Luton Council Library Strategy 2020-2025

Introduction

Our Library Strategy sets out our aspiration and vison for a library service that is sustainable and relevant to the residents of Luton. Whilst we recognise that Libraries are an invaluable community service providing access to learning, information and culture for all, the landscape for libraries has changed dramatically in the last ten years.

Libraries have a key role to play in enabling Luton Borough Council to deliver on its vision for Luton in 2040: a vibrant town built on fairness, where people live good lives and achieve their aspirations, everyone will be able to achieve their potential and inequality will be reduced, a town where no one lives in poverty. Our vision for the library service will inspire people to read, learn and access trusted sources of information, enabling individuals to improve their economic and social wellbeing. This will be achieved through the provision of easily accessible physical and online information, welcoming community spaces, access to health and wellbeing services, and supporting skill development to utilise this information for all. Our library service is therefore fundamental in breaking the link between information poverty and income poverty, and in reducing social isolation towards achieving the Luton 2040 vision.

Ensuring no one in Luton is living in poverty by 2040 is a bold ambition, but it's something we are absolutely determined to achieve. We see the role of libraries and other community assets as key to achieving this ambition. The strategic alignment of the Council's community assets would enable the development of a unique configuration of services that best reflects and responds to local need, enabling: improvements in population health and wellbeing; reduction in health inequalities; empowered and engaged communities; reduce social isolation; and transforming neighbourhoods for the better.

This strategy will be the driver for developing the service to ensure relevance in a digital world in a context of reducing budgets, increased partnerships, shared services and buildings and consortium working. It will ensure that there is a clear transformation of the library service across the town to ensure that Luton Borough Council can deliver a high quality library service that is sustainable into the future and remains relevant to the diverse and changing needs of Luton residents. We will ensure transformation through the establishment of strategic priorities supported by the development of an action plan.

In developing this strategy, the Council has considered its statutory obligations and the contribution that libraries can make to wider Council priorities, specifically the Councils vision for 2040 priorities:

- Empowered families and communities;
- Reduced health inequalities; and
- School to employment pathways.

An independent inclusive growth commission has already provided valuable recommendations, which has shaped thinking on how Luton will become an inclusive, modern, and aspirational place and recognises the value of our young people and diverse population. Libraries are recognised nationally as providing a significant role to communities in delivering a broad range of outcomes, including increasing wellbeing, literacy targets and community cohesion. In addition, their role as a service located within communities provides a rich selection of resources and materials locally and can offer a venue that facilitates a social space, events and shared working in creative and innovative ways. Libraries are uniquely situated, as a trusted and valued service, to engage with local communities in responding to changing needs and neighbourhood priorities.

The Library strategy has also been further informed by Harnessing Momentum: A Strategic Vision for the Arts,

Cultural and Creative Industries in Luton 2017-2027.

Purpose of Service

The purpose of our library service is improve access to knowledge, information and public spaces through engagement with partners and communities to build an inclusive town. The service exists to ensure that quality resources, knowledge and technology are available and accessible to everyone.

Luton Council's principal objective is to maintain the quality of the library service through a model that is best able to achieve this in both the short and the long term.

Our Statutory Duty

Luton Council has a statutory responsibility (legal duty) to provide a local library service in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Act requires that the Local Authority provide a library service that is 'comprehensive and efficient'.

There are no national standards for library provision, it is for local decision to how the library service best meets this requirement practically, including how many libraries there are, where they are, when they are open, and what each one offers. As a result, library services across the country are not all the same. Services are shaped by factors such as local policy, customer need and, in some cases, historical developments.

In formulating the library strategy the Council must also comply with the public sector equality duty (section 149 of the Equality Act). This requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it; the relevant protected characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; and marriage and civil partnership.

How does our strategy compare to what is happening nationally?

In 2010, the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals published guidance for local councils which said that a good public library service would deliver:

"A positive future for children and young people; a fulfilling life for older people; strong, safe and sustainable communities; promotion of local identity and community pride learning; skills and workforce development; Health improvements and wellbeing; Equality, community cohesion and social justice; and Economic regeneration."

In 2011, Arts Council England (ACE) took on national responsibility for the development of libraries and museums, with core funding of public libraries remaining the statutory responsibility of local library authorities. ACE identify public libraries as a vital resource for the development of creativity and the promotion of culture.

