Divisions Affected - All

CABINET – 20 APRIL 2021

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE SERVICES

Report by Corporate Director, Customers and Organisational Development

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

(a) Agree the purpose for libraries and heritage services set out in para 28 and the development of a strategic framework to enable these services to contribute more effectively to broader community outcomes in line with the council's statutory duties and strategic vision 'Thriving Communities for Everyone in Oxfordshire'.

(b) Ensure the role of the libraries and heritage is widely acknowledged as a significant contributor to economic growth and development in the county and the region by setting out the ambitions and planned outcomes in strategic plans.

(c) Agree that the development of the strategic framework should be based on detailed understanding of local need and engagement with stakeholders as set out in para 34 to 38.

(d) Agree to the development of a Member Engagement Plan to build a shared understanding of the contribution of these services to community outcomes.

Executive Summary

2. The county council has set out its ambition for thriving people, thriving communities and a thriving economy in the corporate plan and are working with strategic partners across the county to deliver this ambition. The projected growth in Oxfordshire brings with it many opportunities and challenges. There is likely to be increased demand for services such as libraries to meet population growth and for the public, private and community sector to work together to ensure local, place-based development meets a wide range of needs and reduces inequalities. The plan to build 100,000 new homes to 2021 will result in considerable amounts of s106/CIL available to the council to develop the library service infrastructure to meet this growth.

3. The council has also worked over the last two years to reposition and refine its corporate plan and priorities. Drawing on the Director of Public Health's annual report 2019/20 *'Some Are More Equal Than Others'* there is a renewed focus on tackling inequality and promoting wellbeing, and a much greater focus on communities and people who are more likely to be excluded. The new equalities, diversity and inclusion strategy *'Including Everyone'* (published in October 2020) also reflects the council's intent to focus on reducing inequality and supporting those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable. This strategic direction develops the council's vision of 'Thriving Communities for Everyone in Oxfordshire' and, alongside planning for a post-Covid recovery, provides the libraries and heritage service a clear context and opportunity to consider and strengthen its strategic contribution.

4. The council's current library and heritage services provide a network of assets in our local communities and an active and passionate community of volunteers. Our libraries provide a 'footprint' in many communities, geographically spread across the county, on which to build and develop responsive library and added value services that explicitly meet local needs.

5. The scale and volume of these services and examples of how they currently contribute to meeting community objectives is set out in para 19. There is evidence from other authorities that a clear vision and strategic framework for the planning and delivery of these services can strengthen the contribution they make to wider community outcomes. As we move out of the pandemic and make plans for economic and community recovery the time is right to improve our strategic ambition and planning for these services.

Background

6. Culture-led regeneration as a local policy has been around for many years, but arguably has a higher profile now that at any earlier time. Studies undertaken by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Local Government Association (LGA) has set out the case for libraries and heritage as a contributor to economic development, health and well-being, community development, inclusion and local place shaping.

7. Arts Council England (ACE) have recently published their new strategy to 2030, 'Let's Create'. It majors on place-based regeneration including the links between the funded arts and cultural sector and the wider commercial creative industries. This touches on the development and retention of talent and creativity as key employability skills alongside Science Technology Engineering, Arts and Maths (STEAM).

8. The Culture, Tourism and Sport Board of the LGA published 'Culture-led regeneration: achieving inclusive and sustainable growth' in 2019. It includes case studies of councils which reveal the range of benefits that can be achieved when arts and culture are put at the heart of local activity.

9.   There is now a clear acknowledgement of the social and economic value of the cultural sector, and its ability to deliver growth and drive regeneration. These impacts can range from growth in tourism, creative and cultural sectors, to enhancing individual skills, knowledge and confidence, to strengthening community pride and place image.

