



# Libraries Strategy

## **Developing sustainable library services and community hubs**

**Paul Bayley**

**Principal Manager Local Community Services**

**March 2014**

## Contents

Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Cheshire East Libraries	5
3. The National Picture	7
4. The Council's Three Year Plan – a major change project for Libraries	9
5. Library Survey – September 2013	10
6. Priorities for a sustainable library service	13
7. Delivering the strategy	15
8. Summary of new priorities for action	24

## Executive Summary

This Libraries strategy defines the service priorities for our libraries to ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, while also directly contributing to the key outcomes set out in the Council's Three Year Plan, and delivers the expectations from the major change project to deliver a sustainable library service in Cheshire East. The Council recognises the valuable role that our libraries play in their communities and is committed to retaining its libraries. It has the ambition to broaden the role of our libraries and develop community hubs that appeal to a wider audience and buck the national trend of declining library usage.

The Council provides libraries in 16 towns in Cheshire East, receiving 1.8 million visitors and issuing 2.7 million books each year. The latest CIPFA Public Library Statistics reported that Cheshire East has the highest issues per 1,000 population of all North West authorities and all English Unitaries.

The Council's Three Year Plan has established a project to develop a new model for sustainable library services and community hubs. The Council is committed to its 16 libraries but the project is expected to deliver £1m saving against a baseline revenue budget of £3.5m by 2015/16.

A Library survey was commissioned to ensure we design and deliver a sustainable library service that meets the expectations of our communities. 95% of library users are satisfied with the library service. The service that they tend to value is a traditional one, with an emphasis on borrowing books. The changes they desire tend to be enhancements or modernisations of the current library offer: Wi-Fi, eBooks, and better zoning to allow for both quiet study and noisy children in the same building.

Expectations of libraries have evolved and if they are to represent value for money to all residents they must become more relevant to a wider section of the community and help our local communities to become strong and supportive and help people to develop the life skills and education they need to thrive. Libraries would not exist, however, without their traditional purpose of lending books and so our challenge is balancing the expectations of our traditional library users with the diverse needs and expectations of residents that visit our libraries to seek help with finding a job, or get information on benefits, or develop digital skills, or participate in community activities.

The service priorities for our libraries are:

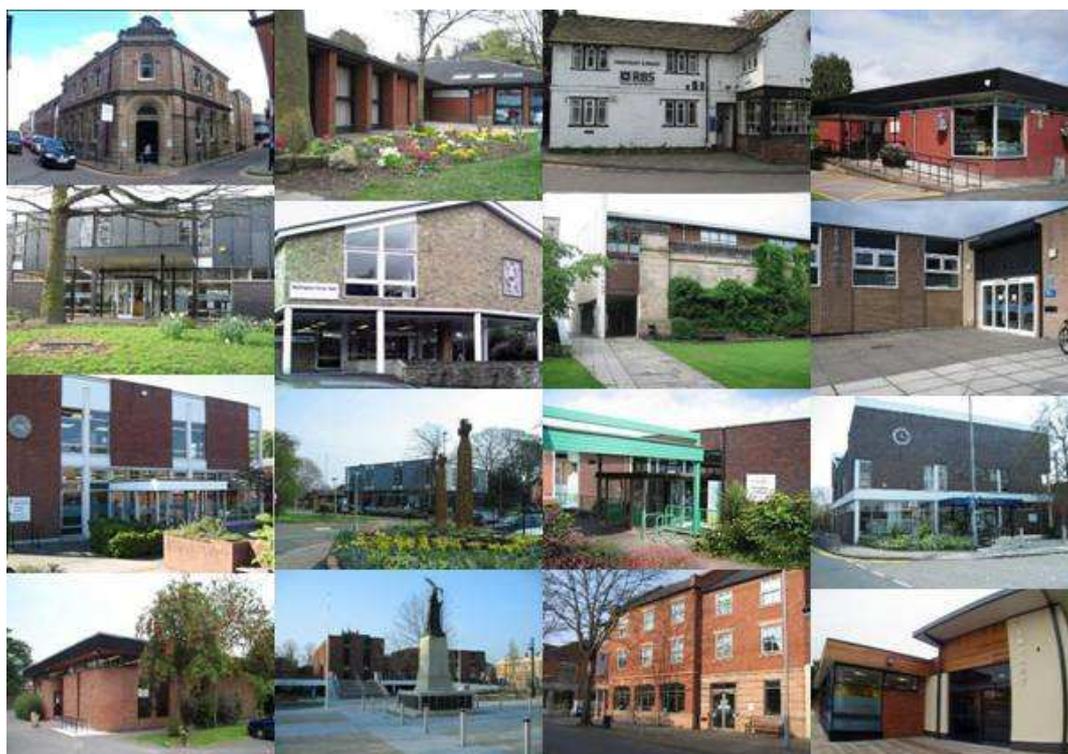
- Improve literacy
- Support informal learning
- Enable digital inclusion
- Provide information
- Develop libraries as community hubs
- Improve efficiency to give best value for local people

# 1. Introduction

Cheshire East Libraries are highly valued by residents. A recent Libraries survey reported 95% of users were satisfied with the library service in Cheshire East. We have the highest number of issues amongst all Unitary authorities, and the third highest out of all UK library authorities. The Council recognises the valuable role that our libraries play in their communities and is committed to retaining libraries in the 16 towns that they are in today. It has the ambition to broaden the role of our libraries and develop community hubs that appeal to a wider audience and buck the national trend of declining library usage.

