



# Northumberland

## County Council

### **COMMITTEE: COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 26 APRIL 2023**

### **UPDATE ON LIBRARY SERVICE REDESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**Report of Cabinet Member:** Cllr Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Lives

**Report Author and Lead Officer:** Nigel Walsh, Interim Service Director

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#### **Purpose of report**

To provide Members of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the status of the agreed Library Service redesign programme and the continued development of the Service.

#### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Consider the contents of the report.
- Note progress and achievements supporting the three phases of service redesign.
- Note the service priorities for 2023/24 including the development of a new Library Strategy in the context of new government guidance.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- **Living** - Libraries offer a wide range of information and activities which support health and wellbeing as well as providing a safe welcoming space for individuals and interest groups.
- **Enjoying** - Libraries offer social networks and information and support for residents of Northumberland to seek advice/support within their communities.
- **Thriving** - Libraries provide a first point of contact for individuals seeking support with gaining new skills; for those seeking employment and business support, all of which directly contributes to economic growth and the regeneration of communities and their development.
- **Learning** - Libraries provide a significant role in the development of literacy, social and digital skills across Northumberland.

## **Key Issues**

### **National Context**

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). In providing this service, councils must, among other things:

- encourage both adults and children to make full use of the Library Service
- lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) report 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021' (section 2.2) states 'Libraries are vital community hubs - bringing people together and giving them access to the services and support they need to help them live better. Our ambition is for everyone to; choose to use Libraries, because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so, understand what Library Services offer and how they can make the most of what's available to them, be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills and information they need to improve their quality of life, and receive trusted guidance through the evolving information landscape and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world'.

The DCMS also highlight that Library Services contribute to seven outcomes critical to the individuals and communities in their areas:

- cultural and creative enrichment
- increased reading and literacy
- improved digital access and literacy
- helping everyone achieve their full potential
- healthier and happier lives
- greater prosperity
- stronger, more resilient communities

### **The Northumberland Library Service**

The Library Service within Northumberland has been the subject of significant structural and leadership changes which saw the transfer of the complete service to a charitable leisure trust in 2015 and a phased return to Northumberland County Council (NCC) from 2016. Following the return to County Council management, an internal review was carried out in late 2017. The review identified some examples of innovative engagement, but also opportunities to reinvigorate and improve the service whilst considering the financial impact and ongoing issues of continuing the current model of provision.

Whilst the significant structural and operational changes introduced since the 2017 review stabilised and improved the service, it was acknowledged that detailed insight was required to design a Library Service to effectively meet current and future needs of our residents and communities. In September 2019 Cabinet agreed the proposed methodology and timeline for an extensive consultation exercise, the findings from which were used to inform future Library Service provision for Northumberland based on evident and agreed need. Cabinet also agreed the allocation of up to £100,000 non recurrently from the Strategic Management Reserve to support the accelerated transformation of the service.

### **The Library Service Consultation**

The results from the consultation demonstrated and confirmed the important role the Library Service plays in the lives of Northumberland residents, particularly amongst the county's population of older people and those who use the service regularly. In addition to the provision of books, computers and resources, the value of the Library Service was recognised as a safe, inclusive, social space for community members. The full Libraries Consultation Report can be accessed through the following link [NCC Library Consultation Full Report June 2020](#)

### **Tackling Inequalities**

Public Libraries are uniquely placed to assist in tackling inequalities within society. Libraries offer a wide range of health information, both online and through quality-assured reading material dealing with the more common health conditions. In their role as hubs in our communities, Libraries can offer non-clinical spaces in localities where health and wellbeing groups can work with the community in a trusted and non-threatening venue. They're also places where people can come to meet others - reducing social isolation and improving 'connectedness' are important factors in addressing inequalities. Libraries can also serve as a neutral refuge where people, especially those who are homeless or live in difficult housing conditions can find shelter, company, a place to rest, or find quiet study space.

The Northumberland Libraries Consultation (2020) clearly demonstrated the value of the County's Library Service to residents, specifically:

- For a third of respondents (34%), visiting the Library is part of their daily/weekly routine
- Three in ten visit the Library because it is a quiet place
- A quarter visit the Library as it is a safe place to go

- 18% go to the Library as it is somewhere to pass time
- A fifth of respondents find visiting the Library helps them to feel less lonely or isolated
- 15% of respondents feel it is important as a place to socialise.