10.   Through the evidence collected by the LGA, culture-led regeneration has been shown to deliver a broad range of social and economic impacts, including:

- creating employment
- community cohesion and pride
- attracting more visitors, boosting the tourism sector
- supporting enhanced resident health
- stimulating town centre footfall, boosting local business
- bringing enjoyment for residents
- stimulating and supporting creative sector growth
- attracting inward investment
- developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of residents
- enhancing the area's image, helping to attract skilled people and business investment

11.   The important lessons and good practice drawn out from the LGA's research highlights

- a shared vision is an important foundation
- cultural investment can require boldness and ambition
- positive outcomes can be achieved with limited budgets
- national cultural bodies can be important local partners
- community involvement can be a powerful driver for culture-led regeneration
- careful design and delivery can help to maximise impacts
- cultural programme brand and identity can be very important
- building the cultural network in rural areas can help enhance impacts

12.   An enquiry carried out in 2017 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing into the role of arts and culture in health and wellbeing found that the arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived. The arts can also help meet major challenges facing health and social care: ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health as well as saving money in the health service and social care.

13.   Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership recognise the value of culture and heritage and have established a Culture and Visitor Economy Working Group to develop an improved understanding of these sectors to the local economy and community well-being and ensure that links with key strategies are made, including the forthcoming economic recovery plan post-pandemic.

14. Libraries and Heritage Services need to articulate a shared vision and long-term strategy to meet the needs of Oxfordshire's communities. A review of key internal and external strategies undertaken in late 2020 demonstrates that there are significant gaps in the current suite of strategic plans, where libraries and heritage contribution is missing.

15. The review also identified that there is a growing evidence base demonstrating the impact and outcomes, cultural engagement has on an individual's mental health and well-being, connected communities, healthy place shaping and economic prosperity. Building on the county's growth agenda, the council's aspirations for a 'Thriving Oxfordshire', the digital shift and changing public expectation, the time is right for the council to consider how best to evolve to meet the challenges residents, businesses and visitors are currently and the role the council wants libraries and heritage services to play in the future.

Oxfordshire libraries and heritage services now

16. The council has a statutory duty to deliver library and archives services and an enabling duty to deliver museums, local history and other heritage services (this duty is set out in para 36 - 38).

17. Oxfordshire County Council's Libraries and Heritage Services comprise:

    - 22 libraries run by county council staffs
    - 22 Community Supported Libraries run by volunteers with the support of paid staff
    - Home Library Service supporting 670 clients
    - Prisons library Service in Huntercombe and Bullingdon
    - 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
    - the museum service also has a legacy responsibility for the remains of the Bishop's Palace in Witney
    - local history service based in the History Centre in St Lukes Church
    - Victoria County History, multi-partner local history project supported by the VCH Trust
    - all three museum locations are Accredited Museums and the Local History Centre is also Accredited

18. In addition, the council supports the operation of Oxford Castle through a contract with the Oxford Preservation Trust and delivery of a learning programme to schools. LandSec 125 year lease of the remaining area, currently under-utilised.

19. The Carnegie Trust graphic attached as Appendix 1 demonstrates how libraries and heritage services contribute to social, cultural, economic and

educational well-being. The table below provides a snapshot of activities and outcomes delivered by libraries and heritage services in 2019/20 are mapped against these outcomes.

Social and health and well-being	*Libraries* • reading as therapy - Reading Well collections • prison library and home library services • promoting environmental awareness – recycling, electrical equipment collection • Making Every Conversation Count in partnership with Public Health – signposting library users to health and well-being resources • participation in events and activities reduces social isolation and connects people with benefits for their mental health • space for groups to deliver activities eg Chess Club, Dungeons and Dragons, Knit and Knatter, coffee clubs • volunteering opportunities • libraries are safe and trusted spaces where there is no limit to how long people can stay in them • libraries staff are highly skilled in talking to and assisting customers from all parts of our communities *Heritage* • photo and memory sharing projects to combat ~~elder~~ loneliness in our older residents. • Picture Oxon and Oxfordshire History digital content websites delivered for online consumption and enjoyment of local history (500,0000 page hits) • access to archive records, supported infected blood public inquiry, and regular police enquiries around child welfare. • volunteers enable the Oxfordshire Museum to open to the public, to deliver its informal learning programmes and maintain the garden • volunteers at the Museums Resource Centre develop and share their knowledge of the collections and the stories they tell • objects from the museum collections shared with almost 3,000 older people across the county, helping to stimulate memory and encourage conversation • a wide range of activities eg family drop-ins, activities for toddlers, reminiscence groups for older people, summer garden games, trails, activity back packs, friendly and welcoming staff and a café at the museum
Education and learning	*Libraries* • 47,000 children visited libraries to borrow books

