

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET - 22 JUNE 2021

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA) LIBRARIES AND
HERITAGE SERVICES PEER REVIEW FEEDBACK REPORT**

**Report by Claire Taylor, Corporate Director, Customers,
Organisational Development and Resources**

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- (a) consider the LGA Cultural Services Peer Review feedback report (Annex 1);**
- (b) note the recommendations set out within the report;**
- (c) agree the proposals set out at paragraph 10 for incorporating the report's recommendations into the service planning and Libraries and Heritage Strategy development process.**

Executive Summary

1. Cabinet agreed on 20 April 2021 to the development of a Libraries and Heritage Strategy to be presented to Cabinet by the end of 2021. The development of a strategy will set a clear long-term direction for the development of these services, their contribution to post pandemic recovery and wider community outcomes focused around the following themes:
 - education, learning and skills
 - healthy place shaping and well-being
 - culture and creativity
 - digital inclusion
 - social inclusion and community cohesion
 - economic development
 - environmental sustainability
2. The strategy will be informed by an evidence base including a review of current performance, analysis of community needs and customer feedback. Further, insight will be gathered through community engagement in Faringdon and Banbury, these locations have planned library improvements (including capital expenditure) and offer an immediate opportunity for proactive stakeholder engagement in shaping the future of the service.
3. In developing the evidence base the county council have benefited from feedback from a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review on

Oxfordshire Libraries and Heritage Services Libraries which took place virtually on 11 and 12 March 2021. Cabinet is now asked to consider the report, note the recommendations made, and agree that these should be incorporated into the council's business planning and development of the strategy.

4. Peer reviews are conducted by a team convened by the LGA and include Councillors and senior officers from other councils, who provide challenge and bring experience of service innovation and improvement to bear in their review of the county council's services. Oxfordshire County Council would like to formally record its thanks to those officers and members who undertook the review.

Scope of the LGA Peer review

5. The Libraries and Heritage Services subject to review included (appendix 1 sets out key service statistics):

- 44 libraries – 22 of which are Community Supported Libraries run by library staff supported by volunteers
- home library service
- on-line library services
- The Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock
- the Museums Resource Centre at Standlake, housing the reserve collection
- a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade 1 listed medieval barn at Swalcliffe, providing accessible storage for large agricultural and trade vehicles
- museum learning service at Oxford Council
- all three locations are Accredited Museums
- the museum service also has a legacy responsibility for the remains of the Bishop's Palace in Witney
- local history and archives service based in the History Centre in St Lukes Church
- Victoria County History

6. The peer review team looked at one core question applicable to all cultural service reviews namely:

- How effective is the contribution of libraries and heritage to cross cutting agendas of other services and the wider council objectives?

The council also asked the peer team to focus on the following area:

- How to ensure the themes and content in the forthcoming Libraries and Heritage Strategy will deliver better outcomes for residents, visitors and businesses.

The LGA Peer Review Process

7. Engagement with libraries and heritage staff and the Cabinet member for Cultural Services took place before the review, with senior and service managers contributing to the production of a position statement provided to the peer review team in advance of their virtual visit. The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information and then spent 1.5 days participating in online activity during which they:
- Spoke to more than 40 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
 - Gathered information and views from more than 13 meetings, and additional research and reading.
 - Collectively spent more than 120 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 3.5 weeks in Oxfordshire.
 - Presented initial findings at the conclusion of the peer review visit to senior managers and the Cabinet member for Cultural Services

LGA Peer Feedback and Recommendations

8. The LGA Feedback Report is attached as Annex 1. An Executive Summary in section one summaries the review team's conclusions.
9. Following the review, the LGA peer team have made six recommendations:
1. reconsider timescale for strategy development
 2. modernising foundation blocks
 3. include an engagement plan as part of the strategy process – councillors, staff, customers and stakeholders
 4. consider establishing new arrangements internally and externally to improve partnership working
 5. tap into all the available Peer support for both Elected Members and Officers
 6. look at best practice elsewhere to inform components of the Libraries and Heritage Strategy.
10. The table below sets out how each recommendation will be delivered and considers who will need to be involved.

1. Reconsider timescale for strategy development

What have we already done?

At the time of the peer review in March 2021 it was our ambition to take a draft strategy to Cabinet in June 2021. Following the feedback from the peer review team on the timescale at the time of the review the decision was taken to work towards a later deadline to present the draft strategy to Cabinet.

Cabinet on 20 April approved a report setting out the rationale for developing a strategy, key themes to be explored in the forthcoming strategy and the deadline for receiving the draft strategy later in the year.

How will we go further to deliver this recommendation?

The peer review team recommended that the strategy development is underpinned by a comprehensive analysis of library and heritage services performance against community need. The performance and community needs analyses will be undertaken during the early summer, with the results available to be shared with stakeholders, including staff, members and partners (internal and external).