Amongst users of the Mobile Library Service, almost all (98%) look forward to the visit and 77% agree that the visit helps them to feel less lonely or isolated.

The Library Service plays an important role in the lives of those accessing technology in the County. For one in ten customers the Library is the main way that they access computers or the internet, and this rises to 46% of those who are out of work and looking for work.

### Service Redesign and Performance

In March 2021, following detailed consideration of the consultation results, NCC Cabinet agreed a three-phase approach for redesign of the Library Service based on:

- (A) Strengthening the core service
- (B) Establishment of Library Hubs within each Locality area
- (C) Extending reach and partnerships

In March 2022 the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the status of each phase of service redesign. It was reported that Hub Libraries had been successfully established in Berwick, Blyth, Cramlington, Hexham and Morpeth. The Report also highlighted the improvements made to the digital offer, staffing structure, capacity, resources and the marketing / awareness programme. The table below compares the key performance indicators for Quarter 3 (Oct-Dec 2021), included in the previous Report, with the key performance indicators for Quarter 3 (Oct-Dec 22).

	Q3 2021	Q3 2022	% increase
Library service membership (running total @ Q3)	52,033	64,262	23.50%
New members	2,231	2,467	10.58%
Physical book issues	96,311	109,522	13.72%
Mylibrary.co.uk sessions	26,135	28,607	9.46%
<i>Pressreader</i> sessions	32,952	44,833	36.05%
Hours of public PC usage	4,238	5,565	31.31%
eBook downloads	11,051	11,231	1.63%
eAudio downloads	11,867	15,167	27.81%

Volume of in-person and virtual events	230	585	154.35%
Volume of attendees at events	2,468	8,319	237.07%

Table 1. KPI comparison Q3 2021 to Q3 2022

This demonstrates the strong continued growth of overall membership, the extension of engagement, and the increasing utilisation of the improved key resources.

We have also seen stabilisation of staffing resources over the past three years as shown in the table below. Levels remain significantly below those of 2013/14 however the Service has demonstrated strong adaptability and resilience in ensuring that all branches have remained open to the public.

	13/14	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
<b>Total Service Staffing (including qualified Librarians)</b>	96.67 FTE	82.74 FTE	54.45 FTE	55.75 FTE	59.67 FTE	61.67 FTE	61.91 FTE	62.02 FTE

Table 2. Staffing FTE comparison 2013/14 to 2023/24

The number of qualified Librarians remains lower than the high of 16.58 FTE in 2013/14, at 7.88 FTE, however this is a significant increase from 2017/18 level of 4.08 FTE. These figures include the qualified Librarians working within the Schools Library Service, HMP Northumberland and the Public Library Service – currently 0.65 FTE, 1,00 FTE and 6.23 FTE respectively.

The background section of this Report will describe the key service developments during the past 12 months, and the rationale for the identification of the service priorities for 2023-2024.

### **Summary of Library Service Priorities 2023-2024**

The following summary outlines Library Service priorities for 2023-2024 aligned to the three service development phases:

#### ***Strengthening the Core Service***

- **Digital Offer**
  - Improve the digital support and inclusion offer to customers.
  - Increase the range of digital services e.g. introduction of wifi printing.
  - Wider use of digital across all the Universal Offers.
- **Performance Management** – Review of current Service KPI's and reporting processes to ensure alignment with national standards, Council priorities and the new corporate structure.
- **Service Strategy** – Development of a new strategy for the Library Service informed by the new national framework which will be released during 2023.

- **Customer Service** - Continue to develop and implement self service facilities which increase the range of self service options available to customers.
- **Workforce Development**
  - Conclude the Library Service Succession Strategy to increase resilience.
  - Continue to engage, attract and sponsor volunteers to support the Service.
  - Continue to inform service development through the staff led cross service workstreams.
- **Health and Wellbeing Offer** - Enable the long-term delivery of the Reading for Wellbeing programme through securing funding to retain of the Community Reading Workers.
- **Profile** – Development of an annual Marketing and Communications Strategy for the Service.