The Council published its Three Year Plan in February 2013, setting a clear strategic direction for the authority and identifying the key outcomes we are seeking to achieve to improve the quality of life of local people. The Plan also identified major change programmes to ensure that the Council focuses its energy and resources on those areas of change which will ensure maximum value for money for local people, and also build a sustainable Council for the future. This included a project to develop a new model for sustainable library services and community hubs that challenged the service to reduce its annual operating costs by 30%.

While the lending of reading materials remains the universally recognised trademark of the service, the scope of the public library has evolved beyond the traditional role of promoting literature, reading and culture to also encompass information, literacy, learning, digital inclusion and job-seeking support. This strategy defines the service priorities for our libraries to ensure that it fulfils its statutory duty, while also directly contributing to the key outcomes set out in the Council's Three Year Plan, and delivers the expectations from the major change project to deliver a sustainable library service in Cheshire East.



## 2. Cheshire East Libraries

Cheshire East Council has a statutory duty 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof' as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Cheshire East provides public libraries in 16 towns across Cheshire East, plus the library at HMP Styal. These are supplemented by a mobile library and books on wheels service for rural communities and housebound customers that are unable to access a static library. Specialist and support services such as the Education Library Service, Bibliographical Services and the Library Management System are shared with Cheshire West and Chester.

***2.7 million books were borrowed from Cheshire East libraries in 2013***

***190,000 people logged on to the People's Network to access the internet***

***1.8 million people walked through the doors of our libraries***

### Cheshire East Libraries



The Library service has modernised and developed during the first five years of Cheshire East. RFID self service technology has been introduced to enable customers to borrow and return books themselves. Most of our libraries were refurbished and refreshed as the self service kiosks were introduced to provide a more open, flexible and modern library space. We have reviewed and simplified our stock policy and procedure to ensure we get the maximum value from the stock on our shelves, and we are working with our stock suppliers to improve the efficiency of ordering new stock.

Our Libraries have also taken on the face to face customer service function for the Council in their communities, as standalone Customer Service Points from the legacy Councils were relocated into the libraries, and then this service was rolled out borough wide.

We have reviewed the mobile library service, reducing the number of vehicles from three to one and ensuring that we provide a consistent service across the borough, redesigning routes to provide longer stops in central locations in communities.

We have also reviewed the financial viability of our smallest libraries where the subsidy per active user that the Council funds was significantly higher than our other libraries. Weston library was closed during 2013 and Hurdsfield library is scheduled to close during 2014, although discussions continue with a local community group who hope to provide a community library within a wider community facility on the estate.

A Peer review carried out by the Local Government Association in March 2012 concluded that we are providing a good library service, professionally managed and delivered by highly motivated staff. The review added that they were extremely impressed by the way the service had accommodated the customer service function and made it a success.

The latest CIPFA Public Library Statistics (2012-13) revealed that Cheshire East has the highest issues per 1,000 population of all North West authorities and all English Unitaries. It has the third highest issues amongst all UK library authorities, with only the City of London and Westminster ranking higher. Cheshire East is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> out of the 51 English Unitary Authorities for total revenue expenditure per 1,000 population, and 13<sup>th</sup> out of the 22 North West authorities. Our expenditure on books and other materials for loan ranks higher, however, with Cheshire East ranked 14<sup>th</sup> amongst English Unitaries and 7<sup>th</sup> out of the North West. Our ranking has risen from 24<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively since 2010 for expenditure on materials.

### 3. The National Picture

In December 2013 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published a review of developments in the library sector. The report recognises that there have been a number of developments in library services made in response to the on-going funding environment to which all public services are making their contribution to savings, but also because individual authorities are looking at better ways of delivering a range of services so that they are fit for the present and the future.

Some authorities have in the past 12 months completed some major new building projects for their library service. For example Liverpool Central Library has completed an ambitious £50million refurbishment with over 400,000 visitors since opening in May 2013; the Library of Birmingham, which opened in October 2013, recording 12,000 visitors a day in the first week; and the £31million Wakefield One Library, opened in November, housed in the new civic office building which is also home to Wakefield Museum, a café, and Wakefield Metropolitan District Council One-Stop-Shop. These are true civic buildings, with learning at their core, but offering a diverse range of cultural and wider public services.