The community needs analysis will involve a review of secondary data, demographic, socio-economic, skills, health, and economic data to be combined with the outcome of two locally focused co-production projects to take place in Farringdon and Banbury.

Who will need to be involved?

- Library and heritage staff
- Councillors
- Other council departments
- Partners
- Local communities in Farringdon and Banbury (the pilot areas)

2. Modernising our foundation blocks

What have we already done?

This recommendation consisted of a number of key actions in order to form a solid bedrock from which the Libraries and Heritage services can progress more effectively:

- Put in place mechanisms that will help the services undertake transactional elements of service provision; for example taking online payments.

We have identified the requirements for on-line payments across libraries and heritage and have a plan to implement a new payment system

- Identify solutions to help the digital offer flourish and adopt a more strategic approach to engaging current and future audiences through a range of platforms.

The Cultural Services Improvement Programme has a project underway to improve digital capacity in heritage services to secure a new search engine to increase access and the ability for visitors to interact with our rich heritage collection. This project has started to consider the digital capacity to maximise audience development and engagement more widely and this learning will be fed into the strategy development deliberations.

- Review the data collection system to ensure it captures quantitative and qualitative data to both inform the management of services and also demonstrate cross-cutting strategic impact. This will better enable advocacy regarding the value of the service.

As part of the strategy development process we are mapping the data we collect and how it is currently used in the service to support both operational and strategic planning

- To enable the realisation of the vision for libraries to act as vibrant community hubs and meet the demands of today's communities, consider whether the staffing structure is flexible enough and also whether the structure and the asset base is fit for future purpose.

A database of libraries and heritage assets has been collated to enable an understanding of how our assets will be able to support future demand given projected population growth and the delivery of a wide range of activities to meet identified community need.

How will we go further to deliver this recommendation?

The level of on-line activity across libraries and heritage grew significantly during the pandemic and it is important to build on this experience and integrate digital and physical access and engagement in future service development. The strategy will fully explore the current digital capacity (platforms, skills and culture of OCC) and set out clear ambitions and requirements to ensure our digital reach is maximised.

A new data collection framework will be developed as an outcome of the strategy development process.

We will assess the effectiveness of the staffing structure in libraries and heritage services once the strategy has been agreed.

Who will need to be involved?

- Library and heritage services managers
- Communications, Strategy and Insight team
- IT and Digital
- Libraries and heritage staff
- HR
- Unions

3. Include an engagement plan as part of the strategy process – councillors, staff, customers and stakeholders

What have we already done?

The paper considered by Cabinet in April 2021 to secure agreement to the strategy development process contained a recommendation to deliver a Member Engagement Strategy and to pilot a community co-production model.

How will we go further to deliver this recommendation?

An Engagement and Communications strategy and plan is in development with the following objectives:

- build a shared understanding with stakeholders of the need for change and the benefits of a strategy
- build a shared understanding of how libraries and heritage services contribute community benefit now and how they can be improved to deliver increased impact
- ensure that stakeholders at all levels are enabled and encouraged to contribute
- manage any anxiety that staff may have about possible service change and how this might affect them and their communities
- build stakeholder capacity to be advocates for the strategy
- build our skills, knowledge and understanding of working differently with communities and how place-based planning can support service excellence

- As part of the development of the strategy the council's overview and scrutiny committee will be engaged. Local members will also be included within the place-based pilots. Localities meetings will form part of the engagement strategy.

Who will need to be involved?

- Political and managerial leaders
- Towns, parishes and other civic organisations
- Libraries and heritage services staff
- All councillors
- VCS role in understanding and engaging with communities
- Service users, carers, and representative groups
- The public and media
- Broad representative groups of local stakeholders

4. Consider establishing new arrangements internally and externally to improve partnership working

What have we already done?

The report recommends a cross departmental steering group for the following reasons.

“It would also help to embed understanding regarding how libraries and heritage can support wider council priorities moving forward”

The report also recommends that the council establish an external forum for the following reasons.

“An external forum would harness the existing goodwill towards the council's Libraries and Heritage services and act as a mechanism to ensure ongoing engagement regarding the development of the Libraries & Heritage Strategy, resulting in improved partnership working and the potential to lever external funding”

The peer April Cabinet paper sets out the contribution of libraries and heritage services across a number of themes, including social, health and well-being, education and skills and economic development to assist councillors and officers to understand how these services contribute to wider council priorities currently.

This increased awareness of the contribution of these services to wider council priorities was reinforced by the inclusion of senior officers from health, children's and adult services as part of the peer review discovery in March.

How will we go further to deliver this recommendation?

We will establish new engagement fora as part of the development of the strategy. These will include enhancing internal networks to ensure the service directly contributes and reflects council priorities and external networks, to ensure community engagement and customer focus.

Who will need to be involved?