### ***Developing the Role of the Established Hubs***

- **Area Specific Service Delivery** - Development and implementation of an 'Area Prospectus' to be coordinated from each Hub Library covering each of the Universal Offers and informed by local need.
- **Events** - Delivery of a compelling events and activity programme to reflect the national Universal Offers calendar in line with NCC corporate priorities.
- **Morpeth Library** - Maximising the potential of the new Morpeth Library to increase engagement with a wider range of residents.
- **Accessibility** - Assessing, and improving where necessary, directional signage within each of the towns hosting Hub Libraries.

### ***Outreach and Partnership working***

- **The Mobile Service** - Introduction of new more agile vehicles, maximising opportunities for partnerships working to improve the range of service offers to rural and isolated communities including collaboration with the NCT, Family Hub and Public Health teams
- **The Archive Service**
  - Develop closer working links with the Archive Service, collaborating on projects to explore funding streams and opportunities. Archive Service to provide peer support and knowledge transfer opportunities in terms of bid writing skills across the Library Service.
  - Collaborate with the Archive Service to consider themes for an annual programme of events and talks utilising the new County Hall Archive Service area.
- **New Corporate Structure** - Identifying opportunities for increased collaboration and impact through the new Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities Directorate.
- **The Registration Service** - Work with the Registration Service to further explore family outreach opportunities using the statutory requirement to register births as the catalyst for engagement.
- **Delivering in Partnership**
  - Undertake a site by site assessment of the most effective model of service delivery in partnership with local community stakeholders to increase reach, engagement and build local value.
  - Explore new models of delivery at South Beach and Wylam.

- **The Schools Library Service** – Undertake a review of the Schools Library Service (SLS) to ensure the operating model is viable and meets the current and future needs of education professionals across the county.
- **Community Hubs** - Work with NCT to develop a countywide network of needs led, locally facilitated opportunities and initiatives building upon the work already delivered in Cramlington, Haltwhistle and Newbiggin.

## **Development of a Library Strategy**

A Library Strategy for the County is yet to be fully developed although it should be noted that the key actions resulting from the consultation have, or are in the process of being, implemented. The agreed three phase approach to service redesign followed over the past two years has crucially stabilised the core Service whilst providing a strong platform for growth.

Since 2016, 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021' (DCMS) has been the basis of national guidance and informed the framework for strategic Library Service development. In 2022, Baroness Elizabeth Sanderson of Welton was appointed by the government to lead the development of a new framework to ensure public libraries continue to provide the best possible service tailored to meeting the needs of their community. Contributors to the ongoing review include Arts Council England, Libraries Connected, the LGA, as well as the British Library, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, local authority library services and community managed libraries.

The new Public Library Framework will be released by government in 2023, following which the Library Service will work to produce a strategy for Northumberland based on evident and agreed need. This will allow the Service Strategy to be developed in the context of the new Corporate Plan and structure, with a particular focus on how Libraries can be at the forefront of tackling inequalities.

## **Background**

The following section provides a further detail to Members on the status of the three phase approach to service redesign.

### **(A) Strengthening the Core Service**

#### ***The Digital Offer***

*Borrowbox*, the single provider for eBooks and eAudio remains popular with the collection including audiobooks to support users to learn a range of foreign languages. Full advantage is taken of titles that are offered with unlimited access for a specific time period. The loan period remains reduced to maximise availability (renewing a loan creates a ghost copy for the existing reader and releases that title for a new loan). As with physical books, waiting lists are monitored but because of cost, duplicate licences are bought sparingly to maintain a wide range of reading options.

*Pressreader* is now well established within the service and offers access to over 6,000 magazines and newspapers from over 100 countries in 60+ languages. During 2022/23 to date, over 5,000 individual readers have accessed Pressreader content. Even if members

only read one magazine each, this represents a saving of £22,703 to those service users who via Pressreader can access the content they require at no cost.