*Envisioning the library of the future* was a major research project commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE). It identified four priorities to sustain and develop a 21st century public library service.

1. place the library as the hub of the community
2. make the most of digital technology and creative media
3. ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
4. deliver the right skills for those who work in libraries

ACE, in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA), also published *Community Libraries Guiding Principles*, a report which presented the findings of research about the different ways communities have been involved with their libraries. The report concluded there is no single model of community involvement in libraries, but most community libraries are not independent, they are partnerships with their local council. Community interest cannot be assumed, but needs to be assessed, and some communities, particularly in more disadvantaged areas, may need support.

In March 2013 DCMS published the findings of William Sieghart whom they had commissioned to undertake an independent review of e-lending in public libraries in England. The review focused on the issue of the lending of digital versions of books by public libraries: how should this work and what would its impact be? Sieghart summarised the problem as publishers being collectively nervous of applying the same model for selling digital books as for their printed counterparts, when it comes to selling to libraries. This is because of their concerns about remote downloading, where a library member downloads a book on to a digital device via the internet, avoiding the need for a visit to the library at all. This lack of “friction”, where there is no need to visit the library, means that the publishers and booksellers fear that it would be too easy to borrow a book for free. So easy in fact, that the borrower might never need to buy another book. Publishers want libraries to be successful in digital

lending but not so successful that they significantly inhibit the purchase of the publishers' titles. Sieghart recommended that Public libraries should be able to offer both on-site and remote e-Lending service to their users, free at point of use. However, he also recognised that the interests of publishers and booksellers must be protected by building in frictions that set 21st-century versions of the limits to supply which are inherent in the physical loans market. These frictions could include the lending of each digital copy to one reader at a time, that digital books could be securely removed after lending and that digital books would deteriorate after a number of loans. A recommendation was the testing of remote e-lending, based on one user, one copy, and that copy would deteriorate after an agreed number of loans. A pilot is being led by the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) in partnership with the Publishers Association for this testing of remote e-lending, but until the publishers' nervousness is fully addressed, the availability of stock for e-lending will remain limited.

## 4. The Council's Three Year Plan – a major change project for Libraries

The Cheshire East Council Three Year Plan was agreed in February 2013. The new Three Year Plan set a clear strategic direction for the authority, reflecting the changing role of local government, funding reductions, and policy changes at the national and local level. It identified the core purpose for the Council and the key outcomes we are seeking to achieve to improve the quality of life of local people and, therefore, what our priorities are for action and investment over the 3 year life of the plan.

Our libraries directly contribute to outcome 1 and outcome 3 in the Plan, and they also provide an excellent example of three of the characteristics that define the sort of Council we want to be.

<b>OUTCOME 1</b>	<b><i>Our local communities are strong and supportive</i></b> Individuals and families are self-reliant and take personal responsibility for their quality of life. Communities are cohesive, with a strong sense of neighbourliness. There is genuine civic pride and mutual respect.
<b>OUTCOME 3</b>	<b><i>People have the life skills and education they need to thrive.</i></b> Children and young people get a good start in life, and are prepared for the world of work. Everyone is equipped to live independent, self-sufficient lives, and to realise their particular talents and abilities.
<b>What sort of a Council do we want to be?</b>	
<b>A Council which enables and supports communities, families and individuals to flourish and be self-reliant</b>	
<b>A Council that works in partnership with others to ensure the best outcomes for local people</b>	
<b>A Council that ensures services are delivered in the way which gives the best value for local people</b>	

The Three Year Plan also identified major change programmes to ensure that the Council focuses its energy and resources on those areas of change which will ensure maximum value for money for local people, and also build a sustainable Council for the future. A project was established, under the priority to redefine the Council's role in core place-based services, to ***develop a new model for sustainable library services and community hubs***. The Council is committed to retaining libraries in the 16 towns across the Borough but the project is designed to deliver a library service that better reflects the demand within each community. To ensure that the library service is financially sustainable, the project is also expected to deliver a £1m saving against the current £3.5m revenue budget by 2015/16. A £700k capital programme was also established to enable investment in the service to ensure its sustainability.



of support for the provision of Wi-Fi so that users could bring their own devices to the library. This could free up computer and study space; the research found that at present very few people spend longer periods of time (over two hours) in the library. The most significant priorities for improvement, however, are, as we have found everywhere else in the country, for cafés and toilets.

There is relatively little appetite for broader, non-traditional use of the buildings, using them as community meeting places or sharing with other council services. The exception is an interest in having more adult education classes in the libraries. But there is some local variation, and the majority agreed that libraries should be more tailored to local demand rather than trying to include all the elements of a library service in each.

In summary, the picture to emerge is of generally very satisfied library users. The changes they desire tend to be enhancements or modernisations of the current library offer rather than a total change of direction for the authority: a coffee shop, Wi-Fi, e-books and if possible better zoning to allow for both quiet study and noisy children in the same building. However there are some challenges inherent in this conclusion.

