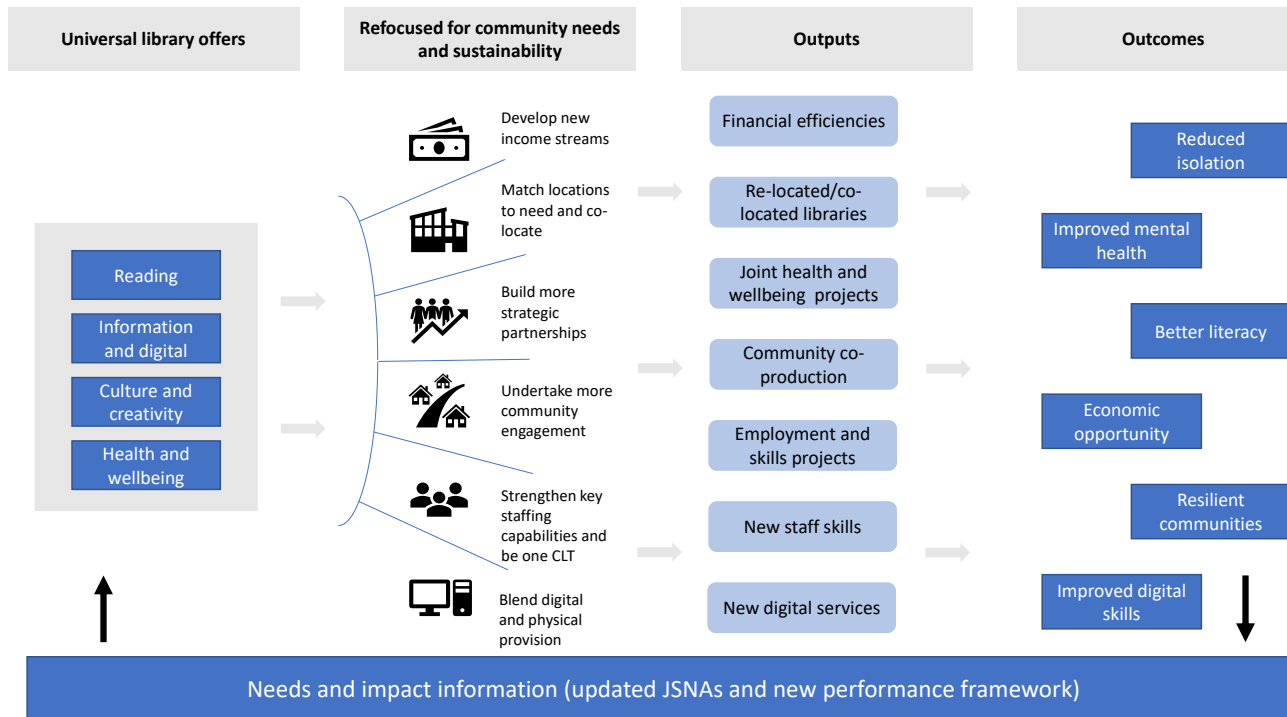
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1.0 Introduction

Shropshire Library Service is a major force for community cohesion across the county. Supported by dedicated, multi-disciplined staff and volunteers, we serve a wide range of functions: sources of knowledge; promoters of literacy; signposters to early intervention; a focus for local events and networks; as well as a force for fun, exploration and friendship.

This Strategy describes the changes library services will make to be at the forefront of the council’s future relationship with its residents and a critical partner in delivery of the county’s priorities.



This Shropshire Library Strategy aims to change the way library services operate so that we can extend our work further into the mainstream of the way the council and its partners work with Shropshire’s communities. It will ensure that library services reach the people who need them most and that co-design and joint delivery with partners serve the priority needs of the county.

The changes represented in this Strategy are summarised in figure 1.

The development of this Strategy has been informed by a public consultation process and work commissioned around the potential for Library transformation.

The Vision, Mission and Priorities highlighted in this Strategy reflect these findings.

2.0 The National Perspective

Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

Library authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' for all those who live, work or study in the area (section 7).



The Arts Council is the development agency for libraries and makes the case to local and national government for continued investment in public libraries and promotes libraries to potential funders. Strengthens the sector with a shared vision for service delivery, securing sufficient resources, brokering partnerships and developing skills

Libraries Taskforce support by the published 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021' in which it sets out the strategic vision and commitment for public libraries in England, recognising the challenging times that councils are facing running library services, calling for radical thinking to protect frontline library services and acknowledging the need for councils to work in 'new and different ways' to 'thrive and not just survive'.

LIBRARIES
TASKFORCE



Libraries Connected is a charity led by national heads of libraries and partly funded by Arts Council England as the Sector Support Organisation for libraries. Its vision is an inclusive, modern, sustainable and high-quality public library service at the heart of every community in the UK.

The Universal Offers cover Culture, Digital Health Information Learning Reading are the six key areas of service that customers see as essential to a 21st Century library service. They provide a positive vision of the power of libraries and support the development of new innovations for communities.

CILIP is the UK library and information association and works to improve services, develop librarian's expertise and champion the profession. They are the independent voice for national information professionals. Guided by a Royal Charter they develop and improve library and information services.



3.0 The Shropshire Perspective

VIBRANT SHROPSHIRE

2021-2031 Cultural Strategy for Shropshire

Our vision by 2031, Shropshire’s vibrant culture will be inspiring more people, both local communities and visitors alike, to explore, create, be active and enjoy themselves. It will enhance lives and nurture the environment for all our futures.

Our shared cultural ambition over ten years, is to create a place where extraordinary and everyday cultural experiences are a source of inspiration for all. We want the importance of culture to quality of life, health and wellbeing, and the economy to be reflected in happier and healthier communities, and for cultural venues and activities to lead the way for climate and environmental change mitigation.

The Shropshire Plan

Shropshire Council is currently developing a new Shropshire Plan, the current priorities are shown below (subject to change). Many of these indicative key priorities will be delivered through this Library Strategy:



Healthy People

- We will tackle inequalities and poverty in all its forms, enabling children, young people, adults and families to achieve their full potential.
- We will provide early support and interventions to Shropshire’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and adults, reducing risk and enabling them to achieve their potential and enjoy life.
- We will work with partners to develop, commission and deliver the right services and support that meet needs of children, young people, adults and families in the right place, at the right time, that are high quality and value for money.
- We will support Shropshire residents to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, choosing healthy lifestyles and preventing ill-health, reducing need for long term or hospital care.

Healthy Economy

- We will provide access to lifelong learning, supporting people and our communities to prosper, and through providing the right skills developing greater productivity and improved wages.
- We will develop Shropshire as a vibrant destination for people that attracts people want to live in, work, learn and visit.
- We will deliver excellent connectivity and infrastructure, increasing access to social contact, employment, education, services and leisure opportunities.

