



Appendix 'A'

A revised strategy for Lancashire's libraries 2017-21

Delivering reading, learning, information, culture and
free digital access across Lancashire

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Foreword

Libraries are a vital service at the heart of our communities. They provide surroundings where people can feel safe and secure, where generations of all ages can meet freely in a public place and where learning can be encouraged.

Lancashire has a strong tradition of communities pulling together when the need arises, and this has been much in evidence over recent years when it comes to protecting their local library. We are grateful to all the voluntary and community groups who have and continue to commit time and resources into the library service and its future development.

This library strategy outlines our promises as a public library authority and sets out the priorities we will focus on to deliver a cost-effective, modern and flexible service.

It outlines our vision and strategic objectives, highlights the importance of our libraries within the community, describes our core offer and provides a clear direction for the future of our library service. We see constituted Friends groups being integral to the long-term sustainability of the service and, working together with our skilled and experienced library staff, we look to build on our Reading, Information, Digital, Health, Learning and Cultural offer.

County Councillor Peter Buckley
Cabinet Member for Community and Cultural Services

September 2017

Background

This strategy has been informed by, and supports the message and ambitions of four key documents:

- The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL):
Universal Offers of Reading, Information, Digital, Health, Learning and Culture
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS):
Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England in 2016-2021
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW):
Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing
- The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP):
Public Library Skills Strategy 2017-2030

In setting out the Lancashire Library Service strategy we will make reference to, and be guided by the above documents but we also understand that in order to achieve our highest ambitions we must have an in-depth understanding of our communities. We have always sought to put the people we serve at the centre of service delivery and draw our inspiration from them in setting our goals and detailing our ambitions. This strategy therefore is a result of listening to what our residents see as important and reflecting that in this strategy but more importantly embedding this in the way we deliver our services.

To make sure we can do this in a meaningful way we will engage with our communities across the county; listening and responding to the conversations which have informed and will continue to inform our strategy. This is a living strategy which is proactive and not reactive. Working with our communities in this way we will be able to accurately foresee where we should focus our investment as well as reviewing and refreshing our approach to the strategy.

We are committed to providing comprehensive access to library services for people unable to attend a library building in person. This will form part of our core offer detailed later in this strategy.

We also aspire to have a flexible and open minded approach to developing the library offer in Lancashire over the next four years. We recognise that partnership working with all our communities is vital to the success of the service.

We also wish to deliver an equitable service and will be working to deliver a service built on a model of having library bands which establishes 4 different bands. Each band will have a set number of opening hours and opening patterns. Libraries will be allotted to a level which reflects the population that it serves but with each library providing the same core offer and facilities. It is envisaged that, throughout the next 4 years of the strategy, this framework of bands will allow us to develop a flexible and

dynamic service which will address local need, as we continue to review and develop the service. This is the practice we have adopted in the past and we will continue to regularly consult with our communities on opening times and service delivery.

In an age where loneliness and social isolation is identified as one of Britain's biggest problems, the library is a pivotal space in the wellbeing of our communities. The importance that we believe libraries have in supporting the health of people has been evidenced by a 2015 study commissioned by Arts Council England, *The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries*. The study found that library engagement has a positive association with general health and being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4% increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health. It also predicted medical cost savings associated with library engagement based on reductions in GP visits by improved access to health information.

Libraries are one of the few free, accessible spaces where anyone can come and learn, share, connect and be active in a safe, neutral environment. We should not underestimate the personal value of libraries as a space and service which enriches lives and contributes both to wellbeing and life chances.

Our vision and strategic objectives

Our vision is:

"A library service which is embedded and flourishing at the heart of Lancashire communities and community life and which makes a difference through reading, information, digital, health, learning and culture".

Our strategic objectives are:

- To provide helpful and knowledgeable staff.
- To encourage people to enjoy reading.
- To provide spaces to enjoy culture and learning.
- To provide easy-to-use online services.
- To help people reach their potential and live independent lives.
- To support our communities to stay healthy.
- To provide opportunities for volunteers and Friends groups to help develop our libraries.