With so many satisfied users, our real challenge over the next few years could be to work out how to retain and keep them happy while not alienating the next generation who will be looking for an increasingly technology-based offer. The need for modernisation expressed in many of the verbatim comments and reflected in the quantitative findings relating to IT is likely to become a more pressing one over the next couple of years, and users who are currently broadly happy with the service may well become less so if they perceive it as failing to move with the times. A closer look at patterns of use and at detailed age breakdowns may well indicate that support for libraries could decline unless the service is modernised to meet the needs of a younger more demanding population.

The relative under-use of our libraries for study purposes, combined with some of the verbatim comments which indicate concerns about different types of use creating conflicting needs for quiet and "buzz", suggest that the smaller libraries in particular are struggling to meet the needs of all groups within the community. This is a challenge for many library services, but getting this right will make a big difference to satisfaction levels and to perceptions of the service as we move forward with any modernisations. It is library layout, look and feel which is the chief driver of satisfaction with libraries.

The findings from this research indicate that we have a mandate from users to experiment with different approaches on a library by library basis, rather than trying to include all the elements of a library service in each one. Therefore as a service we will need to continue to work with our users in each community to establish their priorities and assess the potential of each building to accommodate a variety of needs.

The survey also concluded, more controversially perhaps, that it could be argued from the findings that people are so happy with the service that there is some justification for making reductions in some areas of provision. The most obvious

place to look would be the stock fund, which is very generous. Spending less on that would probably impact only a little on satisfaction and could enable us to meet efficiency targets and/or resource some of the modernisation mentioned above. It would also free up space for more seating and/or study space, and in the larger libraries, for better zoning.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the surveys, our research partner recommended that any future strategy for the service should include:

- the introduction of Wi-Fi across the system;
- the provision of e-books;
- an assessment on a library by library basis of the potential to rethink layouts to provide, where possible, refreshments and more seating for both study and relaxation purposes;
- a review of the feedback about each library to develop a priority list for improvements, reporting on this to local users;
- consideration as to whether reducing spending on book stock (in particular) would allow the service to speed up modernisation, rethink library layouts and/or meet any future budget reductions; and
- building on this exercise to create an on-going dialogue with local communities about issues such as widening the use of library buildings to provide partner services and share resources.

## 6. Priorities for a sustainable library service

In its review of developments in the library sector the Department for Culture, Media and Sport re-affirmed that local authorities remain best placed to assess the needs of their local communities and design services accordingly, within the requirements of their statutory duty to deliver a service which is comprehensive and efficient.

The library survey told us that Cheshire East library users value their library service very highly, and that the service that they tend to value is a core, traditional one, with a strong emphasis on borrowing books, especially for pleasure. The survey also warned that we need to work out how to keep these traditional users happy while not alienating the next generation.

Expectations of libraries have evolved beyond the traditional role of promoting literature, reading and culture to also encompass information, literacy, learning, digital inclusion and job-seeking support. If libraries are to represent value for money for all council tax payers in Cheshire East, and remain sustainable, they must become more relevant to a wider section of the community and play a key role in helping our local communities to become strong and supportive and in helping people to develop the life skills and education they need to thrive.

Libraries would not exist, however, without their traditional purpose of lending books and our challenge is balancing the expectations of our traditional library users with the diverse needs and expectations of residents that visit our libraries to seek help with finding a job, or get information on benefits, or develop digital skills, or participate in community activities.

The service priorities set out below are broadly similar to those defined in the Libraries strategy published in 2012, and so this strategy does not signal a significant change in direction for our libraries. They are now more closely aligned to the Council's priority outcomes defined in the Three Year Plan, and in particular reflect the evolving role of libraries as community hubs within some of our towns.

SERVICE PRIORITY	COUNCIL OUTCOME
<p><b><i>Improve literacy</i></b>  <b>Promote books and reading to people of all ages to improve children's and adult's literacy and to improve life opportunities and health.</b></p>	<p><i>People have the life skills and education they need to thrive</i></p>
<p><b><i>Support informal learning</i></b>  <b>Provide an informal learning environment that encourages people to participate in activities that contribute to their learning and skills development.</b></p>	<p><i>People have the life skills and education they need to thrive</i></p>
<p><b><i>Enable digital inclusion</i></b>  <b>Support people to develop digital and information skills through free internet access and skilled support to help people that are digitally excluded to get online.</b></p>	<p><i>People have the life skills and education they need to thrive</i></p>