- We will ensure an appropriate mix of housing in the right areas of the county when supporting people with disabilities and to attract the right workforce for the employment needs and opportunities located there; reducing distances travelled to work.

Healthy Environment

- We will deliver the Council's Corporate Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
- We will enable safe, sustainable, diverse and inclusive communities that pull together by reducing anti-social behaviour and risk of harm; ensuring services and purchased products are safe; and adopting the waste hierarchy to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover from all household waste.
- We will maintain, protect, and enhance our outstanding natural environment, promoting positive behaviours and greater biodiversity and environmental sustainability.
- We will promote the means to tackle climate change and reduce the carbon footprint including the adoption of low carbon energy for council's assets and for communities.

Healthy Organisation

- We will work with partners and people to achieve shared priorities to meet current and future need and deliver improved outcomes, with children, young people, adults and families voices influencing change.
- We will communicate clearly and transparently about what Shropshire Council delivers, signposting to the right places for services and support.
- We will put our resources in the right place using accurate data, insights, and evidence to support the delivery of the organisation's priorities and balance the books.
- We will enable a happy, skilled, healthy, empowered, and proud workforce that influences and leads change.
- We will focus on diversity and inclusion for the workforce, addressing any inequalities.
- We will ensure councillors are supported to advocate for their constituents but to also be ambassadors for the council.

Zero Carbon Shropshire 2030



Shropshire Council declared a climate emergency in May 2019 and agreed a Strategy Framework in December 2019 which established the objective of net-zero corporate carbon performance by 2030. Our vision is for Shropshire Council to become carbon net-neutral by 2030 and assist in the ambition for Shropshire to become carbon net neutral in the same year.

4.0 Rural Shropshire

Shropshire is a large rural county, the second largest inland county in England, with a population density of 1 person per hectare. Around 57% of Shropshire’s population of 323,136 people (2019 mid-year population estimates) live in villages, hamlets and dwellings dispersed throughout the countryside. The remainder live in one of the 17 market towns and key centres of varying size, including Ludlow in the south and Oswestry in the north, or in Shrewsbury, the central county town. This geographic spread of diverse communities creates the social, economic and cultural patchwork set in flourishing natural environments that contributes to the quality of life of Shropshire people.

The rolling green landscape, open spaces and the culture and heritage of the County make Shropshire an attractive place to live, work and visit, whether in rural areas or within one of the historic market towns, with excellent schools, low crime rates and opportunity for everyone.

Shropshire has a rich cultural heritage to discover and natural landscapes to explore, for residents and tourists alike. There are Roman and Iron Age sites; castles and historic buildings; theatres and museums; the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which covers 23% of the county; parts of two World Heritage Sites, rivers and canals; walking and cycling routes including one of the largest Rights of Way networks in the country; geology and wildlife; and natural and industrial archaeology.

Our large geography means that our economy operates and reaches in different directions. We have Birmingham and the Black Country south and east, Wales on our longest border to the west and Manchester and Staffordshire north and east, as well as Herefordshire and Worcestershire to the south.

Shropshire is a beautiful and attractive place appealing to visitors and drawing people to move here, and there are opportunities and challenges which need to be considered in this strategy.

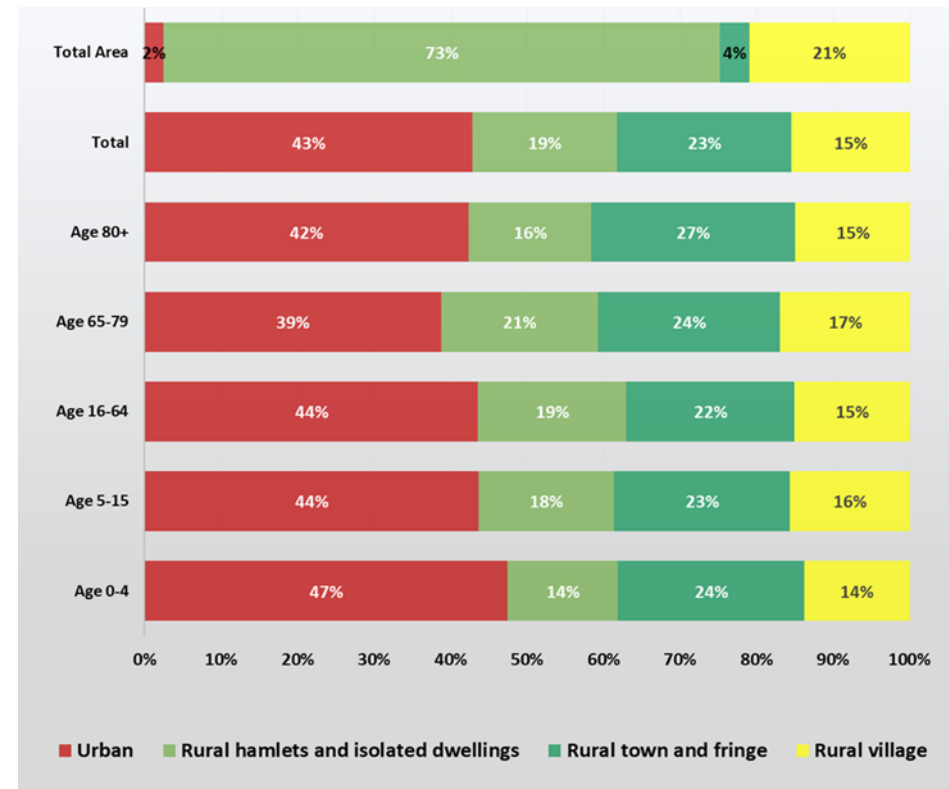


Figure 1: Shropshire geographic area and population by age range

The population is older with the proportion of people aged 65 years and over being well above the national average and this is projected to continue. A higher proportion of Shropshire's older population live in rural areas rather than urban areas, whilst young adults leave the county to go to university or for employment, and there is a falling birth rate. Population growth is due to the in migration of adults.

This is an established pattern that presents future tests and opportunities to innovate and find solutions both for the Council and others. By 2041 the working age population (16-64) will be almost the same size as the dependent population (0-15 and 65+). Whilst this doesn't reflect the growing proportion of people aged 65 and above in the workforce, it does provide a strong indication that as Shropshire's population is getting older the proportion and number who are of working age is projected to be reducing.

There is also a projected growth in single person households in the future, particularly in the 65 years and older age group, which may change demand for types of housing and the need for social care support over time.

Health needs in Shropshire do vary from place to place, but there are some conditions which are more prevalent, and which are preventable. Cancer, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, obesity and diabetes are amongst these conditions. Some of the prevalence of the conditions may be linked to the older age of the population but raising awareness and promoting the changing of lifestyles and behaviours across all age ranges will help people remain healthy for longer. Considering healthy life expectancy at birth by gender illustrates the differences between places on the expected average age that a person would be diagnosed with a disability or condition that would require treatment. This suggests that both males and females living in rural areas are likely to have more healthy life years, particularly in the south of Shropshire.

