

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6th December 2023

Libraries and Heritage Strategy update

Report of the Director of Customers and Culture

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

Acknowledge the planning and performance framework that is in place to ensure the effective delivery of the Libraries and Heritage Strategy, and the progress that has been achieved to date.

Executive Summary

2. As requested, this report updates the Committee on the Libraries and Heritage Strategy, which was launched in June 2022. It outlines the planning and performance framework that was established prior to launch, and which has been subsequently implemented over the last 18 months (as demonstrated via a series of appendices). Key achievements have also been highlighted.

Discussion

Background

3. Cabinet approved the Libraries and Heritage Strategy on 24 May 2022, and it was subsequently published in June (see Annex 1 – Libraries and Heritage Strategy 2022-2027).
4. For note, a draft of the strategy was previously reviewed by Cabinet in December 2021, having been considered by the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2021, and then taken out to public consultation between 24 January 18 March. The results of this engagement directly informed the final version of the document. The 191 responses expressed very strong support for the strategy, its embedded vision, and priorities for action.

Planning and Performance framework

5. Ahead of the launch of the Strategy, the Service Manager for Libraries and Heritage proposed a planning and performance framework to support the delivery of the strategy (see Annex 2 – Libraries and Heritage Strategy Action Plan covering report, April 2022). This was signed off at Director level and established a robust foundation for the service to put the strategy into action.
6. The basic approach put forward was to use the annual Service Plan as the main delivery mechanism for the Strategy, rather than to have a separate 'Strategy

Action Plan'. It was felt that a separate action plan would have created duplication and confusion. In the Service Plan, the council already had an established document, known to staff, councillors, and partners; and the decision was made to simply refresh the Service Plan within Libraries and Heritage to reflect this new, 'enhanced' role.

7. As a relevant aside, further enhancements have been made to the emerging Service Plans for 2024/25, with all the activities and key performance indicators being directly linked back to specific Council priorities and Libraries and Heritage Strategy themes and priority activity areas (see Annex 3 and 4).

Strategic Alignment

8. A core principle underpinning the framework was to demonstrate the alignment between the strategic priorities set out in the Council's corporate Strategic Plan and the Libraries and Heritage Strategy, and the actions and targets embedded in the Service Plans. Annex 5 (Libraries and Heritage Strategy Action Plan strategic alignment, April 2022) shows how this purpose was hardwired into our thinking and practice from the very start.

Monitoring actions and performance

9. Another key principle behind our approach to delivering the strategy has been/is to establish a high degree of transparency; and, with that transparency, greater accountability. It was important that, once published, the strategy didn't just go on to gather dust on the shelves, as it were; and that customers, staff, and partners could see that it was being delivered, and making a real difference. Thereby, people could hold the service/council to account on progress. This commitment to transparency has been demonstrated in various tangible ways, including:
10. The Service Manager has produced regular quarterly updates on the Service Plan since the Strategy was approved. These updates have been shared with all staff, and various interested parties. They take a 'we said/we did' style, to enable readers to see where we have achieved on agreed actions and, also where progress may not have been as swift as we would have liked (and giving the reasons why) – see Annex 6 and 7, for a couple of recent examples of these updates. This openness and honesty holds true to the values of the Council, around taking responsibility.
11. The Service has taken active steps to highlight performance and key achievements. In 2022, the Libraries and Heritage Service only had one indirect mention in the council's annual report and, following the submission of the attached spreadsheet (Annex 8), the service had a far more prominent profile within the 2023 report. Additionally, Annex 9 is an infographic that was produced (for Cultural Services) and shared with partners to highlight key performance headlines. Similar local, service-specific infographics and newsletters have been produced to reach customers, staff, volunteers and partners across Libraries and Heritage.