During lockdown, service delivery of the Universal Library Offers moved online where possible. Due to the success of this, the following initiatives now continue to be available online whilst also being available in a face-to-face format, recognising the importance of customer choice and further strengthening the core service:

- Creative writing groups
- Family history chat group
- the Summer Reading Challenge for primary age children
- Live streamed events to support national, regional and local initiatives e.g. The Big Green Draw

In addition, the Library Service programme of virtual and hybrid author events is now an established favourite and has developed a loyal following, not all of whom are Northumberland based. This demonstrates the power and reach of virtual and online elements of service delivery. *See feedback in Appendix.*

The nationally agreed extension to home use of *Ancestry* and *Find My Past* concluded in December 2021. Whilst home access was always a known temporary offer, the public can now book to access these useful and compelling local and family history research tools on a PC, or hublet, in their local library.

During lockdown, the service established a Digital Helpline to provide support by phone to residents experiencing problems with computers, websites, tablets and phones. A popular and much needed service, this continues and is being promoted via partners in to raise awareness of this free local, as well as the established face-to-face support in libraries.

Within the Library Service, in-person digital support is available to residents who have little or no IT skills, or lack digital confidence but would like to learn and understand more. It is recognised that post pandemic, residents typically seek this support for when using their own device, rather than by using hardware available within their local library. Our Digital Champion volunteers across the service provide one to one sessions offering bespoke support to those in need, helping to raise standards of digital competency across the county and proactively supporting residents to be part of the digital community.

A series of 'Techy Teaparties' delivered across the county library network, often aligned to national initiatives such as 'Get Online Week', ensure that digital support is promoted in a friendly and inclusive manner. This in-person digital resource is greatly appreciated by those who have engaged with the programme.. *See customer feedback in Appendix.*

Covid Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) has been used to provide a full time Digital Resources Assistant and the impact of this additional capacity has enabled the service to not only deliver the Techy Teaparties referenced above but also 12 sessions to 116 children and 77 adults as part of the STEAM (Science, Tech, Engineering, Arts and Math) themed Summer Reading Challenge 2022. The service has also set introduced hublets at Cramlington and Newbiggin, improved the usability of Library Service website and newsletter and managed online presence on the Frontline website. This targeted funding, channelled to specifically enhance the digital offer libraries can provide has enabled the Digital Resource Officer within the service to focus on more strategic digital work whilst also supporting the operational element of service delivery.



During 2022, a small pilot was instigated to explore the best way the Library Service could support individuals who were loaned or gifted devices by Northumberland Communities Together (NCT), or partners. As a result of this support given one individual gained successful employment. Funding options are being explored to continue this service which provides digital support, devices and free data provision,

### ***Staffing Structure***

The staffing structure to support the establishment of Library Hubs, designed to address the established priorities and needs of each Locality Area, includes a supervisory role in each area to provide a renewed focus on providing more identifiable and accessible contacts for colleagues and partner organisations across the county. This approach enables the Librarian team to lead on strategic service development relating to the Universal Library Offers through working in a dynamic outreach role to promote and support use of the service in collaboration with the front-line staff. Recruitment to the Supervisor roles is now complete, concluding October 2021, and the subsequent vacancies are now also backfilled.

A new Librarian post has been filled to add capacity to the county wide team and facilitate the increased focus on our digital offer. The temporary appointment of a Digital Resources Assistant has furthered this work and alongside the recruitment to Supervisor and Librarian posts has provided progression opportunities for existing staff, also supporting the principle of 'recruit and retain'. Current recruitment to Library and Information Assistant vacancies will conclude this phased approach to recruitment.

Mindful of the workforce profile, and to encourage the next generation of Library Service professionals, four apprenticeship posts were created across the County. At Berwick, the apprentice has graduated and secured a permanent position within the service whilst the remaining three continue their placements (Morpeth, Cramlington, Schools Library Service).

To develop resilience the Library Service Senior Team are leading the production of a Service Succession Plan which will capture vital knowledge that can be catalogued for reference and cascaded through peer support, mentoring and learning. A skills audit has underpinned this work, enabling knowledge gaps to be identified and providing a framework for priority actions. The succession plan will focus on growing talent, ensuring staff are able to thrive, strive and achieve. This project will continue through 2022/23.

Opportunities to bring additional capacity and skills to the service through project work are continually sought and pursued. The Reading for Wellbeing project, originally focused on Newbiggin, has provided the service with two part time Community Reading Workers. The Reading for Wellbeing project brings life changing outcomes to individuals and is coordinated through social prescribing. A key objective of the service during 2023/24 will be to establish these part time fixed term posts on a permanent basis, enabling the benefits of social prescribing to continue to support not only the community but also the local authority and the NHS.