Shropshire is one of the most self-contained local authority areas in the country. 71% of working people that live here also work here, although the south of the county does see more people commuting out for their work. Those who travel out of the county for work earn more per week than those who live and work here.

Whilst there are a small number of large employers, the majority are SMEs (small and medium sized businesses) with a higher proportion at the smaller end of the scale. Shropshire is a low wage economy and has a gross value added (GVA) that is lower than the England average with the gap continuing to grow.

The rural, sparsely populated nature of this county, along with demographics, prevalence of SMEs and health and care needs, demonstrate why the network of Libraries across the county are so important.

5.0 Shropshire's Library Offer

Shropshire Library service operates through a network of twenty-one static libraries, a prison library, three mobile libraries, digital and development services which together provide access to library services in every market town and most parts of a very rural and sparsely populated county.

- ❖ 6 Principal market town libraries run by Shropshire Council: Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Market Drayton
- ❖ 7 Local market town community libraries run by Shropshire Council: Gobowen, Church Stretton, Bayston Hill, Wem, Library at the Lantern, Pontesbury, Much Wenlock
- ❖ 8 Local market town community libraries run by local community groups / Town Councils, etc.: Albrighton, Bishop's Castle, Broseley, Craven Arms, Highley, Shifnal, Cleobury Mortimer, Ellesmere
- ❖ 3 Mobile libraries run by Shropshire Council cover 274 stops ranging from 10 minutes to 2.5 hours on a fortnightly rota
- ❖ Stoke Heath Prison Library Operated under fully funded contract from Her Majesty's Prisons

The overall picture of Shropshire's library locations is one where resources are thinly spread across a high number of branches:

- ❖ It has one of the highest numbers of libraries amongst its statistical neighbours. It has 24 service points, of which three are mobile libraries compared to an average of 17 libraries across the group¹.
- ❖ Its total revenue expenditure for 2019/20 was lower than the national average and the average of its statistical neighbours.
- ❖ It has 13,463 residents per branch, which is considerably lower than the national average of 25,526 and is lower than the average of its statistical neighbours.

This needs to be seen in the context of the county's rurality. However, there is a need to review the library locations to maximise potential and to allow them most easily to respond to need.



¹ Statistical neighbours as per CIPFA Stats Comparative Profile, 2018-19 Actuals and 2019-20 Estimates are: Herefordshire, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Wiltshire, Central Bedfordshire, North Somerset, Stockport, York, Isle of Wight, Calderdale and Solihull and cover service points open for more than 10 hours a week.

6.0 What do Shropshire Library Services do for us?

Shropshire Libraries are a vibrant service at the heart of our communities. We provide environments that allow people to feel safe, where generations of people meet freely in a public space and where learning, discovery and innovation are encouraged.

Libraries in Shropshire are increasingly at the heart of their communities, providing safe, trusted spaces which host a huge range of services and activities that support Shropshire residents to lead full and healthy lives. Our ambition and commitment is to continue to unlock the huge potential that library services have to impact positively on individuals' lives whilst at the same time delivering local priorities.

Libraries already provide:

- ❖ Quality information and digital support ensuring staff have the skills to support services.
- ❖ e-services that enable individuals and communities to develop skills to find answers and to inform life choices and feel safe online.
- ❖ Accessible resources that embrace technology.
- ❖ Bookstart, which is a national programme for parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from any age.
- ❖ Universal Reading Offer, which supports the growth of a literate, empathetic and confident society.
- ❖ Health and Wellbeing partnerships to promote healthy living provide support and engagement opportunities supported by inclusive spaces; signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities.
- ❖ Work with the business, education, culture and health sectors to facilitate economic growth with appropriate developments for communities
- ❖ Investment in spaces that are flexible, inclusive and attractive vibrant multi-functional spaces.
- ❖ Training for staff in line with development strategies to ensure a flexible, confident work force equipped to respond to any future needs of our communities

Despite services being severely restricted by Covid, in 2020/21 Shropshire Libraries provided.....



A network of
21

LIBRARIES that received **130,000** visits (851,000 in 2019/20)

Virtual Rhyme Times attended by over **2,400** children and adults.

Over **326,000** items in library stock that generated **237,000** Loans (748,000 in 2019/20)



Information to over **39,000** subscribers via library e-bulletins.



3 mobile libraries serving smaller and rural communities, stopping at **274** locations

77,700 e-book and e-audiobook loans to over **14,000** users via the CLOUD LIBRARY



Over **10,000** sets of Ready Reads click & collect book selections. That's around **40,000** books carefully chosen by library staff



2,863 hours of computer access for those who were most in need (52,000 in 2019/20)

630 reassurance phone calls to vulnerable people during lockdowns

1 PRISON LIBRARY

Free WI-FI in every library



45,520 books and other items for customer requests



Online resources that were used **82,000** times

11,500 new books added to library stock

Support for **148** people to complete the CENSUS online



The online COMMUNITY DIRECTORY which received **179,000** views

A **countless** number of things that made POSITIVE IMPACTS on people's lives during the most difficult of years.



7.0 How are we doing?

Library Services Feedback

Feedback obtained through the Library Strategy consultation phase 1 engagement survey 1 October 2019 to 10 November 2019. There were 909 survey responses.

80%

rate Shropshire Libraries as very good (48%) or good (32%). 2% rate the service poor. The remaining 18% don't have an opinion or don't know.



The greatest barrier to using library services is.. **limited opening hours**

The **range of library resources** and lack of choice is considered the second greatest concern.

Other concerns include:

- Lack of investment in library buildings/loss of space.
- Library charges/loan fees.
- The online catalogue.



What people like best.. **Welcoming library staff members**

The **library resources** are the second best thing about libraries in Shropshire.

Other things people like best include:

- Community location/facilities.
- Library events and groups.
- The Mobile Library.

Oswestry library is a lovely friendly library. All staff most helpful. I only came to live in Oswestry 18 months ago and obtained a lot of information from the library and have made new friends from some of the groups they hold re Chatter Natter and Books Aloud. Also computer sessions very good and excellent choice of books.

Bridgnorth library is excellent. The premises are spacious and attractively presented. Information about the area and what it offers is clearly presented and the staff are always pleasant, helpful and always knowledgeable.

My children and I love Church Stretton library and visit every week. SUPER staff, a lovely setting and space, and great range for us to choose from. We feel so welcome and wanted there and would be lost without it.

The current library spaces as community hubs and focal points as other traditional community places disappear.

We believe that the library is not a luxury: it is a practical tool and vital public space for individuals and families. It is a resource for parents with young children, for school children without a place to work at home, for job seekers trying to gain new skills and employment, for elderly people living in isolation, for community groups and, increasingly, an incubator for new ideas and businesses to come to fruition.