	- 1.5m items were borrowed by children (including dual language, braille and books for dyslexic readers) - 598 events supporting children's reading and literacy - 9,000 children participated in Summer Reading Challenge - 1,780 Rhymetime, family events and Play and Stay sessions were delivered - 26,000 children and young people (early years to Year 12) attended a class visit with teacher – for many of these it was the first visit to a library - Bookstart – books donated to pre-school children - 400 Code Clubs were run - 340 digital workshops were provided to adults supported by Digital Helpers - the Makerspace in county library offered innovative new technology activities including Raspberry Jams and Virtual Reality workshops - informal gadget sessions were held to support residents to understand how to use their mobile devices - study space in all libraries - language courses – eg Russian in Henley Library, ***Heritage*** - 8,500 school children engaged with the museum through loans of boxed collections of objects, workshops at the museum and in school - 1,500 children engaged in informal learning activities through the museum - volunteering opportunities enable people to develop their existing skills and knowledge - 127,000 visitors to the Oxfordshire Museum benefited from provided structured learning opportunities through talks, workshops and other activities for more than 1,000 adults - 3,645 visitors accessed the archive collections for local and family history research, aiding personal fulfilment. - over 600 adults reached through 10 VCH talks and other public events
Cultural	***Libraries*** - 4,500 activities for adults were delivered including author talks, reading groups, creative writing courses - annual ebook short story competition supported young people and adults to be published - access to CDs and music scores - Rhythm and Rhyme for early years - space for exhibitions and live performances - Makerspace – 3D printers and workshops - ***Heritage*** - 3,000 adults in the community engaged in face to face activities delivered by the museum service

	• Cultural programmes at the museum include exhibitions of work by contemporary and historic, regionally and nationally significant artists and craftspeople, music, plays, films and other activities • archives from 301 archaeological sites, located in 110 Oxfordshire parishes accessioned and made available for public enquiry. • 8,000 documents were produced for the public to view in the history centre • 2,611 enquiries from the public by email or letter were replied to by history centre staff • History Centre worked with Bodleian Libraries to deliver 7 outreach *Talking Maps* events in Oxfordshire Libraries • 146,537 page visits to VCH Oxon. online volumes (plus physical book use at History Centre and Libraries) • New VCH Wychwood volume published 2019 (Volume 19) • VCH Smart Phone app launched • 10 VCH talks or other public events, reaching over 600 people
• **Economic Development**	*Libraries* • signposting to benefits information and support • PC access for job search • support with Universal Credit applications • supporting digital skills • encouraging enterprise through access to on-line business databases and information *Heritage* • History Centre supports planning of building development and conservation projects, through provision of archive content and historic photographs. • The Museums Service enables developers to meet their planning obligation by providing an Accredited repository in which to deposit and make available to the public archaeological archives resulting from development

20. In 2020 in response to covid-19 libraries and heritage services increased on-line engagement significantly. The museum service has seen an increase of 18% in in followers on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and a 579% increase in engagements, which have topped 67,000 for the year to the end of January.

21. A series of short films, featuring curators talking about objects, are being shared via the Service's YouTube account and a menu of 40 curriculum-

focused films on key history topics have just been released, to support parents and teachers in delivering lockdown learning. This is already generating significant interest.

22. Oxfordshire Libraries already had a healthy and active digital library presence before the pandemic which increased prior to the pandemic by 32%. Online library services include an ebook & eaudio loan library-licensed service, access to many online databases some of which are also only licensed for library customer usage worth many £1,000s. During the pandemic lockdowns, the online library service usage skyrocketed to a level never seen before, reflecting the national trends.