### ***Resources***

In September 2019, in addition to the county wide consultation, Members agreed one off funding up to £100,000 from the Strategic Management Reserve to support the accelerated transformation of the service over the following 12 months. This timeframe was impacted by the pandemic but the allocation enabled the service to enhance available

stock in Alnwick, Cramlington, Morpeth and Ponteland, and to enhance the digital offer (Wi-Fi printing to be introduced later this year). Other improvements through this allocation are in progress including improved signage to make the location of libraries more easily identifiable.

A further injection of new reading resources has been possible at all libraries through an additional allocation of COMF. This particularly supported those who remained socially cautious following the pandemic by allowing the continuation of the Home Library, or Select and Collect Service. It has also encouraged a return to in person visits to branches by enhancing the selection of titles on offer.

Self-service kiosks enable customers to issue and return their books independently, which means they can use library resources outside staffed hours. This is particularly valuable where libraries are co-located with partners who can offer extended access to premises such as Bedlington Station, Newbiggin, Ponteland and the new Morpeth Leisure Centre. The kiosks allow staff to focus on higher value interactions with customers such as digital support or general customer service signposting and delivery.

Installation of kiosks is now complete in Alnwick, Amble, Ashington, Bedlington, Bedlington Station, Berwick, Blyth, Cramlington, Haltwhistle, Hexham, Morpeth, Newbiggin, Ponteland and Prudhoe. There is confidence that an enhanced range of self-service options will be launched during 2023 which will enable:

- Wi-Fi printing (whereby a user can print from their own devices, paying for and releasing them from the printer without any staff intervention)
- Self-service PC booking – a user can review PC availability and reserve a PC for immediate or future use
- Self-service guest sign up – a visitor can sign up as a guest to use the PCs. A receipt can be printed with their username and password
- The ability to top up their Netloan account – users can top up their account via the kiosk to use the credit later when required to pay for their prints

### **Capacity**

The capacity of the service can be enhanced with the support of volunteers, Volunteers themselves benefit in many ways such as improved social cohesion, skill development and a sense of fulfilment and purpose. Many Library Service volunteers were in the 'age vulnerable' category during pandemic and have not returned. Some new volunteers have come forward as a result of local engagement, for example Allendale Library is now open two Saturdays per month thanks to volunteers from the Allen Valleys Local History Society.

To strengthen this critical resource an NCC marketing campaign will be undertaken during 2023 as an element of the corporate volunteer initiative to encourage volunteers to share their skills and knowledge to add value to and supplement the service offer. The volunteer theme is also a key message of the King's Coronation celebrations over the period 6-8 May 2023.

A bid to the Arts Council England (ACE) Volunteering Futures Fund to enable the service to work with partners across the county on a two-year delivery programme was regrettably unsuccessful. The service will continue to seek funding opportunities to support volunteering, particularly for young people in Northumberland Libraries and the wider cultural sector.

## ***Service Improvement / New Ways of Working***

New ways of working were adopted during the pandemic to maintain access to the range of resources and support the service provides. Where appropriate, these services have been adapted or embedded to retain good practice, provide choice and offer an improved service.

The Select and Collect service gave staff the opportunity to provide customers with books by new authors and to also foster discussions over the phone and online about reading likes and dislikes. Despite the recovery of the face-to-face service, some customers are still benefitting from this support, indeed it appears that for some a 'channel shift' has occurred. The return of in-person activity has allowed the adoption of Reading Friends, an initiative supported by The Reading Agency that aims to use reading to bring people together and get them talking, to tackle isolation and loneliness using reading as the shared interest. This service has recently been filmed at Blyth Library in preparation for a feature on Tyne Tees local news.

The lucky dip selections of books and craft activities at key points in the year e.g., Halloween and Christmas for young readers have been replaced by the resumption of our planned programme of holiday activities, class visits, Storytimes and Rhymetimes. This has included participation in the Book Trust Storytime initiative that provides additional resources to complement the six selected stories that form a six-week programme of events, sharing stories with young children.