I feel the library is a real hub of information for people from all walks of life and social demographics. It can bring communities together as it is quite diverse in its content. A physical structure with amenities is important for those less well off or with less IT resources at home/ the elderly that are not as tech savvy.

Libraries are the heartbeat of communities. Shropshire Council should be proud of what they have on offer in their libraries.

The library on Church Stretton is such a community hub. Mothers and toddlers. Elderly folk. People who don't have computer internet access at home. Please don't take it away.

Over 900 people responded to our initial draft Library Strategy consultation that ran during October/November 2019. 90% of respondents were identified as current users. During National Libraries Week we engaged over 400 library users with our quick snapshot survey and Library Roadshows.

The key themes from the consultation were:

- ❖ Overall levels of satisfaction with library services are high.
- ❖ Borrowing books and other items remains the main reason why people visit their library.
- ❖ Customers view library staff as the most important aspect of the service. Opening times and range/quality of library stock are also very important.
- ❖ Library staff are highly rated regarding customer service and approachability.
- ❖ In terms of the future, respondents were keen for libraries to stay as they are. People argue strongly for the importance of libraries to individuals and communities.
- ❖ The largest proportion of responses were from female library users aged 60+. Levels of engagement with those under 30 was very low.

The key themes suggest we need to balance the needs of our 'traditional' users alongside the needs of other library users. Developing services to attract new users is also essential to ensure that libraries stay relevant in the future.

A full report showing the consultation findings can be found in appendix 1.

8.0 The importance of Libraries

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to fund and ‘provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons’ for all those who live, work or study in the area. In providing this service, Councils must, among other things, encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service and lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.

The best library services enable, empower and equalise:

- Enable communities to fulfil their potential and live fuller lives
- Empower them to make informed decisions
- Equalise through supporting residents, regardless of background

Libraries can act as ‘anchor institutions’ as a vital part of the social infrastructure that supports local communities. They provide a county-wide platform where people will find help, inspiration, access to knowledge and learning, connections, community and fun. This platform is central to the health and wellbeing, economic support and cultural offers of the council and its partners.

Library services are for all Shropshire’s communities, but actively seek to reach those who stand to benefit most, many of whom are amongst those the services do not yet reach and are in most need.

The Local Government Association (LGA) (2017) has produced a report that considers the future priorities for libraries. The report suggests libraries should be:

- Seen as genuinely integral to the delivery of local Council’s broader corporate strategies.
- Increasing impact, by working in partnership with other agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Considering the adoption of new service delivery models to reduce costs, share risks and generate new sources of income.

However, they also agree that reading and borrowing books and other resources are a key reason why people use libraries and that any other roles for libraries should not undermine this.

9.0 Key challenges

We are experiencing considerable change as individuals and communities. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving the EU and attempts to mitigate climate change are impacting all of us. The table below highlight some key challenges we are facing and suggests how our Library Services can contribute proactively to provide solutions.

	Key Challenge	Evidence	How Libraries can help
1	A growing aging population, increasing social isolation and mental ill health.	In November 2020, 19% of adults experienced some form of depression (almost doubling from 10% prior to the pandemic), while 17% of adults experienced some form of anxiety, this increased with those people who were suffering from financial hardship. 48% of adults reported that their wellbeing had been impacted by the pandemic ² . This is not a new issue, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Community Life Survey 2019-20 found that 37% of people in England experience loneliness, at least occasionally, and young people (16-24) were the most likely to feel lonely 'often or always' ³ .	These trends suggest there is a growing need for community support and for people of all ages to re-connect and feel part of their community. Library services have huge potential to support individuals and communities. Some examples of what they already do include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Social prescribing ❖ Early years activities ❖ Community groups ❖ Libraries of Sanctuary ❖ Support for those with special needs or disabilities ❖ Mobile libraries and home delivery services
2	The need for businesses and those who are self-employed to adapt and innovate, along with support	The UK unemployment rate in November 2020 was estimated at 4.8%, 0.9% higher than in November 2019 ⁴ . This is predicted to rise to between 5-11% in 2021/22 ⁵ . Young people (aged 16-24) have seen the most significant rise in unemployment, whilst more people over 65 were in work. The figures were driven by the reduction in part-time jobs and the self-employed, especially women. Small businesses were impacted more than larger businesses.	Libraries have the advantage of being based in the heart of local communities, so can often reach out to more people than traditional business hubs, especially the more disadvantaged, women and those from BAME backgrounds. Libraries can play a central role in meeting the needs of individuals including economic recovery, with help

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/latest>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-life-survey-201920-wellbeing-and-loneliness/wellbeing-and-loneliness-community-life-survey-201920>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/november2020#:~:text=The%20UK%20employment%20rate%20was,higher%20than%20the%20previous%20quarter.>

⁵ https://obr.uk/docs/ExecSumm_November_2020.pdf

	needed for the unemployed.	As Shropshire has higher than average micro-businesses (90.5% compared to 89.4% in WM) and self-employed people (14.8% compared to 10.7% UK), and more people working in accommodation and food (9.9% compared to 7.7% UK) the impacts are likely to be more significant locally than in the UK generally ⁶ .	and training for job seekers and entrepreneurs, and helping local artists and arts organisations to continue their work. Libraries can develop cultural partnerships, which help to support creative industries and to provide information for the growing staycation market, helping tourism businesses to grow and adapt.
3	Children and young people falling behind with school or college work and special needs not being met	Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was growing concerns about the number of children not receiving a formal education. According to Local Government Association research ⁷ , in 2018/19, more than a quarter of a million children in England may have missed out on a formal full-time education which equates to around 2% of the school age population. According to a report by Young Minds ⁸ , the Covid-19 pandemic has had considerable impact on children and young people. They found that it had a negative impact on young people's mental health, that with most young people not attending school at that time and many not having access to resources and materials with which to learn, there will be a subsequent detrimental effect on both academic attainment and wellbeing. The impact of this, particularly on groups who are already disadvantaged, is likely to widen existing inequalities and to contribute to a rise in young people looking for mental health support.	Libraries provide activities that support children learning at home, reducing isolation and included new events created in partnership with local artists and arts organisations. These could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Safe spaces for children and free computer and internet access ❖ Homework clubs ❖ Class visits ❖ STEM and code clubs, which help children and young people with computer programming, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. ❖ Makerspaces. where people gather to co-create, share resources and knowledge and work on projects. ❖ National reading and learning partnerships
4	Localisation and the need for locally based services,	The Office for National Statistics ⁹ found that 46.6% of people were working from home in April 2020. According to a speech by David	As localisation continues, the need for a free, high-quality, local venue is likely to increase. As a dispersed, rural county, more people working from

