

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET 24 May 2022

Report on outcome of public consultation on Oxfordshire County Council Libraries and Heritage Strategy 2022-2027

**Report of Corporate Director, Customers,
Organisational Development and Resources**

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Note the outcome of the public consultation on the Libraries and Heritage Strategy
 - b) Delegate the responsibility for the adoption and implementation of the strategy to the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Safety and the Corporate Director for Customer, Organisational Development and Resources and the project team.
 - c) Agree that an annual review of the actions to deliver the strategy is reported to Cabinet and the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Executive Summary

2. A draft Libraries and Heritage Strategy: 2022 - 2027 was approved by Cabinet on 21st December 2021 subject to public consultation. This report details the consultation approach and sets out the key themes arising from the consultation.
3. The 191 consultation responses expressed strong support for the strategy, vision and all the priorities for action. In addition, significant support was recorded for the council's ambition as expressed in the vision and key priorities highlighted below.
 - 87% agree with the council's vision
 - 97% agree with our priority to increase libraries and heritage role in fostering literacy and a love of reading
 - 99% agree with our priority to support children and young people's learning and parents support for their learning
 - 87% agree with our priority to increase the impact of libraries and heritage on health, well-being and active citizenship

- 89% agree with our priority to reduce the carbon impact of our buildings and services
 - 92% agree with our priority work with communities to design services which reach the heart of communities, reflect our rich diversity, engage new audiences and are responsive to local needs
4. The public consultation on the draft strategy has strongly validated the council's vision and priorities, building on the extensive process of stakeholder engagement undertaken in its development.
 5. No significant changes have been made to the content of the strategy (attached as Appendix 2) and a final action plan has been developed (attached as Appendix 3) reflecting the consultation feedback.

Background

6. Between 24 January 2022 and 18 March 2022, the council invited structured feedback on its draft library and heritage strategy 2022 - 2027. People were signposted to the full draft strategy document and encouraged to read it for background information.
7. Feedback was primarily collated using an online survey on the council's digital consultation and engagement platform, [Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#) and a small number of paper copies of the consultation document, survey and promotional posters were distributed to all libraries, the Oxfordshire Museum and Oxfordshire History Service. Arrangements were also put in place with Oxfordshire customer services, library and heritage services and the engagement and consultation team to supply information in alternative formats on request and to accept written responses. Anyone replying by paper copy could use of a Freepost address.
8. The consultation was actively promoted to different audiences, using multiple channels, with a strong emphasis on paid-for digital promotion using social media. We also targeted communications at service users, staff, and councillors to help them spread the word.

Overview of the consultation feedback

9. In total, the council received **191** survey responses. Eighty-one per cent of the survey responses were from Oxfordshire residents. A summary report setting out the detailed findings from the consultation can be found in Appendix 1 to this paper.
10. Overall, the consultation findings validate the vision and the package of thirteen priorities for delivery, over the next five years, under the three core priorities of people, place and partnerships. This is a positive reflection of the extensive process of stakeholder engagement we undertook to develop the draft strategy, which included also included early public input in summer 2021.

11. **Vision**

- 87% of survey respondents agreed with our vision for libraries and heritage services as set out in the draft strategy document. Only three per cent disagreed.
- The supporting comments which substantiate peoples' views on the vision, clearly show the value people place on these services, and in particular the importance of the library service.

12. **Package of thirteen priorities**

87% of survey respondents agreed that the thirteen priorities set out in the draft strategy document are the right ones to deliver our ambition and vision for libraries and heritage services in Oxfordshire. Only two per cent disagreed.

People priorities

13. Between 85 per cent and 99 per cent of survey respondents agreed (total saying strongly agree and agree) with the five individual **people priorities**. Very few people disagreed with any - ranging between one person and six people per priority (one to three percent).

- We want to support children and young people's learning and parents support for their children's learning (99 per cent agreement)
- We want to increase libraries and heritage contribution to learning and promote library's role in fostering literacy and a love of reading (97 per cent agreement)
- We want to support people to develop skills and knowledge (97 per cent agreement)
- We want to increase the impact of libraries and heritage services on health, wellbeing and active citizenship (87 per cent agreement)
- We want to equip libraries and heritage staff with skills to deliver on innovative services (85 per cent agreement)

14. **Place priorities**

Overall, views on the place priorities were more mixed, with between 60 per cent and 92 per cent of survey respondents agreeing (total saying strongly agree and agree) with the five individual **place priorities**.

Whilst again, only a small proportion of survey respondents actively disagreed with any of the place priorities (range of between five and nineteen people per priority), a notable proportion said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

- We want to work with communities to design services which reach the heart of communities, reflect our rich diversity, engage new audiences and are responsive to local needs (92 per cent agreement)
- We want to identify ways to reduce the carbon impact of our buildings and services (89 per cent agreement)
- We want to use data and intelligence about 'place' to target the specific needs of local communities and drive a culture of service improvement (80 per cent agreement)
- We want to involve people in the design of libraries and heritage buildings (73 per cent agreement)
- We want to deliver services to support business start-ups to support economic growth (60 per cent agreement)

15. **Partnership priorities**

Between 77 per cent and 85 per cent of survey respondents agreed (total saying strongly agree and agree) with each of the three **partnership** priorities. Again, only a few people disagreed with any (range of between 5 and 14 people per priority) and a notable proportion said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

- We want to maximise partnerships at local and national level to improve the sustainability of services (85 per cent agreement)
- We want to develop partnerships that support more resilient, fairer and healthier communities (85 per cent agreement)
- We value and want to strengthen our partnership with volunteers (77 per cent agreement)