ACE's new ten year strategy "Let's Create" (published in January 2020)[1], identifies three outcomes:

i. Creative People: Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life;
ii. Cultural Communities: Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture; and
iii. A creative and cultural country: England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

[1] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate

The document states that “Libraries are widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity. They help to build stronger, happier communities, support social prescribing, develop readers and promote digital literacy. They will be central to our delivery of this Strategy, and over the next 10 years we will increase our investment in them.”

Libraries Connected (formerly the Society of Chief Librarians) also produced and launched the universal offers for public libraries in 2013. These were reviewed with the public library sector and stakeholders in 2019 and re-launched as a streamlined and consistent framework with the mission of “Connecting communities, improving wellbeing and promoting equality through learning, literacy and cultural participation” with the four key themes of:

- Reading – engage, imagine, discover;
- Information and digital – inform, inspire, innovate;
- Health and wellbeing – healthier, happier, connected; and
- Culture and creativity – explore, create, participate

Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021, published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in December 2016, and endorsed by the Local Government Association, sets out a vision for public library services in England. The document provides seven outcomes to achieve the vision:

i. Cultural and creative enrichment;
ii. Increased reading and literacy;
iii. Improved digital access and literacy;
iv. Helping everyone achieve their full potential;
v. Healthier and happier lives;
vi. Greater prosperity; and
vii. Stronger, more resilient communities.

The document also challenges local authorities to “explore alternative forms of delivery and financing for library services before making any reductions in library services”, and sets out the current context for libraries as a nationally mandated service delivered locally, to local priorities.

In developing this strategy, the Council has considered its statutory obligations, the universal offer and the contribution that libraries can make to Council priorities. To support us in identifying what local people need from the library service and understand how we can deliver our statutory duty of a ‘comprehensive and efficient library service’ a survey was designed to capture the usage and views of both users and non-users (full analysis available as Appendix 1).

This Strategy demonstrates a commitment to the delivery of a broad range of modern, affordable library services to meet people’s needs in reading, accessing information, learning, literacy, health and wellbeing, work and leisure.

Our library service will:

- Outreach and engage with community members and organisations to ensure Luton’s library offer adapts to meet local needs;
- enable all that live, work and study in Luton to access knowledge, information and cultural resources for themselves, and provide support for those who may need more help;
- contribute to the health and wellbeing of our communities;
- provide safe spaces (both physical and virtual) where anyone can go, without judgement, to read, to

borrow, to learn, and to access information and online resources;
- enrich communities by fostering local culture and heritage, and provide opportunities for citizens to participate actively in community life; and
- Achieve financial resilience and sustainability by seizing opportunities to reduce costs and increase income.

The implications of COVID-19 mean that user interactions and requirements of the library service are likely to change. This strategy provides the flexibility and opportunity to allow the library service to respond appropriately to emerging needs and opportunities.

Where we want to be: Strategic Vision for Libraries 2020-2025

Our vision is to create a modern Library Service at the heart of the community that is inclusive, efficient, safe and accessible, and meets the needs of all who live, work or study in Luton. Our service will be responsive, relevant, sustainable, and support residents to reach their potential.

> "A library in the middle of a community is a cross between an emergency exit, a life-raft and a festival. They are cathedrals of the mind; hospitals of the soul; theme parks of the imagination. On a cold rainy island, they are the only sheltered public spaces where you are not a consumer, but a citizen instead" Caitlin Moran columnist and author ('Moranthology', 2012).

There are a number of reasons why libraries need to develop over the next five years, determined by local need, the Council's priorities, and national policy (Libraries as a statutory service[2]).

Our ambition is that by 2025, we will have transformed the Library Service from its current offer (summarised at Appendix 2) to an inspiring Library Service shaped by the community where libraries are an integral part of a wider community hub; a place for people to meet/gather; a place for learning/self-improvement; a place for the promotion of health and wellbeing, and seen as 'much more than just a library'.

The transformation of the Library Service will enable the service to be fit for purpose, sustainable, and able to support its users to access high quality services. In the context of this strategy, Community Hubs represent the potential transformation of the Council's community estate to strategically align services, with the view of enabling more services to be accessed in one place, increasing convenience for residents, as well as enabling modern, vibrant, safe and sustainable spaces that will instil civic pride and enable communities to learn and grow.

Libraries are incredibly important, and the Council will engage fully with communities around any proposals for reform of the Library Service, ensuring any proposals are consulted widely, allowing reasonable time for communities to develop alternative or complementary proposals. This will enable the service to meet community needs, achieve financial sustainability, and ensure the best quality delivery of service.