⁶ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157170/report.aspx?town=shropshire>

⁷ <https://www.local.gov.uk/children-missing-education>

⁸ <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/policy-reports/what-impact-is-the-covid-19-pandemic-having-on-education/>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuk/april2020>

	activities and entertainment	Ramsden, from the Bank of England ¹⁰ , this is likely to be the start of a transformation change in work patterns, with people tending to work longer hours. He argues that it does, however, offer more opportunities for women, older people and people with disabilities, as it removes some of the barriers to going out to work but there will be some who need to develop their IT skills and who will need space out of the home.	home in Shropshire will offer more opportunities to develop libraries as work bases and meeting venues. As many of these will be more used to an office environment, it can be assumed that space for working out of the home and for meetings will be required. Libraries can also offer local venues for cultural events and activities.
5	Increased demand for trusted on-line resources and entertainment, along with a drive for online service delivery	By February 2020, 96% of households in Great Britain had internet access, up from 93% in 2019 and 57% in 2006 when comparable records began ¹¹ . However, 13% of people never go online ¹² . Older people and those in the DE demographic class were more likely to not use the internet (27% of DE adults, 30% of adults aged 65-74, and 51% of adults aged 75+) and that 2% of households with children do not have access to the internet. More than half (52%) of people who did not go online said that they were just not interested in doing so, while 6% said that they do not have the right equipment, or it is too expensive.	Libraries have been providing IT access to the community for some time and since the Covid-19 lockdowns, have rapidly developed their online resources. Activities taking place across the country include Rhyme Time sessions, Story Times, Lego clubs, Code clubs, reading and book groups and e-festivals. They are uniquely placed as a safe environment to offer support and equipment to help people get online and develop their skills.
6	Impact of reduced public spending and austerity	After 10 years of austerity, Local Government has seen significant impact on budgets and the ability to deliver services. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies ¹³ , cuts to funding from central government have led to a 17% fall in English councils' spending on local public services since 2009/10: equal to nearly £300 per person. Councils'	Library Services can deliver a range of core Council priorities in the heart of the community, helping people to access services on line and enabling better working across Council Services to reduce impacts on other services and helping keep people out of the social care system.

¹⁰ <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/speech/2020/the-potential-long-term-effects-of-covid-speech-by-dave-ramsden.pdf?la=en&hash=FA29F3EE33EF0439FF20F0EBE91E55B4F64DA9B6>

¹¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2020>

¹² https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/196408/online-nation-2020-summary.pdf

¹³ <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14563>

	<p>spending is increasingly focused on social care services; in 2021/22, 62% of Shropshire Council’s total expenditure was on social care.¹⁴</p>	
7	<p>Mitigation of Climate Change</p> <p>Shropshire Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has pledged to reduce Shropshire’s carbon output to zero by 2030. Some activities that are being delivered include solar panels on public buildings, greenspace provision in the Local Plan and support for low carbon, high tech businesses. Plans include better insulation in homes, solar farms, habitat restoration, increasing active travel and reducing waste¹⁵. Delivering services online will also be important to help reduce vehicle use.</p>	<p>As effective community hubs in the heart of the community, libraries could be where this facilitation happens; bringing people together, providing information and space, and promoting opportunities to get involved. Being based in the community, this would reduce travel to meetings and the buildings could become show cases for energy saving adaptations.</p>
8	<p>Longer-term impacts on society of the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving the EU and climate change</p> <p>It has been argued that the Covid-19 pandemic has polarised society, with the least wealthy being hit the hardest. The result could be further inequality. This could be coupled with ongoing changes in consumer behaviour, patterns of work and the role of technology, resulting in significant impacts on individual’s lives and communities. The focus on growing economic prosperity could bring with it further mental health issues and lack of social cohesion.</p>	<p>Libraries are well placed to help deliver sustainable recovery based on better understanding of local needs. They change lives for the better by helping people to help themselves, bringing people together and providing support and guidance. Libraries can introduce new ideas and opportunities to people and give them the confidence to use these skills to improve their quality of life.</p>

¹⁴ <https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/18528/budget-book-2021-22-final.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://zerocarbonshropshire.org/zcsplan/>

10.0 Other considerations

The Integrated Care System for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin aims to join up primary and preventative health and care approaches to increase health and wellbeing across the area. It is part of a national initiative through NHS England, under which all areas of the country are covered in this way to coordinate services and plan in a way that improves population health and reduces inequalities between different groups. The role of Libraries in achieving these goals needs proactive consideration as the new system is developed.

The impact of leaving the European Union has yet to be fully realised. This will emerge within the next few years and will impact on the actions needed in the implementation plan.

Over the lifetime of this strategy there are some other potential initiatives, which, if introduced, could impact on how we use and get involved in Libraries, including:

- The introduction of 5G and 6G connectivity
- The development of game-changing new technologies
- Potential for long term and permanent changes to working patterns and the Shropshire economy.

As it is difficult to predict when, or indeed if, these changes will come about, and the impact they will have if they do, this strategy will be reviewed after five years, and amended to take account of circumstances at that time. In the meantime, the three-year implementation plan will be a working document that can be updated as necessary to take advantage of new opportunities or address new concerns.



11.0 Shropshire Library Strategy

Vision

Our **Vision** is for library services in Shropshire to be at the heart of our communities making connections to improve people's lives.

Our **Mission** is to provide physical and digital library services and spaces that inspire people's learning, imagination and discovery, to connect and fulfil an individual's potential, health and well-being and articulate the value of library services to our communities.

We have identified six **Strategic Priorities** to achieve our vision for the next five years:

<p>1. Improved opportunities for reading, literacy, culture and creativity</p> <p>Reading, Literacy, Culture and Creativity are increasingly important parts of library services, we will create relationships that ensure libraries enhance people's lives as a place of discovery, diversity, and interactivity.</p>
<p>2. Improved health and wellbeing of Communities</p> <p>We will strengthen our role in the co-delivery of health and wellbeing interventions for people living in the county. Explore opportunities for greater collaboration with Adult Social Care, Health, Children's Services and external partners, including the voluntary sector to deliver commissioned services.</p>
<p>3. Promote Economic Recovery and Growth</p> <p>We will support the development of small, medium businesses, entrepreneurs and job seekers. Deliver digital technology for internal and for loan, business information, free and low-cost access to business intelligence, market research, 1 to1 training, innovative spaces and intellectual property support.</p>
<p>4. Communities that are resilient and inclusive</p> <p>We will highlight the key role we play in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. We will, with technological support provide services events and pathways that help address health needs, contribute to tackling inequalities in individuals, families and groups across all ages.</p>
<p>5. Library services that are more innovative and sustainable</p> <p>We will increase our contribution to Local and National cross cutting aims for reducing social isolation, living independently and addressing the challenges of rurality. Utilise technology to free up staff interventions to work creatively to support an improved quality of life and sustainable communities.</p>
<p>6. People are enabled to discover the digital world</p> <p>We will provide a 21st century service that enables people of all ages to get online, and ensure they have the skills to engage with the digital world safely and effectively. Help to build digital confidence for day-to-day life as part of community and workforce development.</p>


12.0 Who will we focus on?

Libraries are for everyone and are accessible to all. However, the future library services will proactively target needs rather than be “needs neutral”. This means that in addition to providing library services that are available to all across Shropshire, the priority will be to use resources to find and help people who stand to benefit most, and also to work with other organisations to deliver this. An Equalities Assessment is available (appendix 2).