SERVICE PRIORITY	COUNCIL OUTCOME
<p><b><i>Provide information</i></b>  <b>Provide simple and straightforward access to the information that local people need to enable them to be self-reliant and take personal responsibility for their quality of life.</b></p>	<p><i>Our local communities are strong and supportive</i></p>
<p><b><i>Develop libraries as community hubs</i></b>  <b>Provide welcoming, neutral and safe places for people to access a range of community services and participate in activities and events that bring communities together and improve life opportunities, health and wellbeing.</b></p>	<p><i>Our local communities are strong and supportive</i></p>
<p><b><i>Improve efficiency to give best value for local people</i></b>  <b>Identify opportunities to deliver the service more efficiently and effectively and seek alternative sources of funding, such as grants and sponsorship from local businesses.</b></p>	<p><i>Provide best value services for local people</i></p>

## 7. Delivering the strategy

Given the service priorities set out above are broadly consistent with the priorities that the service has been working to over the last two years, we will deliver this strategy through continuing and completing existing initiatives and projects as well as starting new projects and developments.

### 7.1 Improve literacy

We will continue to participate in national library initiatives to promote books and the love of reading, particularly to children. Our participation in the Summer Reading Challenge continues to increase in popularity each year with 2013 seeing 25% more children complete the challenge than the year before. Each child was challenged to visit the library four times and read at least six books over the summer. Related activities locally included a



'Creepy House Zoo lab' event, in which children got the chance to handle creepy animals. 3,427 children completed the challenge last summer; 3,625 children attended an event at their local library; and 262 children joined their local library as a result of participating in the challenge.

Throughout the year, we host a programme of class visits to our libraries to demonstrate the importance of books and to develop a love of reading, as well as promoting what else is available at their local library.



For younger children, and their parents, we hold weekly Rhyme Time sessions at all of our libraries. Library team members sing simple rhymes with the parents and children with the aid of musical instruments and books to promote literacy to the young people, and their parents. At our large libraries, we can have more than 100 children and parents attending each session. We have introduced a new initiative at Crewe library using Lego to engage children that do not typically choose to read or engage with books in their spare time. The session starts with a story, and then the children are invited to build a model based on what they have listened to in the story. They can develop their idea by using other books in the library, and then once they have completed their model they are encouraged to continue to tell their own version of how the story unfolds using the model they have built.

We support the national Bookstart programme by coordinating the distribution of Bookstart packs throughout Cheshire East. Bookstart is administered by Booktrust, an independent Arts charity funded by the Arts Council England, and offers the gift of free books to all children at two key ages before they start school, to inspire a love of reading that will give children a flying start in life. Bookstart is built on a simple premise - babies who have an early introduction to books benefit in lots of ways, educationally, socially, culturally and emotionally.

For older readers, we participate in the Reading Agency's annual Book Challenge, which is designed to get adults and young people engaged in an enjoyment of reading – particularly those who struggle. We also support World Book Night, which takes place every year on April 23 in the UK, Ireland, and the USA. It's a celebration of reading and books which sees volunteers (including most of our library staff) spread their love of reading by giving books away to people who don't read regularly. We also encourage and support Reading Groups by offering access to the Reading Group collection and providing space within our libraries for the groups to meet and share their thoughts on what they are reading.

## **7.2 Support informal learning**

Libraries are increasingly supporting people in their communities impacted by welfare reform and those seeking work as the government continues to move many of its services online through its drive to digital by default. The Job Centres are signposting people to libraries for support.

Our libraries provide access to a wide range of books, digital resources and self help leaflets on subjects covering CV building, interview techniques, assertiveness, money advice, our libraries. We also provide local newspapers with job advertisements and local job bulletins. Our staff are trained as Digital Champions to encourage and give basic assistance to those reluctant to use a PC and to get online, and they are also trained on Universal Job Match to give assistance to customers using it. We have recruited volunteers as IT Buddies that offer 1:1 assistance to those needing more in depth coaching and support to access online services. We have also established Job Clubs, in partnership with other agencies, at a number of our libraries in communities where this has been identified as a priority.

For our residents interested in adult education, we run activities and events to promote lifelong learning during Adult Learners' Week each year. We also host Writers Groups at some of our libraries, and English Conversation for Improvers at Crewe library.

Libraries have always been a place for school children and students to get help with or complete homework and assignments. Some of our libraries run 'Homework Clubs' every weekday after school or anytime Saturday morning, but we also have many students using the People's Network or simply using some of our quieter study zones



to complete homework assignments. We are planning to introduce Wi-Fi free for library members across all of our libraries and review our layouts to provide better zoning and more seating for both study and relaxation purposes, and as a result we expect to see an increase in the use of our libraries as a place for study.

### **7.3 Enable digital inclusion**

Our People's Network computers provide library users with access to the Internet, email, and a range of learning and office resources on library PCs, free for the first hour of each booking. Printing and scanning facilities are also available.



Our libraries are designated UK Online Centres, part of a UK network that have helped more than one million people get online since 2010. Our staff are trained as Digital Champions to encourage and give basic assistance to those reluctant to use a PC and go online, and we have recruited volunteers as IT Buddies offering 1:1 help with a variety of computer problems, MyGuide courses, family history and other resources such as NHS Choices and Cheshire HomeChoice.