Our Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Promoting Lifelong Learning for all

Delivering on this strategic priority:

Libraries provide public access to resources, information, and knowledge. Therefore, the library service has a pivotal role to play in the delivery and development of future systems of lifelong learning. Libraries offer guidance and training in how to search and use this information, and rate the quality of information sources. The service also supports employees and volunteers to develop new skills.

The library service will continue to work closely with education services, schools, colleges and the university to contribute to children's literacy, school-readiness, and lifelong learning and development. Access to books and the promotion of reading has a significant effect on children's academic skills as well as their mental health and wellbeing. The Library service will continue to inspire children from their earliest years to discover a love of reading and to learn and develop. This includes free Bookstart packs for babies, toddlers and school-starters, work with schools, Summer Reading Challenge, Rhyme times, story times, clubs and activities for children as well as books for all ages, dedicated study zones and online resources.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service

Libraries will continue to support skill and employability. The library service will explore opportunities to partner with the British Library Business and Intellectual Property Centre National Network to provide support for local businesses, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and start-ups.

Target Outcomes:

- Encourage library users of all ages to become literate in all forms of contemporary communication;
- Library services to work closely with education services and schools, colleges and the university to contribute to children's literacy, school-readiness and lifelong learning and development;
- Provide technology and access to resources that support people in self-study;
- Engage with community partners to develop and deliver various traditional and non-traditional literacy programs;
- Identify new ways our collections, programmes and services can assist with life-long literacy and discovery;
- Continue to build diverse collections to support programming and services, ensuring there is a diverse offering of materials, including dual-language picture books;
- Further develop partnerships that support people into employment;
- Offer core courses, learning and e-learning opportunities in libraries;
- Develop computer literacy skills, supporting entrepreneurs and assist in developing financial literacy; and
- Engage with local partners to reduce levels of digital exclusion and disadvantage.

Priority 2: Building community through outreach, programmes & partnerships.

Delivering on this strategic priority:
The library service plays an important role in community development, as places to meet or through outreach work in communities. The Library service will strengthen its programme of outreach, providing library services and activities where they are most needed, including schools, and other community venues. The service will reach new communities, increasing service usage and bringing in new customers through outreach, marketing and by providing a service that is appealing and relevant to them.

The library service will ensure diversity in the materials offered. The library service recognises the importance of library users 'seeing themselves' in the materials offered, through character representation in fiction, wider representation in non-fiction and linguistic representation in terms of the materials offered.

The library service will adapt to new demands, and help people to access library services and materials, signpost services offered by partners, and explore working in different ways as the library service evolves.

Target Outcomes:

- Build on existing strong partnerships to ensure libraries are used by multiple agencies, to become community hubs for a number of quality service offers;
- Ensure that the service develops and delivers innovative and effective outreach programmes, based on identified needs;
- Identify and engage with community groups and partners to develop innovative and effective programmes, collections, and services;
- Improve accessibility and strengthen community resources and assets by extending the availability of the building outside staffed hours;
- Enhance the promotion of activities that take place in libraries that support people looking for employment and/or progression in their careers; and
- Build on the library's profile and participate in neighbourhood and community-wide events.

Priority 3: Supporting and enabling health and wellbeing.

Delivering on this strategic priority:
Changes in local needs means that library services have to evolve and adapt. As well as being a source of information, lender of books, and other learning materials, libraries have an important role to play in the prevention of ill-health, and promotion of health and wellbeing. Libraries provide a safe space where people can access or find out about other services, meet others and socialise or simply spend time.

Target Outcomes:

- Contribute to the public health agenda, particularly in the areas of physical and emotional wellbeing;
- Build relationships with partners to help deliver health and wellbeing initiatives to Luton's diverse communities;
- Improve the library environment whilst offering a venue that is universally accessible and free at the point of access, which provides a place of safety and companionship for people who have a sense of isolation;
- Improve and promote a wide cultural programme and social inclusion, increasing digital inclusion;
- Ensure that vulnerable and isolated customers who are unable to visit the local library in person are still able to access library services; reviewing current outreach services and exploring new delivery models to improve access for these customers, making greater use of developing technologies and home delivery solutions; and
- Promote mental and physical wellbeing by connecting people with knowledge, opportunities, and services, and with each other.

Priority 4: Driving sustainable economic growth through modernisation of the service and finding innovative ways to improve the offer and save money.