Key achievements

12. In terms of key actions delivered since the Strategy launched, these include:
- Reducing the carbon impact of our buildings and services - Carbon Literacy training for senior management teams; signed up to the Green Libraries Manifesto; celebrated 'Green Libraries' during Libraries week in October 2023 and Big Green Week in Museums; had workshop with the Climate Action team to discuss current work in this area and future priorities; L&H buildings heavily featured within the public sector decarbonisation planning/ investment bid (and carbon neutral buildings written into the Libraries Asset Development Plan; on that front...)
 - Completed the Libraries Asset Development Plan (waiting for Cabinet sign off, following presentation to Informal Cabinet in September). Full assessment of whole network re. current state of repair and future community needs
 - Increase the impact of Libraries and Heritage services on health, wellbeing and active citizenship / Develop partnerships that support more resilient, fairer and healthier communities – Established a 3 year strategic partnership with Public Health around the delivery of Make Every Contact Counts and wider, targeted health and wellbeing activities (includes a contribution to Libraries revenue budget to cover staffing cover/specialist activities); Museums gained external funding for a major review into service accessibility, and has set up an Accessibility Panel, which is feeding into service development; All libraries set up as Warm Welcome sites from 2022; Libraries supporting visa applications, validations and operating as the 'front door' for City council and Citizens Advice in Oxford; Nationally award-winning work with children and young people, including Ukrainian families and young adults in care (via the Business and Intellectual Property Centre, BIPC); linked to this...
 - Support children and young people's learning and parents support for their children's learning – Signed a new 3-year/£1M-worth strategic partnership agreement with Book Trust, around the delivery of Bookstart across the county, bringing in; increased uptake for the Summer Reading Challenge (+15% in 2023; c.8.5k children engaged); re-emphasis on delivering regular Rhyme/Story time sessions across library sites and supporting class visits; (re)creation of Museums' Learning and Access team (delivering to schools across the county and working pan-Heritage); review and updating of schools history web-pages.
 - Communications and Marketing – New branding designed and launched for Museums; new branding emerging for Libraries; Heritage Search digital portal launched ([Heritage Search - Oxfordshire County Council](#)) with 1M records now digitally available to customers interested in the history of Oxfordshire.
 - Maximise partnerships at local and national level to improve the sustainability of services – As noted above, 3-year strategic, funded library partnerships

with Public Health, Book Trust, City Council and Citizens Advice; refreshed approach to room hire/lease of L&H buildings; gained approval for extension of Community Partnership agreements in libraries (from annual to 3-year arrangements); partnership working with NHS and Oxford University (BIPC); new links with the Bodleian and the History Centre; New Burdens funding from The National Archives covering project archivist post.

13. Finally, for this section, it is worth noting the performance of Libraries and Heritage within the most recent Residents Survey ([Read the latest insight from our residents' survey | Oxfordshire County Council Intranet](#)). Libraries and Heritage were 'one and two' in terms of residents' satisfaction across the whole portfolio of council services. What's more, there has been significant improvement in our rating over the last twelve months. Putting this into context, only two council services showed significantly increased net satisfaction compared with 2022: Libraries (+9% compared with 2022), and Heritage (+7%). The service believes this achievement is partially attributable to the new strategic impetus, greater clarity of direction/priorities, and the renewed commitment to put customers at the heart of everything we do.

Financial Implications

14. There is no specific investment plan or budgetary commitments linked to the strategy. It should also be noted that the service is on track to come in on budget for 2023/24, whilst achieving in-year savings, and there is an agreed plan in place re. how Libraries and Heritage will remain sustainable in the medium term.

Comments checked by: Bick Nguyen-McBride, Assistant Finance Business Partner (Bick.Nguyen-McBride@Oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Legal Implications

15. There are no specific legal implications linked to the contents of this report.

Comments checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Legal (paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Staff Implications

16. Libraries and Heritage staff were fully involved in the development of the strategy. Since the Strategy was published, staff have then been kept informed and engaged with the Service planning – For example, two major Service Development Workshops have been held in 2023 (May and November) with Library staff from across the county/teams; and, likewise, Museums have had three all-staff conferences in the last year, and the History Service have had a similar number of focused all-team meetings. This has been linked to the 12:3:2 system; and, on that front, every individual member of staff in the service has (for the last two years) been assigned personal objectives directly relating to a Strategy priority, a Council priority area, and a Council behaviour too.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

17. The Libraries and Heritage Strategy was approved with equality and diversity matters having been fully considered. Key activities within the Strategy/Service Plan are tied to tackling inequalities and increasing the diversity and accessibility of our offer. Also, the services would always undertake an equality impact assessment should there be any consideration of substantive changes.

Sustainability Implications

18. As noted above, for the first time in recent years, the Libraries and Heritage Service is due to come in on budget this year. This is being achieved by significant vacancy management, reduced spending on supplies and services, and more innovative income generation (plus a linked reduction in income targets, which have long been recognised as being non-sustainable, especially re. Libraries).

Risk Management

19. Horizon-scanning analysis and a 'Risks, Assumptions, Issues and Dependencies' (RAID) log are embedded within the Service Plan. The service also actively and regularly inputs into the Directorate's Risk Register.

Report overseen by Mark Haynes, Director for Customer Experience, Cultural and Property Services

Annex: Annex 1: Libraries and Heritage Strategy (2022-2027)
 Annex 2: Libraries and Heritage Strategy Action Plan - Covering report (April 2022)
 Annex 3: DRAFT Libraries Service Plan 2024-25 (October 2023)
 Annex 4: DRAFT Heritage Service Plan 2024-25 (October 2023)
 Annex 5: Libraries and Heritage Strategy Action Plan - Strategic alignment (April 2022)
 Annex 6: Library Service Update - Service Plan Q1 Review (July 2023)
 Annex 7: Heritage Service Update - Service Delivery Plan Q4 Review (May 2023)
 Annex 8: Annual report 2023 feedback (Libraries and Heritage)
 Annex 9: Cultural Services 2022 2023 Infographic

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

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