23. The History Service's digital resources' website www.oxfordshirehistory.org.uk, which was previously available only at the History Centre and the county's libraries, has been developed and is now universally accessible. This website brings together digitised content from and about the service's historic collections, as well as highlighting websites for local history and family history research. New pages are regularly added to it. The site has averaged over 5,000-page views each month since the start of lockdown.

24. The council have a library refurbishment programme planned for 2021 with s106 funding to the value of c£720,000,

Libraries and heritage services in the future

25. Our libraries and heritage services occupy an unusual place in the public service landscape.   Free to enter and open to all they offer an extensive network of community anchors at the heart of our communities. Libraries and heritage sites are at their best when we enable citizens to fulfil their potential in a safe and trusted civic space that enables engagement and participation.

26. We know residents' value our libraries and heritage services as they received in excess of 2.5m physical visits in 2019/20 in addition to substantial numbers of on-line engagement.

27. A new and explicit purpose for libraries and heritage supported by an increased strategic focus will enable us to build on our existing strengths and increase the impact of these services on community outcomes.

28. It is proposed that we make the purpose explicit as set out below:

Oxfordshire libraries and heritage services purpose:
Our libraries and heritage sites are vibrant hubs bringing people together with access to services and opportunities that will support them to thrive.

29. Our libraries and heritage services are universal services, open to all citizens. Research undertaken by the Carnegie Trust into attitudes and use of libraries has identified that whilst this is a great strength this is also a challenge as there is not a universal set of needs. Their research shows that whilst 72 –

79% of people in the UK and Ireland reported that public libraries are essential and very important to the community this is not reflected in personal use with only around 43 – 50% of people in each jurisdiction actually using the library.

30. The trust suggests the main reason for this is peoples lack of understanding of what the library can offer to them as an individual because of the universal nature of the offer. This lack of awareness about libraries is likely to be the same for heritage services and could result in these services being underutilised by individuals and groups who could benefit from them. There is an urgent need to improve marketing and communications on the service offer.

31. Whilst we have yet to undertake a full analysis of the demographics of library and heritage users in Oxfordshire we know from experience that some groups are over-represented and others under-represented in their take up. Whilst we deliver some services designed to meet the needs of specific groups, there would be a benefit in increasing the focus across these services on tailored, personalised services whilst maintaining the focus on delivering a universal service.

32. It is therefore proposed that the new strategic framework for planning and delivering these services focuses on balancing targeting need more effectively within a universal service. A full and detailed analysis of service use and need will be completed and a strategic plan will be developed against this analysis of need, with clear and discrete initiatives to meet specifically identified needs to reduce inequalities within the universal service offer.

33. The strategic plan will set out actions, outcomes and measures for the next five years against the following themes:

   - education, learning and skills
   - health and well-being
   - culture and creativity
   - digital inclusion
   - social inclusion and community cohesion
   - economic development

34. Analysis of local need is a critical element in the development of the strategy and in addition to using a wide range of data to understand local need it is proposed that locality-based engagement is undertaken in the development of the strategy. There is evidence that place based engagement recognises the interconnectedness of people's lives and that their knowledge can assist local organisations to design services to meet specific local community needs. OCC has co-design expertise which thus far has focused primarily on adult social care. The 're-imagining' of libraries and heritage services in Oxfordshire will benefit from close engagement with residents and stakeholders through the use of co-design tools.

35.   Banbury and Faringdon are proposed as two localities to initiate locality-based co-design. A significant refurbishment of Faringdon library has been underway since January and will complete over the summer.

36.   The focus of co-production activity in Faringdon has been around the programme and activities that might be possible in the newly re-furbished library. Whilst, Faringdon library has a Friends Group it is anticipated that the co-production approach will enable the service to achieve deeper and wider engagement in the local community than is currently the case, leading to increased take-up of services on opening.