Delivering on this strategic priority:
Despite the financial challenges the Council faces, we are determined to continue to transform how the library service operates. Within the context of significant reductions in public spending it has been recognised that libraries will need to contribute to local government savings targets by becoming financially efficient and affordable based on community needs. We need to target investment towards modernising the service to meet the future needs of residents. While we cannot speculate on the number or locations of libraries in the future, we can guarantee a quality, town wide service that is responsive, modern, relevant and sustainable in a changing world where its value to residents is acknowledged; where the service is the best it can be for all.

Target Outcomes:

- Ensure the service is run efficiently and provides value for money;
- Share library buildings to provide other services that people want locally, creating community hubs;
- Create a seamless user experience through the integration of our digital and physical spaces;
- Investigate innovative and alternative service delivery models;
- Invest in technology to improve library operation and services; and
- Use new technology such as self-service and e-books.

What will success look like?
Our Vision and Strategic Priorities provide a clear direction for the future delivery of the Library Service over the next five years, and supports the Council's overarching priority of eradicating poverty. Throughout our journey we will regularly review our outcomes and progress made against them.

This strategy will be kept under review during its lifetime to ensure that we continue to monitor and evaluate our ambition. An action plan will be developed in partnership with the provider of the Library Service and will be monitored periodically and reviewed annually. The action plan will bring together the strategic priorities, the Libraries Deliver outcomes, the libraries connected themes, and assessments of local needs with the aim of

fulfilling the targeted outcomes. The Library Service will work with various partners to achieve the ambitions of this plan.

This strategy and its action plan will support and respond to Luton 2040, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Strategic Vision for the Arts, Cultural and Creative Industries in Luton, and Many Voices, One Town – a strategy for building a stronger community in Luton, as well as other key local and national strategic documents.

We will consider this strategy to have achieved our ambition for libraries if the following are achieved:

- Overall use of library services, whether online or in person, increases;
- The service is reaching new communities and bringing in new customers;
- The service is making a positive contribution to improving outcomes and opportunities for citizens;
- The service is economic, efficient, effective and sustainable; and
- The service is supporting and contributing to the wider strategic prioirites of the council.

Key performance indicators will be developed and reviewed periodically, and enhanced or adapted where appropriate, to achieve our ambition and demonstrate social value.

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Summary of consultation

Appendix 2 – Overview of Existing Provision

Appendix 1 – Summary of consultation



Appendix A - Survey Summary v0.1.docx

Appendix 2: Overview of Existing Provision

Libraries offer a wide range of services for all ages, including: safe and welcoming spaces; quality book stocks for all ages (including different languages); homework help; activities to encourage reading and cultural engagement; information for local studies; access to a PC and free online resources (including Wi-Fi); informal learning; home library service; membership; concessions; signposting; and functional support such as photocopying. Libraries also engage with partners to deliver cross-cutting objectives through different programmes and projects.

Libraries

There are six static libraries in Luton, which offer the full range of core services, and three Library Access Points, which provide access to a collection of books:

- Luton Central Library, St. George's Square, LUTON, LU1 2NG;
- Leagrave Library, Marsh Road, LUTON, LU3 2N;
- Marsh Farm Library, Lea Manor High School, Northwell Drive, LUTON, LU3 3TL;
- Lewsey Library, Landrace Road, Luton, LU4 0SW;
- Stopsley Library, Hitchin Road, Luton, LU2 7UG; and
- Bury Park Library, Bury Park Community Centre, 161 Dunstable Road, Luton, LU1 1BW.
- Library access points:
    - Hockwell Ring Community Centre
    - Chaul End Community Centre
    - Farley Community Centre

In addition, a home library service and a range of virtual resources are also available for Luton residents. Luton Central Library is the headquarters for the service and offers the main local studies collections for Luton.

Library core service

- Books in standard and large print;
- Audio books and e-Audio books;
- Music and films in appropriate formats;
- Newspapers and magazines in print and e-format;
- Books and newspapers in a range of community languages;
- Computer and internet access through the public library computers;
- Free Wi-Fi at all libraries (not currently available at Marsh Farm Library);
- Access to online services and resources;
- Bookstart Rhyme Time and Homework Help;
- Study space and quiet areas; and
- Events and activities to support reading and literacy.

All libraries participate in the national Summer Reading Challenge and support other programmes, such as those set out in the Universal Offers Calendar.[3]

Library Access Points core services

- Books in standard and large print; and
- Free Wi-Fi.

[3] https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/universal-library-offers-calendar-2020