The embedding of an enhanced supply of digital resources, a hybrid author events programme, a programme of digital inclusion work, the return of our key Digital Champion volunteers combined with the service's Digital Helpline, now offer a holistic approach to encouraging and supporting people to get online and improving digital skills.

The Librarian team have adapted their work to focus on outreach. Partnerships with Family Hubs, Leading Link, Locality workers and the Thriving Communities network for example have helped raise awareness of the service in the wider community. Where capacity has allowed, they have also fostered good working relationships at a more local level for example with Hexham Town Council where a warm welcome and support plan was devised and delivered when a contingent of Ukrainian families relocated to the town during 2022.

The opportunity to realise a new Mobile Library fleet consisting of three vehicles has been taken and the multi-purpose, more agile, digitally enabled vehicles were delivered mid-March 2023. They will be used by the Library Service, NCT, Public Health and Family Hub colleagues and other partners to deliver a range of services to communities across the county, offering new collaboration opportunities and increasing impact and reach.

Early implementation plans will see one of the new vehicles deployed to deliver the mobile library service to the west of the county during April 2023. This operational experience will shape future discussions regarding optimum utilisation of the vehicles with partner services across the council. It is envisaged that in the future, multi service outreach work enabled by the new vehicles will support the delivery of many key Council objectives with residents experiencing a mobile 'plus' service.

## ***Marketing and Awareness***

The need for more general information and awareness about the Service was identified by the consultation which prompted the production of 'Rediscover your Northumberland Library' materials. This requirement to increase awareness was accentuated following the

interruption of the face-to-face aspect of the service during the pandemic and the phased return.

£15,000 of COMF was allocated to improve awareness of the Service and its locations. Professionally designed publicity material has been distributed with the emphasis being distribution via partners and in community venues rather than within libraries themselves. A programme of improved local signage will increase visibility of the branches during 2023.

The Service has established a regular monthly newsletter that is distributed by email to over 4,281 library members. Please see the following link for access to the latest Newsletter <https://nland.uk/FebNewsletter>

The Service's presence on social media has been reinvigorated, including the introduction of Family History Chat on Facebook (over 200 members) and the Northumberland Libraries Facebook page currently has 3700 followers.

### **(B) The Establishment of Library Hubs Within Each Locality Area**

As England's largest and most sparsely populated County, providing an effective and sustainable Library Service for Northumberland cannot be achieved through a standardised model of operation. Building on the findings of the consultation, and considering the learning from operating during the pandemic, a series of Hub Libraries has been established serving each of the diverse Locality Areas.

The designated Hub Libraries provide coordination of the wider network of smaller 'Satellite Libraries' and other forms of provision available throughout the Locality. The Universal Library Offers will remain central to the overall provision however their delivery in each Locality will be programmed according to known local needs and ambition. This approach enables the service to prioritise different aspects of the Service at a local level with a strong central digital core.

All members of Library staff will be involved in the creation of their new local prospectuses with the concept being introduced at the Staff Conference on 19 April 2023. With the support of NCT Locality Coordinators and Family Hub managers, the evidence of need will be drawn together and addressed in the context of NCC priorities within the framework of the Universal Library Offers. This conversation will be broadened across colleagues within the new Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities directorate. These plans will be presented to Local Area Committees for consideration and comment and be reviewed on an annual basis, therefore providing an assurance of relevance and purpose.

Each of the County's Library Hubs offers:

- Flexible and welcoming community spaces for group and individual activities such as storytimes, family learning, group and individual study, reading and writing groups, wider community activity determined in collaboration with residents and joint activities with partners to meet common objectives e.g., health, education, tackling inequalities and improving skills.
- Well identified town centre positioning with convenient access from a local transport hub.
- Access to IT offering support to use different devices, including their own, to residents who have little or no IT skills and either no or limited access to IT at home for their own purposes including job searching, personal business and keeping in touch. Where feasible this will extend to a wider range of services, such as 3D printing, to support building digital confidence, education, economic recovery and the delivery of the Universal Library Offers.

- An events and activities programme that supports the delivery of the Universal Library Offers in line with local priorities and national initiatives.
- Local studies resources for loan and reference with a focus on the specific local area.
- A wide and changing range of books and resources for loan.

Berwick, Blyth, Cramlington, Hexham and Morpeth are the County's designated Hub Libraries.