We have checked these objectives with our customers, asking respondents what they thought the Lancashire County Library Service should provide, in line with the service's strategic objectives. This was through an extensive consultation held in 2016.

Our consultation told us that 93% strongly agreed we should provide helpful and knowledgeable staff and 91% said we should encourage people to enjoy reading. 71% strongly agreed we should provide spaces to enjoy culture and learning, 64% easy-to-use online services and help people reach their potential and live independent lives. 59% said support for communities to stay healthy and 48% strongly agreed that there should be opportunities for volunteers to help in libraries.

These objectives link in with and will enable us to deliver the seven key outcomes set out in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport document *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021* as follows:

- Supporting economic change through learning and digital literacy.
- Promoting reading and literacy.
- Providing a 24/7 virtual offer.
- Buildings that provide cultural and learning experiences.
- Opportunities for volunteers.
- Health and wellbeing.
- Developing the library workforce.

They also link in with the six universal offers set out by the Society of Chief Librarians and partners including Arts Council England and the Reading Agency in order to keep our services relevant and accessible.

They are:

- Reading Offer: providing a modern reading service within a local community.
- Information Offer: supporting people to access information and services online in life-critical areas.
- Digital Offer: providing free internet access, clear and accessible online information about library services, and staff who are trained to help customers access digital information.
- Health Offer: providing and promoting Public Health information, sign-posting and referrals as well as creative and social reading activity.
- Learning Offer: developing and promoting our role and contribution to lifelong-learning.
- Cultural Offer: people enjoy a quality and diverse cultural experience in their libraries.

This strategy has been developed to build on the success of the past, and to enable the service to respond to the future challenges and opportunities facing the people of Lancashire.

To achieve this, we will:

- **Inspire** people to enjoy books and reading
- **Stimulate** new ideas and new ways of thinking through access to learning, information and local heritage
- **Engage** with communities to encourage cultural and creative activities
- **Deliver** excellent and inclusive customer services for all

Our libraries are our community and cultural spaces

The attraction of working with libraries for many organisations lies in their ability to connect with their communities on a local level. The neutrality of libraries engenders trust in people. Libraries are uniquely positioned in terms of customer interaction within their immediate community and sometimes far beyond. The service is also connected in different ways to many organisations, both large and small, from providing meeting rooms to being commissioned to deliver specific services, such as the prison and school library services.

The role of library venues is multifaceted. It is a provider of the library service, it is a venue used by other agencies to share public information and services, it is a learning and cultural venue, and it is a place to connect to the rest of the world through the internet and digital access.

The County Council has a statutory duty enshrined under the [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#) to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all people working, living or in full-time education within the county of Lancashire. It is important that we consider this duty, to ensure that Lancashire's library service remains effective, innovative and fit for purpose.

The following quotation is taken from William Sieghart & Panel, [Independent Library Report for England DCMS, 2014](#) which informed the work being undertaken by the Library taskforce whose report is one of the key references for this strategy: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports paper [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England in 2016 – 21](#).

“Libraries are, let us not forget, a golden thread throughout our lives... The library does more than simply loan books. It underpins every community. It is not just a place for self-improvement, but the supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning, from babies to old age, offering support, help, education, and encouraging a love of reading. Whether you wish to apply for a job, or seek housing benefit, or understand your pension rights or the health solutions available to you, or learn to read, the library can assist.”

We know, however, that people want even more than this and 36% of our customers tell us that attending a social or group activity at a library is the **most** important service a library can provide. We don't know how many of our customers would have limited or no social contact without their library but we do know the vital importance the library can play in helping to maintain the independence and enhance the self-worth of the most deprived people living in Lancashire today.

The following quotation from The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports paper [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England in 2016 – 21](#) expands on this point.