Targets include:

- ❖ **Public Health, Adult Social Care and Health** – being commissioned to develop initiatives jointly with adult social care and health teams. There is a strong, nationally recognised social prescribing offer to build from, which can place libraries at the heart of the preventative agenda of the emerging Integrated Care System. Discussions to date have identified opportunities in areas including:
 - Becoming part of the day care offer for people with learning disabilities, alongside other culture and leisure facilities.
 - Support to Shropshire’s 33,000 informal carers.
 - Serving as hubs for people to see and try out assistance technology.
 - Joint information provision initiatives, with events to be attended by NHS and public health staff.
- ❖ **Children’s Services** – Shropshire libraries have a long tradition of providing space for stimulating learning activities for children, including Rhyme Times, creative workshops with musicians and poets, reading groups, class visits from schools and craft events. We have recently begun working with Children’s Services to provide and co-ordinate activities funded through the national Holiday Activities and Food Programme to enrich the school holiday experience of 5,500 children. More generally, libraries can build on their contacts to help the early help hubs in reaching more families who may need support.
- ❖ **Economic growth** – building on libraries’ role in supporting small businesses, as they do for example with advice on digital, environmental and sustainability issues through the *Let’s Do Business in Shropshire* programme. Libraries will increasingly offer support to job creators in small businesses, by providing access to information such as professional and academic property databases, the British Library’s IP Centre offer, market research, company information on patents, trademarks, design and copyright. Investment could be sought to create privacy pods for use for online meetings, technology for blended meeting rooms and other equipment including tablets and laptops to assist small businesses. Libraries also offer great potential for co-working space, to establish libraries as key partners to help job seekers and small businesses, with both practical support and opportunities for networking.



13.0 Our Priorities

1. Improved opportunities for reading, literacy, culture, and creativity

We have a unique position within our communities, offering a wide range of services that are available to all. Reading, Literacy, Culture and Creativity are important parts of library services, creating relationships that ensure libraries enhance people's lives as a place of discovery, diversity, and interactivity. Reading and literacy are fundamentally important life skills that enable families to be healthier, happier, more self-assured and more resilient. This also empowers greater investigation and innovation allowing libraries to move towards expanding the services we give our customers and the commercial opportunities offered through a range of high-quality activities.

We will explore direct delivery and partnership opportunities to....

- ❖ Further develop inclusive family learning activities to support the home learning environment and lifelong learning, encouraging reading for pleasure and literacy
- ❖ Maintain and, where possible extend library materials in response to circumstances to ensure inclusivity of access to literature and creative opportunities.
- ❖ Enable staff, customers, entertainers and the curious to envisage how culture and technology could be used to make library services more accessible.
- ❖ Empower staff, people and communities to experience and co-create cultural enrichment.
- ❖ Embed opportunities for a wider range of arts, culture events and performances, allowing staff to own projects and share their experiences and knowledge with their teams and communities.

2. Improved health and wellbeing of Shropshire Communities

Shropshire Library services play an important role in supporting and maintaining quality health and wellbeing outcomes of people living in in the county. Our partnership work around health and wellbeing is recognised and shared on the national level as an example of good practice.

Partnerships with Public Health, NHS and the voluntary and community sector will be strengthened through new ways of working, through the Integrated Care System. Being part of this collaboration will help support complex individual need. To enable this, we will strive for investment in health and wellbeing resources, fit for purpose environments and trained professional staff expanding on the possibilities of people centred support.

Highlighting national, regional and local campaigns gives us focus to engage people around their health and wellbeing in a meaningful, friendly and non-clinical way.

We will work with partners to....

- ❖ Expand on work with Public Health, NHS, GPs, voluntary, community and other professional organisations to deliver health and wellbeing support in the community through Social Prescribing and other health related initiatives
- ❖ Invest in health and wellbeing resources to lower the health inequality gap
- ❖ Increase staff confidence through training and development
- ❖ Engage communities to explore living well in a creative way to generate curiosity and aspiration
- ❖ Expand on opportunities to deliver library service benefits to the most vulnerable and/or living in the most rural areas
- ❖ Support wellbeing of families and individuals throughout different stages of life
- ❖ Provide accessible environments, activities and resources for people with specific needs, such as visually impaired, hard of hearing, people living with dementia, autism and other needs

Case Study

Social Prescribing

Shropshire Libraries Social Prescribing shortlisted for LGC awards 2019, involves tailor- made client focused library inductions. By introducing clients to helpful resources like Reading Well Books on Prescriptions, local community help groups, library social groups, volunteering and other related supportive information, the client can participate in a variety of activities that support recovery and social inclusion.

Aim:

- ❖ Strengthen resilience of communities and empower individuals regarding their health and wellbeing
- ❖ Improve the wellbeing of residents through social interventions
- ❖ Reduce GP patient appointments

How do libraries fit in?

- ❖ Support equality of health information through resources and local knowledge
- ❖ Provide a neutral, free, friendly, warm and non- judgemental environment
- ❖ Have events, advice sessions, groups and clubs to support wellbeing
- ❖ Have friendly knowledgeable staff to encourage social interaction



3. Promote economic recovery and growth

Libraries also have a strong role in supporting small businesses, for example with advice on digital, environmental and sustainability issues through the Let's Do Business in Shropshire programme.

We will...

- ❖ Support the development of small, medium businesses and entrepreneurs in partnership with economic growth, private sector and community providers, and the Marches Growth Hub.
- ❖ Deliver digital technology for internal use and for loan, business information, free and low-cost access to business intelligence, market research, 1-to-1s, training, innovative interactive spaces and intellectual property support.
- ❖ Develop strategic community library business hubs as focal points for business owners and entrepreneurs who are seeking the relevant information, support, and knowledge needed to grow.
- ❖ Provide access points to free business support and resources in partnership with the Marches Growth Hub and other partners to provide:
 - Practical advice to help get your business off the ground, from business plans to market research.
 - Provide information on the basics of intellectual property and how to protect products, websites and brands.
 - Provide up-to-date quality information on intellectual property and tools for researching key industries, with professional expertise.
 - Provide information advice sessions to enable individuals to discuss ideas in confidence, helping to develop business ideas and business plans.
 - Work with partners to support local businesses through the 'Let's Do Business in Shropshire' programme
- ❖ Work with Destination Management Partners to support the Visitor Economy through information, events, Visitor Information Centre's and volunteers

Case Study

Rhyme Time Volunteer

Volunteering at Shrewsbury Library has helped one of our library assistants to pursue her aspirations as a teaching assistant. After leading the half-hour Rhyme Time sessions at the library with up to 60 attendees. She was able to receive a reference from Shropshire Libraries that supported her application to volunteer in a Primary School, assisting in classrooms. Utilising her training for Excellence in Story and Rhyme Time she helped to innovate delivery in the library. Her new-found skills enabled her to secure a place as a trainee teaching assistant as well as a fully funded level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education.