16. The implementation of the Libraries and Heritage Strategy aligns with many of the strategic priorities of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance. These are set out below:

OCC Strategic Plan Priority	Libraries and Heritage Strategy Priorities	Action
1. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work	Reduce our impact on the climate by retrofitting our buildings where possible and improving our digital offer (Place)	2.2 Identify ways to reduce the carbon impact of our buildings and services
2. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire	Ensure services meet the predicted population growth	1.5 Support people to develop skills and knowledge

	<p>in the next five years (People, Place)</p> <p>Promote digital inclusion and enhance digital access (People)</p> <p>Support people in the community to gain digital skills, including the potential of advanced technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence (People, Partnership)</p> <p>Support access in rural communities (People, Place)</p>	<p>2.4 Use data and intelligence about 'place' to target the specific needs of local communities and drive a culture of service improvement</p> <p>2.5 Work with communities to design services which reach the heart of communities, reflect our rich diversity, engage new audiences and are responsive to local needs</p> <p>3.1 Develop partnerships that support more resilient, fairer and healthier communities to strategy</p>
<p>3. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents</p>	<p>Increase programmes and activities to support people to have active and healthy lives, reducing social isolation and loneliness (People, Partnership)</p>	<p>1.3 Increase the impact of libraries and heritage services on health, wellbeing and active citizenship</p> <p>3.1 Develop partnerships that support more resilient, fairer and healthier communities</p>
<p>4. Support carers and the social care system</p>	<p>Increase programmes and activities to support people to have active and healthy lives, reducing social isolation and loneliness (People, Partnership)</p>	<p>1.3 Increase the impact of Libraries and Heritage services on health, wellbeing and active citizenship</p> <p>2.5 Work with communities to design services which reach the heart of communities, reflect our rich diversity, engage new audiences and are responsive to local needs</p> <p>3.1 Develop partnerships that support more resilient, fairer and healthier communities</p>
<p>7. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential</p>	<p>Strengthen our offer for children, young people and families, including support for early years and improving school readiness (People, Partnership)</p>	<p>1.1 Increase libraries and heritage contribution to learning and promote library's role in fostering literacy and a love of reading</p>

		1.2 Support children and young people’s learning and parents support for their children’s learning
8. Play our part in a vibrant local democracy	<p>Increase and widen participation in services – physical and digital (People, Place)</p> <p>Build on the role of libraries as providers of trusted information and gateways to other public services (People, Partnership)</p> <p>Increase the opportunities for communities to tell the story of their local heritage (People, Place)</p> <p>Increase access to heritage in person and digitally (People, Place)</p> <p>Further develop museum and library buildings as vibrant community hubs (Place, Partnership)</p>	<p>1.1 Increase libraries and heritage contribution to learning and promote library’s role in fostering literacy and a love of reading</p> <p>2.1 Involve people in the design of libraries and heritage buildings</p> <p>3.3 Value and strengthen our partnership with volunteers supporting service delivery</p>
9. Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit	Increase the contribution of libraries to sustainable economic development, innovation, and entrepreneurship across the county (People, Partnership)	<p>2.3 Deliver services to support business start-ups to support economic growth</p> <p>3.2 Maximise partnerships at local and national level to improve the sustainability of services</p>

Corporate Policies and Priorities

17. The strategy has been developed to ensure that the contribution of libraries and heritage services to the council’s strategic plan 2022-2025 and nine priorities will be maximised.

Financial Implications

18. No immediate financial impact. This strategy is planned to be implemented utilising existing resources. Proposed actions and outcomes will be monitored closely with the service, and any significant additional resources identified will follow standard governance procedures prior to expenditure. The management of library buildings is undertaken by the County Council's property and facilities management team and development proposals are set out in the capital programme.

Comments checked by: Bick Nguyen-McBride, Assistant Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications

19. The Report to Cabinet on 21 December 2021 confirmed that approving the Libraries and Heritage Strategy did not have Legal Implications which needed noting. The consultation on the Strategy referred to above was "non-statutory" (ie it was not carried out pursuant to any statutory obligation of the Council) and so it does not have Legal Implications which need noting nor does the proposal for an annual report on implementation.

Comments checked by: Richard Hodby, Solicitor, Legal Services

Staff Implications

20. There are no immediate staff implications arising from this report

Equality and Inclusion Implications

21. There are no immediate equalities and inclusion arising from this report.

Sustainability Implications

22. The strategy identifies the need to ensure all building refurbishments are designed to reduce impact on the climate. Libraries will review their role in providing trusted information on climate change to ensure it is accurate and will work in partnership to deliver a programme of activities and events to raise awareness of climate change and how residents can take action to reduce climate change.

Risk Management

23. The risk in adopting a libraries and heritage strategy is primarily one of effective communication, managing expectations and successful delivery. The strategy implementation will be strengthened by partner and community support and it is proposed to deliver a stakeholder engagement programme to build support for the strategy.

Consultations

24. The draft strategy was published on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire consultation and engagement portal as set out in para 7. Implementation of significant actions within the strategy will be subject to stakeholder and engagement where necessary, and in line with the principles set out in the strategy, to ensure the council meets its statutory duties.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Detailed findings from the public consultation

Appendix 2: 'Creative, Inspiring, Inclusive' - A library and heritage service for Oxfordshire now and for the future: 2022-27

Appendix 3: Action Plan

BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

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