Inspiring Libraries
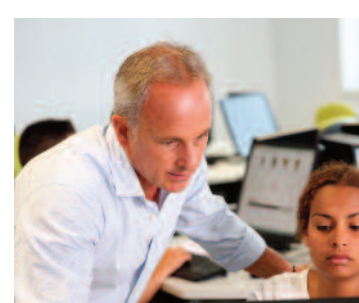
A new strategy for Hertfordshire Libraries

2014 - 2024

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Hertfordshire

Imagine a Hertfordshire library in 2024

- Shahnaz works during the day, but is studying for a Masters Degree in the evenings. Now that she can use her swipe card to access the library 24 hours a day, she comes in to study in peace and quiet, and she often grabs a coffee to keep her going. She uses the online resources to support her research, and if she needs to order in specialist material, she can pick it up via the click and collect service or order for home delivery for a small charge.

- Grace is 16. She joined the library as soon as she saw the new teenage area with its interactive video wall, bean bags and juice bar. She became a Youth Consultant to help shape services for other young people. She has helped to organise events meeting authors and artists and is now involved in making a film to promote the library using the camera and editing software in the library's 'Makerspace'.

- Derek started volunteering in the local library after his wife died. It gave him a reason to get out and mix with people again, while providing a useful service. He helps customers to use the self-service kiosks and they often like to stop for a chat. If people have more complex enquiries, he can show them how to contact a librarian via the 'Skype' link.

- Kristina is a busy mum, always on the go, but she makes time to bring her son Tomas to Baby Rhyme Time because he enjoys it so much, and she always has a bag full of picture books to take home with her. After the session, there is often a health professional on hand to offer advice, and Tomas sometimes gets a free piece of fruit to encourage healthy eating!

- Oscar is 12 and he and his friends stop at the library most evenings to do their homework. Sometimes they work individually, but often they use the Tech Tables to work together as a group. In the school holidays he comes to a Raspberry Jam club in the library, where he has great fun figuring out how to programme his own computer games.

- Jason has never been good with computers. Now he has lost his job and needs to apply for benefits online, he is really anxious about getting it wrong. Fortunately, a friend has told him to come into the library where one of the IT Champions can help him through the process. Now that he is more confident, he is coming in regularly to use the job search facilities.

- Mary used to be a regular library visitor, attending the book group and the knit and natter sessions. Now she is not in good health, and doesn't get out much, so she uses the library online. She downloads e-books or orders hard copies for home delivery, and she can still discuss what she is reading by participating in the online reading forum.

- John had not been into his local library for years until a neighbour encouraged him to come along to a gardening talk presented by the 'Friends' group. Now he comes in frequently to research his family history on the free Online Reference Library, and he has become an active member of the 'Friends' himself, organising regular quiz evenings in the library.

Hertfordshire Library Service is sure to look different in ten years time, but it will still be enabling citizens to enrich their lives.

Our strategy – Inspiring Libraries

Our new strategy will ensure that Hertfordshire can deliver a high quality library service that is sustainable into the future and remains relevant to the diverse and changing needs of Hertfordshire residents over the next ten years. We will work in close partnership with local communities, invest in the digital future and provide an enhanced gateway to reading, information and wellbeing.

1. **A vibrant community asset** – where libraries are shaped with local people and partners to reflect local need, support sustainability and enrich communities.
   - Our public consultation demonstrated the power of the idea of the public library as a safe, trusted non-judgemental space for the whole community.
   - We want to develop this role further by promoting the library as a local access point for other services, and making library space available for a wider range of events and activities organised and run by local citizens.
   - This will foster a sense of ownership, involvement and participation in local communities and develop the library as a genuine community hub.

2. **The digital library** – a service that is ambitious in its use of technology and digital formats for the benefit of Hertfordshire residents.
   - Libraries are well placed to support residents in making the most of the opportunities offered by digital innovation.
   - As the pace of technological advance increases, the role of the library in lifelong learning will develop to support those in danger of being left behind, while enabling children and young people to maximise their potential in a digital world.
   - Libraries have a key role to play in providing an environment which is safe for people to experiment with a range of new technologies and develop their skills and confidence.
   - Emerging technology will open up new possibilities for libraries to support small businesses and offer 24/7 access to resources.

3. **An enhanced gateway to reading, information and wellbeing -**
   - Libraries will ensure that citizens of all ages have free and equal access to books, e-books, talking books and other reading resources.
   - Libraries will support literacy and personal development enabling citizens of all ages to learn new skills.
   - Reading for pleasure will be central to the library offer. This is critical for children as the single strongest indicator of educational attainment. It supports formal and informal education and inspires creativity. It can help older people to stay engaged with a changing world and remain independent.
   - Libraries will build on their reputation as trusted providers of information, helping people to navigate their way through the maze by providing easy access to authoritative information sources in libraries and online.
   - Libraries will support improved wellbeing by providing easy access to health information and advice, and by combating loneliness and social isolation.
   - Libraries will provide space and expertise to support study, business and academic research, whilst helping people to access the information they need to make decisions about their everyday lives.
   - Libraries will act as a gateway to more specialised information, advice and guidance services by referring and signposting enquirers to other agencies, as appropriate.

Our vision and values

Our vision is to create inspiring library services that enable Hertfordshire citizens to enrich their lives.

Hertfordshire libraries will enable individuals to access knowledge, information and cultural resources for themselves, and provide support for those who may need more help.

Hertfordshire Libraries will provide safe spaces (both physical and virtual) where anyone can go, without judgement, to read, to borrow, to learn, to access information and online resources.

Hertfordshire Libraries will enrich communities by fostering local culture and heritage, and providing opportunities for citizens to participate actively in community life.