Grace is looking forward to qualifying as an Early Years Educator we have been delighted to help support her in achieving her goals. She has been a fantastic volunteer who was very popular with the Rhyme Time attendees and who really helped lessen the workload for staff here at Shrewsbury Library.



4. Communities that are resilient and inclusive

Library services have a key role to play in building stronger, resilient and connected communities. We provide services and events that help address health needs, impact upon the wider factors of health and contribute to tackling health inequalities in individuals, families and groups across all ages whilst improving confidence and reducing social isolation. As trusted, safe and welcoming community spaces, libraries offer a route for public services to reach communities, providing access to information and signposting, creating social spaces for people to come together and access services that encourage learning and ambition, improve skills and self-confidence, promote wellbeing and individuality and reducing loneliness and isolation.

We will:

- ❖ Enable people to protect and improve their mental health, and to support those with mental health conditions to prevent escalation whilst encouraging recovery to live healthy and happy lives.
- ❖ Understand loneliness and deliver services to help lessen its effects by providing services that enable people to connect.
- ❖ Encourage understanding and tolerance between generations within our spaces
- ❖ Create space to allow kindness to be talked about and experienced.
- ❖ Identify and promote sustainable and effective mobile services to meet the needs of our communities.
- ❖ Develop environmental, social and economical workable services that meet local community needs.
- ❖ Maintain and improve visits and digital networks to ensure that we are relevant for business, innovation and entertainment.
- ❖ Ensure energy use is mitigated to reduce the impact on climate change and wider environment.
- ❖ Continue to work with Town, Parish councils and local organisations to deliver community focussed and managed services.
- ❖ Work with internal and external partners to identify and target those at risk and provide pro-active arrangements that support communities.
- ❖ Work with and support the development of volunteers to support and enhance library services

5. Libraries that are more innovative and sustainable

Increasingly our Libraries are contributing significantly to National and Local cross cutting aims such as reducing social isolation, living independently and addressing the challenges of rurality. This is vital to supporting an improved quality of life and sustainable communities in Shropshire

We will:

- ❖ Embed Libraries firmly within planning frameworks such as Place Plans, the Cultural Plan and the Community and Rural Strategy.
- ❖ Working with other sectors e.g. The Shropshire Culture Compact. We will also embed Libraries within their work to create models of good practice and develop skills and knowledge within the creative sector to deliver new programmes.
- ❖ Increase employability by supporting skills and learning, and helping people back into work
- ❖ Expand the visitor information and tourism offer to grow visitor economy through enhanced connectivity and innovation
- ❖ Invest in Library spaces so they are flexible and attractive vibrant multi-functional spaces
- ❖ Explore further opportunities for co-location
- ❖ Seek funding to invest in our IT infrastructure digital equipment and invest in our staff in terms of IT training
- ❖ Continue to invest in Staff Development in line with the Public Library Skills Strategy, Shropshire Council's Workforce Strategy to ensure a flexible, confident work force equipped to respond to any future needs of our communities
- ❖ Identify new funding streams for innovative services and explore ways of increasing income generation
- ❖ Develop better marketing of our spaces and services
- ❖ Work with volunteers to provide activities and services particularly suited to the local area
- ❖ Continuously assess our ability to respond effectively to unplanned circumstances, altering our services to reflect the restrictions in place whilst ensuring high quality delivery

6. People are enabled to discover the digital world

In the 21st century it is vital that people of all ages can get online, and that they have the skills to engage with the digital world safely and effectively. Basic digital confidence is essential for day-to-day life and to thrive within the workforce. Beyond that basic level the digital world offers incredible opportunities to connect with others, to engage with cultural and creative experiences, and to broaden learning and understanding in new ways. This has been highlighted during the Covid pandemic. Effective digital engagement has the potential to improve a person's employability, to improve mental well-being throughout all life stages, and to help people stay independent in their own homes for longer. Many people are at risk of being excluded or left behind as technology moves on, so Shropshire Libraries are playing a key role to enable digital access, to give people the skills they need, and to provide digital services that people want to use. We want to build on this role by further enabling people to participate in the digital world.

We will....

- ❖ Ensure that our IT and digital services and equipment are robust, as up to date and relevant as possible for what our customers need.
- ❖ Ensure that staff have the skills to deliver services that reflect the digital needs of communities and individuals.
- ❖ Work with partners to deliver projects that are either wholly digital, or that include digital elements that complement our physical services.
- ❖ Continue to explore new ways of creating and sharing our own digital content to further develop Shropshire Libraries' vibrant online community.
- ❖ Look for innovative and emerging technological solutions to transform the services we deliver and the ways that we deliver them.
- ❖ Work with partners, staff and volunteers to place library services at the heart of digital support and learning for Shropshire.
- ❖ Be proactive in seeking funding to develop digital projects and to invest in new equipment and solutions.

14.0 Operations

Partnerships

Achieving sustained impact requires working with communities to understand their needs and working strategically with partners to support the outcomes that most matter to Shropshire. Library services will work more closely with other parts of the council and partner organisations, across health and care, economic growth and climate change agendas.

Venues

We will retain a tiered mixed economy model of Library provision through our Libraries across the town and rural villages of Shropshire supported by a mobile service, where possible, covering the more rural areas ensuring everyone has access to resources relevant to their needs.

Each library location will be reviewed, taking account of potential to serve areas of greatest need; proximity to other Libraries; patterns of use; and suitability of buildings. This may lead to some co-locations with other services. This will involve working with community organisations and Town and Parish Councils to explore service delivery options.

Technology

Self-service lending kiosks will be installed in all libraries, along with full adoption of contactless card-payments. This will enable a deliberate shift in the balance of staffing from routine customer service tasks, to service development and community impact roles, a shift which emulates best practice elsewhere.

Opening Hours

Opening hours will also be reviewed, aiming to target opening times at periods when the service is most able to reach and attract those with the greatest needs, for example to support study and self-led learning, or family activities and enrichment.