We are learning, however, that the computers and software available at our libraries is not keeping pace with what people are using at home, particularly as tablets become increasingly popular. The Council's Next Generation Desktop programme will upgrade our computers to Windows 7 and Microsoft Office 2010, but there are no plans to upgrade to Windows 8 because it is generally accepted that Windows 7 is more appropriate in a business environment. The introduction of free Wi-Fi for library members will enable library users to receive IT Buddy support in the library using their own laptops and tablet devices.

### **7.4 Provide information**

All of our libraries now have Customer Service Points. Customers will find information about council services, be able to access planning applications online, apply for concessionary travel tickets, present benefit claims for onward processing and have their photo taken for a blue badge.

Our libraries provide information on local tourist attractions as well as 'What's On' notices for their communities.

We have a collection of reference books at each library for answering everyday enquiries and checking elusive facts in almanacs, atlases, dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias and yearbooks. Our e-Resources provide access to an extensive range of reference works at the click of a mouse. We have subscribed to many popular resources including Britannica, The Dictionary of National Biography, newspaper databases, COBRA business advisor, Theory Test Pro, Go Citizen, Who Writers Like...? and many more. The majority of resources can be used from home or work, and as well as at libraries via the People's Network computers. We are, however, reviewing the physical Reference collections that we provide in our libraries as more information becomes available online.

We have subscribed to the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme that aims to increase access to self-help materials free through libraries for people who suffer from a range of common mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders.

**READING  
WELL**

There are 30 core titles, all endorsed by health professionals, which can be borrowed from the library free of charge. The books are available either by referral from a GP or other health professional, or just by visiting your local library. The Reading Agency recently worked with Macmillan Cancer Support to create the Macmillan Mood Boosting list - 20 titles recommended by people diagnosed with cancer.

Most libraries have some Local Studies material. Larger libraries have books, pamphlets, trade directories, maps and - on microfilm - local newspapers, census returns and parish registers. The Central Collection, the main collection of books and pamphlets relating to the county is kept at the Cheshire Record Office, which has an online Local Studies catalogue covering the full range of local history sources, both in Cheshire East Libraries and at the Record Office, and Picture Cheshire, our main collection of digital images. We think that our libraries can play an important role in connecting people to the history of their community, but the Library Survey told us that only 10% of respondents found local history information in the last 12 months. We are working with the Cheshire Records Office to review our Local Studies offer with the aim to modernise the offer so that it engages with more library users and helps people to better connect with the history of the area they live in.

### **7.5 Develop libraries as community hubs**

Our libraries play an important role within their communities. They are a community centre or hub, a place for information and ideas, somewhere to meet, open to all, free and welcoming.



As well as providing information on council services, our libraries provide a place for partner organisations to meet with members of our communities. These include Age UK, the Alzheimer's Society, Credit Unions, Housing Associations, Macmillan Cancer Support, Manchester Airport Community Relations team, Police Community Support Officers, and University of the Third Age. Our libraries also host and organise a range of activities including Story & Tea for Adults, Mum and Baby Yoga, Chess Clubs, the Family History Society at Crewe, and Scrabble groups.

We believe that our libraries will increasingly play a role as the 'department store' or 'market place' for information and we will continue to work with partners to help them connect with our communities. When we review the layouts of our libraries to provide better zoning for both study and relaxation, we will also consider how we can provide confidential meeting space as this is frequently a requirement for partners

wishing to use our libraries to meet with their clients. We are already working on a pilot scheme with the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Nantwich to provide them with a new base within the library that will see the introduction of confidential meeting space and better zoning for different activities.

The Pre-Submission Core Strategy describes the Principal Towns, Key Service Centres and Local Service Centres within Cheshire East. It is the libraries within the Key Service Centres of Alsager, Congleton, Handforth, Knutsford, Middlewich, Nantwich, Poynton, Sandbach and Wilmslow that are more likely to develop into local department stores or market places for information and advice. These towns serve as Key Service Centres for a wider locality and the library is already recognised as the focal point for public information. They will increasingly become recognised as the place to find information, attend events, participate in activities, connect with the history and traditions of the community, access and explore the



digital opportunities of the internet, meet a range of public agencies, find a job, or simply browse for books or read a newspaper. In some of our communities, the library may form part of a wider campus style community hub providing universal access to information and services alongside other community buildings such as civic halls and also more targeted services such as children's centres or adult day services.

As part of the library survey, we asked library users which specific improvements to Cheshire East libraries would encourage them to use libraries more frequently. The number one response here was 'having a cafe'. This is a trend that has been observed in libraries nationally. We have previously explored the viability of providing cafes in our libraries, but even in our largest libraries in Crewe and Macclesfield they would not be financially viable, and they would be competing with local businesses. As an alternative we will look to develop partnerships with local cafes, encouraging them to offer take away coffee and cakes that can be taken into the library. We have cafes very close to most of our libraries, but where we do not and such a partnership is not possible we will consider installing a hot drinks machine.