- Political and managerial leaders
- Towns, parishes and other civic organisations
- Voluntary and Community Sector S role in understanding and engaging with communities
- Service users, carers, and representative groups
- The public and media
- Broad representative groups of local stakeholders

5. Tap into all the available Peer support for both Elected Members and Officers

What have we already done?

Officers regularly attend Libraries Connected, Arts Council, National Archives and LGA events to ensure that strategic and operational planning and delivery of these services is informed by best practice and new thinking.

How will we go further to deliver this recommendation?

Elected members will be provided with details of LGA webinars for elected members and ACE/LGA Leadership Essentials for Cultural Portfolio Holders to build understanding of how councils can use cultural services to improve outcomes for their communities and learn from good practice across the country.

Member briefings to update will be held in addition to the engagement strategy and as part of the final launch.

Who will need to be involved?

- Cabinet
- The Cabinet Portfolio Holder
- Members
- Officers

6. Look at best practice elsewhere to inform components of the Libraries and Heritage Strategy.

What have we already done?

We regularly look at best practice through engagement with professional networks.

How will we go further to deliver this recommendation?

One of the strands of the strategy development process will be horizon scanning to identify learning that will benefit the future delivery of these services in Oxfordshire.

Who will need to be involved?

- Colleagues from OCC and across the sector
- Councillors

Corporate Policies and Priorities

11. The strategy will address how libraries and heritage services will contribute to the council's wider set of strategic priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan for Thriving Communities

Financial Implications

12. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by:
Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance

Legal Implications

13. Library authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it (Section 7). The Act does not try to define what a 'comprehensive and efficient library service' is, but when considering how best to deliver the statutory duty, each library service is responsible for determining, through consultation, local need and how to deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources.

Comments checked by:
Anita Bradley, Director Law and Governance

Staff Implications

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

Equality and Inclusion Implications

15. There are no immediate equalities and inclusion arising from this report. The proposed strategy will be based on a robust understanding of need achieved through use of a wide range of data sources. The strategy will enable libraries and heritage services to address inequalities through increased targeting of services to best meet community needs. The plans for public consultation on the draft strategy if required will be subject to an impact assessment.

Climate Change Implications

16. Climate change and environmental sustainability are key priorities of Oxfordshire County Council, the strategy will set out the service will contribute to our net zero commitment and the delivery of our climate action framework.

Risk Management

17. This paper sets out the findings of the peer challenge, the only immediate risk arising from these recommendations is one of missed opportunity i.e. failure to act to address areas for development. The project and engagement plan for the development of the service strategy will set out the risks associated with undertaking the work.

Consultations

18. The peer challenge recommends the development of an engagement strategy to underpin the new service strategy. The peer challenge itself is based on stakeholder feedback.

CLAIRE TAYLOR

Corporate Director, Customers, Organisational Development and Resources

Appendix 1:

Key Service Statistics

Annex 1:

LGA Cultural Services Peer Review feedback report

Contact Officer:

Lesli Good, Assistant Director, Cultural Services
June 2021

June 2021

Appendix 1: Key Service Statistics

Libraries

- in 2019/20 3,382,439 million items were borrowed
- of these 159,071 were e-books and e-audio book and there were 166,255 searches for e magazines
- the Home Library Service supported 670 active borrowers
- County library is the 4th highest library for borrowing in Great Britain
- at 2,462,330 visits this was an increase of 16% over the previous year
- however, in common with other library services across the country borrowing and visits have been falling over the last ten years. CIPFA data for 2006 – 2016 shows a national decline in visits of 28% and 38% in issues (items borrowed). Over the period 2010 to 2020, Oxfordshire's visits declined by 20% and issues by 29.5%
- at 120/1000 population active borrowers are above the average of 110 for our comparator group (active borrowers are defined as someone who has borrowed at least one item in the last year)
- at £12,448 revenue expenditure/1000 population is above the average £10,986 for our comparator group

Oxford Museum

- cares for more than 100,000 objects in store and on display at the Oxfordshire Museum and elsewhere across Oxfordshire
- in 2019/20 the Service welcomed 125,000+ visitors to its sites (excluding school groups)
- museum sites were open and freely accessible to the public for 2,038 hours
- the service engaged with more than 8,500 school children through loans of boxed collections of objects, workshops at the museum and in school, and with more than 1,500 children in informal learning activities
- more than 3,000 adults in the community benefitted from face to face activities
- the service benefitted from 5,400 hours of volunteer support.

Oxfordshire History Centre

In 2019/20

- the history centre housed 8,467 metres of physical archive holdings and 26.3 terabytes of digital storage
- the centre was open to visitors 39 hours per week
- the centre welcomed 3,645 on-site physical visitors, of whom 17% were first-time users
- 8,000 documents from the strong rooms were produced for customer requests
- 2,611 enquiries were dealt with by email or letter
- at £1518 expenditure/1000 population the history service is above the average of £1352 in our comparator group