### **(C) Extending Reach and Partnerships**

It must be emphasised that the designation of the five 'Hub Libraries' is not intended to in any way reduce the significance of the services provided through the smaller stand alone, or co-located libraries. To plan for a sustainable and flexible service it is necessary to seek new ways of working, develop new partnerships and increase collaboration with strong central support and coordination. This is an ongoing mission in the spirit of progressive service delivery.

The Library Leadership Team continues to establish links with colleagues across Council departments, and other organisations, who have shared objectives with the service. This, combined with the County's integrated response to Covid 19, has resulted in heightened awareness of the Library Service and has significantly increased partnership working. Examples include the Ageing Well Partnership, Family Hubs, Health Trainers, and Thriving Communities.

Opportunities to work more closely with communities to enhance the service offered by satellite libraries will be explored during 2023/24. In each case, satellite locations will be supported by the Hub libraries reaffirming the principle that our Hub locations form the core of the service. Models of delivery will be explored which aim to effectively and sustainably meet the needs and aspirations of communities.

One partnership model already in operation is the Community Access Libraries that operate at Haydon Bridge and Heddon on the Wall. Discussions are now underway regarding community involvement in the future service provision at South Beach and Wylam Libraries.

Bedlington Station Library has now been relocated through a new partnership with the nearby Community Centre which is providing benefits to both parties.

Throughout 2023-2024 the Service will particularly focus on exploring further partnerships with the health sector. Reading for Wellbeing, conceived and part funded by Ann Cleeves, is an exemplar project which has brought new expertise and additional capacity to the service to provide focused reading support with outstanding results. The Thriving Communities concept is a people focused way of working which delivered the 'In our Footsteps' project aimed at supporting people in the early stages of dementia. The project, piloted in Ashington and Haltwhistle, delivered a series of workshops which encouraged people to create a heritage trail by working together with a family member or friend to share stories and memories, creating a treasure chest of lived experiences.

To contribute to the Council's ambitions for economic growth, the service continues to work with Advance Northumberland to complement their business support offer through the development of local Business and Intellectual Property Centres (BIPC) at Berwick, Hexham and Morpeth supported by the regional centre in Newcastle and funded by the British Library.

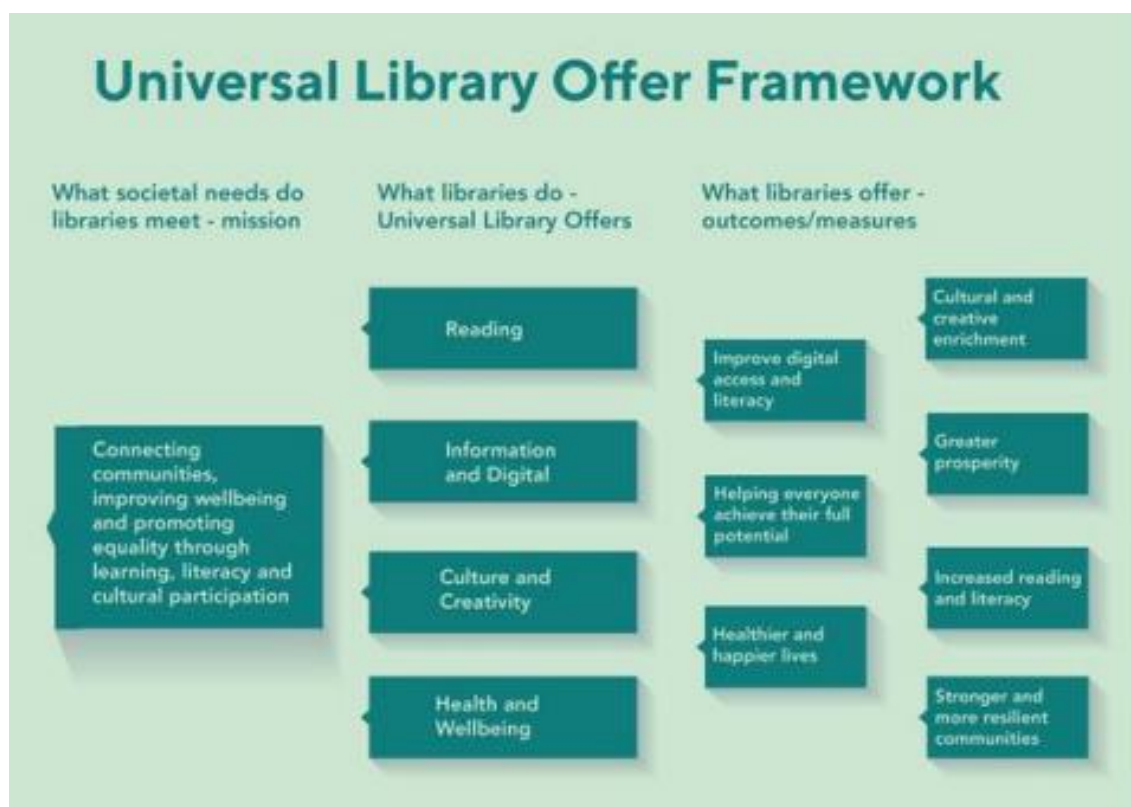
Partnership work continues to be developed by the Librarian team, both at Locality level e.g., Alnwick Storyfest, Berwick Literary and Morpeth Book festivals and as part of countywide initiatives, such as the Illuminated Sheep Arts Trail and a programme of touring productions.