The survey also reported that 50% of respondents said that libraries were good at promoting what they did, but 24% disagreed that this was the case. This is an area that we think we can improve upon, and in particular in promoting the library within its local community.

## ***7.6 Improve efficiency to give best value for local people***

Through the major change project to create a sustainable library service in Cheshire East the Council has defined the ongoing financial commitment that it will make to libraries. This represents a very challenging £1m or 30% reduction in the cost of the library service, to be delivered over three years up to 2016. At the same time, we want to increase the use of our libraries so that they are considered value for money

by more and more council tax payers. 20% of Cheshire East residents are regular users of our libraries at present. As part of its financial planning the Council regularly reviews the subsidy it provides for each user of its services, and so a key measure of success for the library service will be a continuous reduction in the subsidy per library user as we improve the efficiency of the service and encourage more residents to regularly use their local library.

The service has already delivered significant efficiencies over the last couple of years. Similar to the introduction of self service tills in most supermarkets, the introduction of RFID self service technology enables customers to borrow and return books themselves, although there is always a member of staff nearby to help and we will happily help those customers that prefer not to use self service.



Our review of the mobile library service reduced the number of vehicles from three to one and aligned the frequency of visits with the typical loan period of three weeks. The service is now targeted at communities more than two miles from a static library and we regularly review demand at each stop. Our remaining mobile library vehicle is now more than ten years old and requires replacement. We will invest in a new mobile library vehicle in 2014.

We closed Weston library in 2013 and are scheduled to close Hurdsfield library in 2014 because demand for these libraries was very low and the subsidy per user was significantly higher than our other libraries. Discussions continue with Peaks and Plains Housing Trust and a local community group in Hurdsfield who hope to provide a community library within a wider community facility on the estate. We will continue to monitor the demand for our libraries

We have reviewed and simplified our stock policy and procedures to ensure we get the maximum value from the stock on our shelves, and we are working with our stock suppliers to improve the efficiency of ordering new stock. We budget £700,000 or 20% of our overall annual revenue budget on new stock for our libraries (books and multimedia items), including £125,000 on children's books. We will reduce our book fund to £525,000 in 2014/15, although we will continue to invest £125,000 in our junior stock. We will review the reference collections at all of our libraries as more and more reference material becomes available online, and we will only purchase reservation requests from individual users if we are confident that the book will be popular with other borrowers. Based on the latest CIPFA Public Library Statistics, this reduction in our book fund will return us to mid-table (25<sup>th</sup> out of 51) in expenditure on materials amongst English Unitaries and so is comparable with many other library authorities. We are planning to introduce eBooks for lending in 2014, but this will be funded from the existing book fund budget. The range of eBooks available for lending is relatively low at present and so we do not expect this to have a significant effect on the number of physical books available in our libraries.

Our library staff are critical to the success of our service. The library survey reported that 93% of library users said that customer care in their library is good, with the majority of this group saying it is very good. 70% of our annual budget is spent on salaries and other staff related costs. The efficiencies that we have already delivered, particularly in our traditional function of lending books and other materials, have enabled us to reduce our staffing levels whilst continuing to support our customers with greatest need. The expectations and daily duties of our staff have evolved, however. To support the wide and varied needs of the modern library user, we require **Library Assistants** that are able to respond to and support a wide and varied range of requests and activities. They will be supported and managed on a day to day basis by the **Senior Library Assistant**, the Team Leader, responsible for the smooth operation of the library, planning and coordinating resources to meet the needs of their local community and ensuring users have a great experience when visiting the library. As well as supporting the day to day operation of the library, or libraries within their cluster, our **Librarians** will support their Library Manager as the 'product and marketing' lead for their library or cluster of libraries, ensuring the products and services available at their library are relevant and appealing to their community. They will also be responsible for promoting the library within their community. Our **Library Managers** will continue to manage a cluster of libraries, encouraging the sharing of resources, ideas and expertise across their libraries. Our Library Teams will be supported by **Specialist Librarians** for stock acquisition, training and strategic projects. These Specialists will be multi-skilled, with their priorities determined by the annual business planning process. Our libraries will be led by two **Area Librarians**, with shared responsibility for the operational delivery and strategic development of the library service. We will continue to use volunteers where appropriate alongside our staff to support us in delivering activities and events.

We must ensure that we are making best use of our reducing staff resources. 81% of library users told us in the library survey that the opening hours of our libraries are good, with only 4% describing them as poor. Most of our libraries open into the evening at least once a week with some libraries open up to three evenings each week. We appreciate that opening on a Saturday and in the evening is more convenient for customers that work full-time, but the footfall of visitors during evening opening drops significantly, and we do not consider it to be the best use of our staff or our buildings. We will review our evening opening hours and may reduce the number of evenings that we are open to one evening per week. We will consult with users at each library to understand which evening would be most convenient.