"Libraries are cultural hubs within communities - places for inspiration, research, creativity, education, economic prosperity and enjoyment. They help people gain a sense of place and take pride in their neighbourhoods and communities."

Libraries also provide access and signposting to wider cultural activities, objects, knowledge and sites. They encourage people to explore their own culture and creativity, and offer the deep wealth of resources that creative people use for inspiration.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW) was formed in 2014 and aims to improve awareness of the benefits that the arts can bring to health and wellbeing. During 2015–17, the APPGAHW conducted an Inquiry into practice and research in the arts in health and social care, with a view to making recommendations to improve policy and practice. In the [Inquiry Report](#), Lord Bichard of Nailsworth stated:

"More and more people now appreciate that arts and culture can play a valuable part in helping tackle some of the most challenging social and health conditions. Active participation in the visual and performing arts, music and dance can help people facing a lonely old age, depression or mental illness. It can help maintain levels of independence and curiosity and, let's not forget, it can bring great joy and so improve the quality of life for those engaged."

Our core offer

Our libraries will offer:

- Safe, accessible and welcoming spaces.
- Advice and guidance from knowledgeable and trained staff on a range of subjects from recommending reading materials to help getting online and signposting to local services.
- Welcoming and creative spaces where our communities can connect, be active, take notice, learn and share.
- Free access to the internet
- Free 24/7 access to our online library resources
- Support for children and families, through actively promoting health, learning and wellbeing initiatives.
- A range of books, digital resources, eBooks and other materials.
- A request service.
- Cultural activities and events.
- Free Wi-Fi.

Our Home Library Service will:

- Offer full access to the whole of the library services books and audio visual material.
- Provide a request service.
- Be provided free of charge if people are unable to get to a library building because of age, disability or ill health.

Our Mobile Library Service will provide:

- A service which serves Lancashire's more isolated communities.
- Full access to the whole of the library service collections including books and audio visual material suitable for all ages.
- A request service.

Our additional services provided include:-

- Schools Library Service which provides a paid for service to schools in Lancashire and also the unitary authorities of Blackpool and Blackburn.
- Prison Library Service which provides a paid for service to all five of Lancashire's prisons

Looking to the future

Public libraries across the country have been placed in the spotlight as local authorities deal with significant financial constraints. Although we recognise that we will have to live within our means we have a service which we can be proud of with staff who are passionate about delivering the very best they can for our customers. We will explore and develop our role in supporting the local economy through assessing where our available meeting rooms could support the needs of SMEs and bring income into the Library Service.

Within the resources we have available we will continue to provide a variety of options to access library resources through physical and virtual spaces, mobile libraries, digital services, the School Library Service, Home Library Service and Prison Library Service. We will continue to support the mental health and wellbeing of our communities through our [Reading for Health](#) and working with partners to provide enriching experiences for all.

In collaboration with the [Lancashire Volunteer Partnership](#) we will continue to develop our reading hack and adult library volunteers to support our library teams and help develop the skills and wellbeing of our volunteers.

Working in partnership with [The Reading Agency](#), [BookTrust](#) and others we will ensure our library offers support our communities and remain relevant, reliable and accessible

We will work collaboratively with our constituted Friends of Libraries groups to develop flexible and meaningful services for our communities. We see our constituted Friends groups integral to the sustainability of our libraries and by working with us they will be able to support the enhancement of our offer.

As our independent community libraries develop and flourish we will assist in their development and success by actively supporting them both financially and with professional expertise through the Community Libraries Manager and other library and cultural services professionals.

Our creative and collaborative approach and our continued commitment to invest in a wide range of library services will allow us to maximise our extensive network of libraries and customer contacts. We will continue to be a key part of the County Council's offer to the people of Lancashire and will use the opportunity to develop closer links with partners and colleagues from other services. In this way we will improve the customer experience through innovative and collective ways of working which can open up our libraries to whole new audiences.