'Photographing the Roman Wall, Then and Now' saw the Library and Archive Services collaborate to produce a touring exhibition and supporting programme of events which contributed Hadrian's Wall 1900 Festival. This joint project involved conception of the idea, obtaining ACE funding, creating the exhibition through to delivering in person and digital talks and workshops.

### The Universal Offers

Libraries Connected, the Arts Council Sector Support Organisation for Libraries, has developed a framework of four Universal Library Offers that support the core public library offer and drive library innovation and development. These Universal Library Offers are

- Reading
- Information and Digital
- Culture and Creativity
- Health and Wellbeing



### Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Libraries are uniquely placed to help the Council and its partners deliver their strategic objectives, whether linked to community
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	cohesion, health and wellbeing, economic growth, promoting independent living or increasing life chances.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	No implications beyond existing budget allocations
<b>Legal</b>	<p>Library Authorities have a statutory duty under the <a href="#">Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964</a> 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' for all those who live, work or study in the area (section 7). In providing this service, councils must, among other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage both adults and children to make full use of the Library Service</li> <li>• lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area.</li> </ul> <p>The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council.</p>
<b>Procurement</b>	None at this stage
<b>Human Resources</b>	None at this Stage
<b>Property</b>	Property Services are engaged in any potential asset considerations
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The self-completion survey asked for demographic information from consultation respondents related to the protected characteristics to comply with the Equality Act.</p> <p>Libraries provide safe spaces in the heart of their communities, and provide many services targeting people who are living on a low income, people who are lonely, unemployed, or elderly, and people with long term medical conditions or disabilities.</p>
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	None at this stage. Assessments will be undertaken on an individual project basis if required
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	Libraries provide opportunities which foster community engagement and cohesion whilst offering diversionary activity.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	<p>Libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them, people explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture.</p> <p>The consultation was widely publicised in Libraries, via council channels, media and social media and youth council etc. A total</p>

	of 5,068 respondents completed the self-completion survey; of these over 1,400 responses were received as paper copies, with the rest online. Information drop-in sessions were held at all 30 Libraries across the County for people to find out more about the consultation. Telephone interviews conducted with residents to provide more in-depth views on factors driving some of the key findings from the self-completion survey.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Increasing digital access reduces the need for journeys by car or public transport to collect books and material. The Library Hubs will be situated within close proximity to public transport links. Libraries play an important and unique role in wider community communications about resiliency, climate change and a sustainable future.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Libraries offer a wide range of health information, both online and through quality-assured reading lists dealing with the more common health conditions. In their role as community hubs, libraries also offer non-clinical spaces in localities where health and wellbeing groups can work with the community in a trusted and non-threatening venue.
<b>Wards</b>	All

**Background papers:**

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Deputy Section 151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Gill O'Neill
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Jeff Watson
Legal Clearance	Lynsey Denyer

**Author and Contact Details**

Nigel Walsh – Interim Service Director  
[Nigel.walsh@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Nigel.walsh@northumberland.gov.uk)  
07789654473