“Self-service machines in Wembley library” by Julia Chandler/Libraries Taskforce is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

Staffing

The focus on meeting priority needs will require strengthening of some of library services' capabilities, in particular: service development (including partnership building and income and grant generation); community engagement; data and intelligence; digital; and marketing and communications. This will be enabled by release of some staff capacity from processing transactional services, following the introduction of self-service machines.

This should be associated with a change to the current library services structure, supported by a clear workforce strategy. This will enable Library staff to further shift their focus from reactive transactions, to proactive community engagement.

Realising Shropshire Local.

The council is exploring the extension of its Shropshire Local contact model. Shropshire Local recognises how digital services offer increasing opportunities for residents and businesses to navigate Council services in a self-service manner. It aims to offer assisted digital support and to develop customers' own skills so that they can "self-serve" for future needs. Libraries will be integral to this development, with co-location and integration with their wider information provision role. This will facilitate immediate signposting to a wider range of community or preventative services.

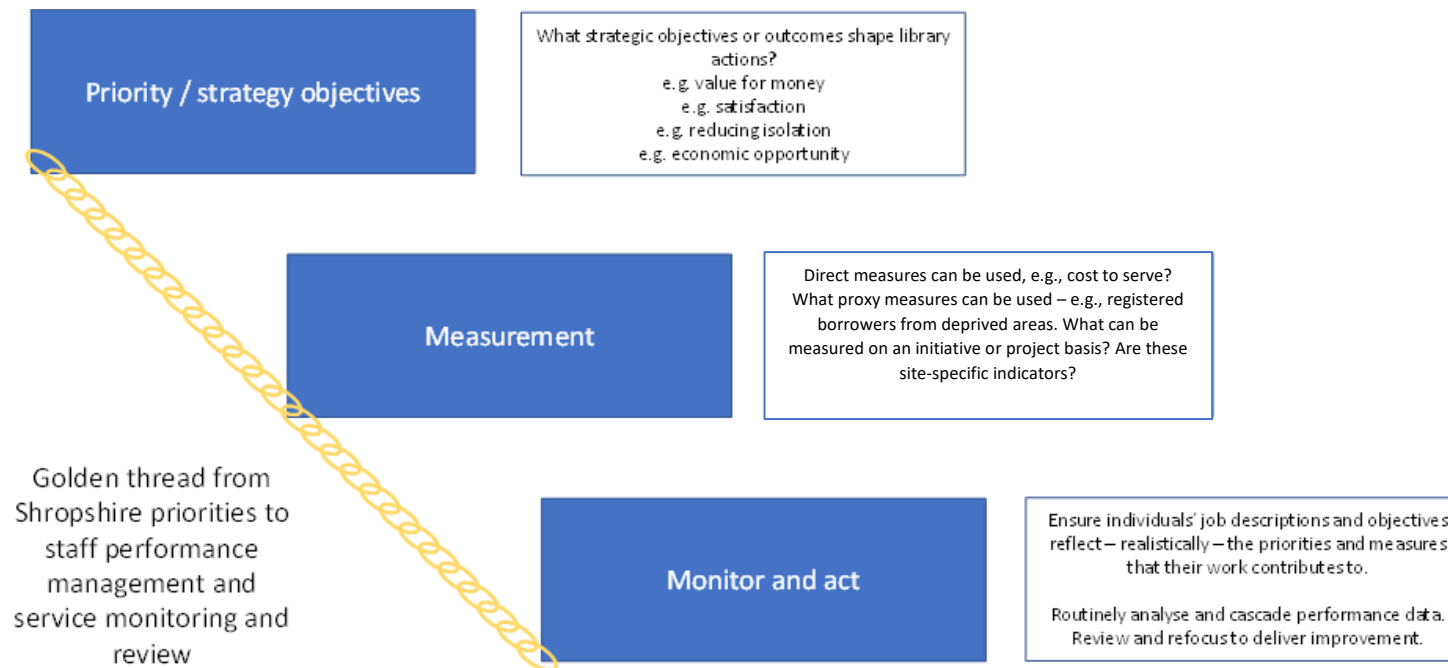
One mobile service.

Shropshire's three mobile library routes work with partners in fire, police, health and local village halls to offer a service that maximises the ability of local stops to combat loneliness and social isolation. Options are being piloted to combine the mobile library service with mobile services for Shropshire Local and a health promotion bus. This may consolidate the role of libraries as a gateway to information and support in a rural context.

15.0 How will we measure success?

The diagram below outlines a new approach to Performance Management, which will be developed over the next 12 months. Building on existing monitoring, the key aim should be to find indicators of impact. These will be aligned with delivery partners and their priorities. This could include measures such as:

- ❖ Usage of the Library Services by adults in most deprived areas.
- ❖ Usage of the Library Services by young people entitled to free school meals.
- ❖ Percentage of Library Service users who have been supported by library staff to access/use library IT services or equipment in the last 12 months and agree/strongly agree that their ability to access and use online resources/services has improved due to support provided by library staff.



16.0 Resources

Due to continued pressure on public finances, there is a need to ensure that all Services provide value for money. This Strategy creates opportunities to reduce ongoing public subsidy for Library Services, whilst increasing income. However, investment will be required to realise benefits. These opportunities are summarised below.

Opportunities for subsidy reduction:

- ❖ Review all library locations, potentially making savings through some building consolidation and co-location.
- ❖ Libraries may host Shropshire Local. Further work is being undertaken to consider both the community and financial impacts of this.
- ❖ Exploration of changes to opening hours.
- ❖ Combined mobile service, which may offer some economy of scale savings but depends on service design.
- ❖ Savings on frontline transaction processing as a result of installing more self-service machines.
- ❖ Redesign staff roles to better enable new ways of working.
- ❖ Exploring opportunities to reduce subsidies for community Library Services.

Income generating opportunities include:

- ❖ Co-producing initiatives with Adult Social Care and Health, Job Centre Plus and Children's Services.
- ❖ Exploring opportunities to maximise returns from space in buildings.
- ❖ Maximising external funding for specific activities.

Investment requirements include:

- ❖ New library management system.
- ❖ Self-service machines.
- ❖ Other digital equipment to support development of community support for digital skills.
- ❖ Building refurbishment to create practical and flexible environments - for example including booths for private internet use, blended meetings screens and equipment for business meetings and shelves on wheels.
- ❖ Recruitment, training and skills development associated with new approach.

The subsidy reduction that will be achieved will depend on local circumstances and each library will be considered in turn. It is therefore not possible to specify the financial impacts at this stage, but it is anticipated that over the duration of this strategy considerable savings/ income generation will be made. Any savings would aim to retain community access to library services by identifying efficiencies, as outlined above.

17.0 Implementation Plan

A detailed implementation plan will be developed and delivered to address the priorities highlighted in this Strategy. This will be a three-year working document, which will be updated as required. A summary of work needed is shown in the diagram below.