37.   Banbury Library, has long needed a review – the location and the building do not provide the opportunity to deliver a modern library service offer and there is a considerable S106 budget available to develop an improved service in Banbury. The focus of the co-production in Banbury will be on the overall purpose of the library in Banbury, physical design issues and services programmes that will meet local need.

38.   Stakeholder engagement in these localities will be focussed on purpose and vision for library and heritage services in those particular communities and what services, delivered from library buildings, would best meet community needs. This will be undertaken with regard to the council's duty to provide a county-wide library service, but one that will better match specific place-based needs.

39.   It is proposed to bring a new strategic framework and plan for libraries and heritage services, based on a robust understanding of need to Cabinet in September 2021.

40.   **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

41.   The strategy will address how libraries and heritage services will contribute to
        - Thriving Communities
        - Thriving Economy
        - Thriving Individuals

Financial Implications

42.   There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. Although agreeing this initial report has no immediate additional costs, there are existing revenue pressures on the library & heritage budgets that have not been addressed and will likely result in overspend position without action in 2021/22.

Legal Implications

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). Every council in England is required to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service under the Act. It must do so in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available. The public library service is not a national service, but a local service. What a comprehensive and efficient service means will differ between councils, and will depend on the needs of each area. It is therefore the role of councillors and officials at a local level to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their service. This must be done:

- in consultation with their communities
- through analysis of evidence around local needs
- in accordance with their statutory duties

> Councils therefore have the freedom to design their library service, based on their analysis and assessment of local needs. There are no longer prescribed national standards, which risked ignoring the specific circumstances or needs of individual library authorities.

The Act allows for joint working between library authorities and councils may also offer wider library services (for example, loaning devices, running activities or providing access to wifi and computers).

In providing this service, councils must, among other things:

- encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service (section 7(2)(b))
- lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area (in accordance with section 8(3))

43.   In fulfilling is duty under section s7(1), a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability, amongst other things:

a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; (s7(2) (a))

> The general duty under s7(1) of the act does not extend 'to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area'.

In drawing up and delivering their library strategies and plans, councils should consider a number of legal obligations, including under:

- the Equality Act 2010 including the Public Sector Equality Duty
- Best Value Duty 2011 guidance
- Localism Act 2011
- the Human Rights Act 1998

44.   The council is obliged to run an archives service under the Public Records Act (1958) and the Local Government Acts (1962, 1972), and has been identified and appointed by the Lord Chancellor as the approved Place of Deposit for the public records of Oxfordshire. These Acts require the care of and provision of public access to public records (records of public bodies, health records and court records), the records of local authorities (county, district and parish councils), and tithe and manorial records

Comments checked by:

Emma Deval, Principal Solicitor (Litigation) emma.deval@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Name, Title, email (Legal)

Staff Implications

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

Equality & Inclusion Implications

46.   There are no immediate equalities and inclusion arising from this report. The strategic framework will be based on a robust understanding of need achieved through use of a wide range of data sources. The plans for public consultation on the draft strategy will be subject to an SCIA.

Sustainability Implications

47.   There are no immediate sustainability implications arising from this report. The strategic framework will address how sustainability objectives can be more effectively delivered by libraries and heritage services in the short and long term

Risk Management

48.   The risk in developing a strategic framework for libraries and heritage services is primarily one of effective communication and managing expectations. It is proposed to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy at the outset so that key messages are consistent.

Consultations

49.   As this report sets out proposals to a strategic framework for approval by Cabinet are no immediate consultation issues arising from this report. A staff engagement strategy will be delivered and co-production activities will take place in Faringdon and Banbury to enable local intelligence to inform the strategic framework. It is also proposed to develop a Member Engagement Plan to build a shared understanding of the contribution of these services to community outcomes.

CLAIRE TAYLOR
Corporate Director, Customers and Organisational Development

Annex: None

Background papers:

Contact Officer: Lesli Good, Interim Assistant Director Cultural Services

April 2021