We must also ensure that our basic tools and infrastructure are up to date and fit for purpose. We have been using our current library management system since 2001, and our supplier has notified us that it will no longer be supported from April 2014. We are now looking for a new library management system that will improve and enhance staff and customer access to library collections and introduce increased functionality, in particular enabling both staff and customers to access the catalogue using mobile devices. We will replace our People's Network computers as they come to end of life as it is frustrating for staff when they have to spend a lot of their time dealing with faulty ICT equipment, although the next generation desktop programme should extend the life of our existing equipment. We will also introduce chip and pin machines to our self service machines to make it easier for our

customers to pay for their reservations, to borrow multimedia items or even to pay their fines. We must ensure that our service keeps pace with customer expectations as we increasingly become a cashless society.

Our libraries are located in a wide range of different buildings, but the majority are stand-alone and do not share their building with other community or public services. Some are owned by the Council, some are owned by the Town or Parish Council following the recent transfer of community assets, and some are leased on long term arrangements. It is recognised that libraries in other authorities have seen an increase in usage where they are co-located with other public or community services, whether that be as part of new lifestyle centres or other public facilities such as museums or community centres. We will explore opportunities to make better use of our library buildings, taking opportunities that benefit the local community and reduce the cost to the Council of its building estate. There are some opportunities already in development:



a library is included in the plans for a new Lifestyle Centre in Crewe; plans have been developed to create a new joint entrance to Poynton library and Civic Hall; and a feasibility study has been commissioned to develop options to relocate the Citizen's Advice Bureau in Nantwich into the library.

The Libraries Shared Service, hosted by Cheshire West and Chester Council, provides back office and specialist support to Cheshire East libraries, including Bibliographical Services, Library Transport, Education Library Service, and a shared Library Management system. We are committed to this partnership and have recently extended the agreement between the two Councils up to 2017. This includes a commitment from the Libraries Shared Service to reduce the cost of its services to Cheshire East through further efficiencies.

We raise £500,000 each year through charges for direct use of the library service, but the Public Libraries and Museums Act imposes limitations on what services can be charged for. These limitations mean that it is not possible to raise charges for the service's core business of lending books, or to charge a fee for membership or use of the library. Our income comes from fines for overdue items, reservations, the lending of Talking Books, CDs, DVDs and computer games, the lending of specialist items such as music scores and choral sets, the use of public PCs, printing, photocopying and faxing, meeting room hire, and participation in group activities.

Alongside our drive for efficiency we will also seek alternative sources of funding to help us achieve our service priorities, such as grants and sponsorship from local businesses. We receive grant funding from central government that covers the full cost of providing the library at HMP Styal and from the Ann Whittaker Trust that contributes to the running costs of Prestbury library. We regularly bid for grant funding available to libraries to support specific initiatives or outcomes. For example, working in partnership with and funded by the council's Arts team, the Big Draw in Poynton saw 360 local residents participate in a month-long programme of drawing activities in November 2013 aimed at all ages, culminating in an exhibition event to

celebrate books, reading and literature through the visual arts. We also receive grant funding from UK Online Centres to improve digital skills in Cheshire East, including a recent initiative to train local post office employees in basic digital skills. Our Library Managers and Librarians will engage with local businesses to also identify opportunities for sponsorship which could include sponsoring special collections, the Summer Reading Challenge, the digitisation of local history resources, or even marketing and promotional materials for their local library.

## 8. Summary of new priorities for action

1. **Introduce free Wi-Fi for library members across all libraries**
2. **Review our layouts to provide better zoning and more seating for both study and relaxation purposes and confidential meeting space**
3. **Review reference collections offered in libraries**
4. **Review and modernise our local studies offer to engage more library users to learn about the history of their community**
5. **Implement pilot community hub at Nantwich library to include the Citizen's Advice Bureau**
6. **Develop partnerships with local cafes to make it easier for library users to enjoy a coffee and cake while using the library**
7. **Improve promotion of our libraries within their local communities to reflect local priorities**
8. **Procure a new mobile library vehicle**
9. **Re-align book fund expenditure in line with comparator authorities**
10. **Introduce eBooks to Cheshire East libraries**
11. **Review evening opening hours**
12. **Implement new library management system**
13. **Introduce chip and pin payments to self service machines**
14. **Seek opportunities for grants and sponsorship to support the funding of our libraries**

These priorities for action will form the basis of the Library service's annual business plan for the next two to three years, and we will monitor and report progress against these actions through the Council's business planning and performance management framework.

We will measure the success of the service by monitoring usage of our Library services and regularly checking that library users are satisfied with the service. Our key performance indicator will be the subsidy per library user, and this will be reported through the Council's annual business planning process.