What Hertfordshire libraries will provide:

Hertfordshire will continue to provide the services that are essential in any public library. In our public consultation, these are the services that residents told us were the most used and the most valued.

All Hertfordshire Libraries will provide:

- **Access to books** – including printed books, e-books and talking books. At present the range of e-books available to public libraries is very limited. Over the next ten years, as this market develops and as reading habits change, the emphasis in library provision will shift from printed books to e-books and from talking books to downloadable audio. Nevertheless, we expect libraries still to be offering both printed and e-books in 2024

- **Reading activities**, such as the summer reading challenge for children, baby rhyme times, toddler tales and support for reading groups for adults.

- **Information** – authoritative and up to date information in libraries and online, including information to support health and wellbeing.

- **Public access to digital technology**, including Wifi access.

- **Access to skilled and trained staff**

- **Public space for reading and study.**

There is also potential for a range of additional services that would add value and generate income. These additional services will be flexible, depending on local circumstances, specific community needs, and customer demand.

Examples of additional library services include:

- **Promotional activities**, such as author talks, health promotions, local history events, and holiday activities for children, many of which may be organised and delivered by community volunteers.

- **Targeted services**, such as the provision of community language materials, support for local literacy initiatives, or services to homeless hostels aimed to promote social inclusion.

- **Specialist collections and services**, such as the business information and government information collections at Welwyn Garden City and the loan of music scores and play sets to local music and drama groups, which it makes sense to deliver from one central location

- **Services delivered _for_ partners**, such as the provision of visitor information services, reminiscence sessions or facilitated reading groups, which the library service can provide if specifically commissioned to do so by partner organisations.

- **Services delivered _by_ partners**, such as adult education classes provided in libraries by local colleges, IT sessions delivered by Carers in Herts, or parenting classes delivered by children's centres.

- **Services to support busines**s, such as work space for use/hire by self-employed people or business start ups, and job clubs for the unemployed.

- **Income-generating services**, such as the loan of DVDs, the provision of fax and photocopying services, and the hire of library space, which are primarily provided to raise income to support the service.

We will deliver the new Library Service Strategy through:

✓ **Tiered Libraries**

In order to clarify what our customers can expect, Hertfordshire's library buildings will be branded and promoted in three different tiers:

- *Tier 1*

  These will be centrally located in the heart of the largest towns in Hertfordshire. These libraries will offer the broadest range of library services, and the longest opening hours.

- *Tier 2*

  In smaller towns, we will provide libraries offering core library services. We will seek to extend access to reflect the town centre's opening hours through the use of self-service and volunteer supervised opening.

- *Tier 3*

  In smaller communities and villages we will provide self-service access to library services including the issue and return of books, access to IT and study space, and staff assistance via a virtual librarian service. We will invite local communities to add value to these self-service facilities through volunteer staffing and the provision of additional services as decided by the local community.

✓ **Online services**

We will provide a high quality online library service, available to Hertfordshire members 24/7 from anywhere in the world. This will include access to information and online reference resources, downloading e-books, ordering items from the library catalogue, access to enquiry services, communication through social media, and streaming of library events.

We will develop a clearly identifiable brand to ensure that our 'virtual library space' will have the same look and feel as our library buildings – attractive and accessible to all, neutral and non-judgemental, intuitive for self-service, but with support available when required. This will include elements of personalisation and the facility for library users to interact with the library service and with each other.

✓ **Outreach services**

We will ensure that vulnerable and isolated customers who are unable to visit the local library in person are still able to access library services. We will review our current outreach services and explore new delivery models to improve access for these customers, making greater use of developing technologies and home delivery solutions.

✓ **Library spaces**

Recent County Council investment in library buildings has demonstrated the potential of 'state of the art' library facilities at libraries such as Oxhey, Welwyn Garden City, Harpenden and Borehamwood. However, there are still library buildings across the county that are not well located or require significant investment. In the course of the next ten years, we will continue to seek opportunities to reprovide and refurbish libraries to create bright, welcoming, flexible, tech-enabled library spaces that are conveniently located and suitable for the provision of modern public library services.

In our public consultation, there was broad support for the idea of co-locating libraries with other organisations or services. Sharing buildings provides opportunities to share costs with partners, and enables people to access a number of services in one visit, potentially attracting new customers to the library service. Over the next ten years, the co-location of libraries with other services will become the norm rather than the exception.

✓ **Technology**

In our public consultation, 73% or respondents were in favour of libraries developing and exploiting technology and digital services. We will do this in two ways:

- ***Exploiting technology to improve service delivery***
  We will maximise customers' ability to access library services for themselves at times that are convenient to them. We will further develop self-service to enable full access to IT facilities without staff intervention, and explore swipe card entry to library spaces to open up the potential of 24/7 access to library buildings. Outside libraries, we will ensure that our online services are easy to access at any time, from anywhere, from any mobile device.

- ***Exploiting technology to empower citizens***
  Over the last ten years, the provision of public access computers in libraries has encouraged many people to experiment with technology and take their first steps into the digital world. Over the next ten years, libraries can perform a similar role with a new generation of technology. We will demonstrate and promote access to tablets, e-readers and 'Skype' style connections, which can transform the way in which citizens access services. We will create 'maker spaces' in our larger libraries where people can go to discover and explore new technologies, such as 3D printing, sound and image editing, and develop programming skills in a safe and supportive environment.

✓ **Volunteers**

Hertfordshire Library Service currently use volunteers to support a number of library services. The Home Library Service is delivered entirely by volunteers, the Summer Reading Challenge for children relies heavily on volunteer support, and we have recruited volunteer IT Champions in a number of libraries to support customers in using public access computers. The results of our public consultation show that there is broad support for increasing the use of volunteers to both support library services and extend opening hours.

We will seek to recruit volunteers, either directly or by working in partnership with local community organisations to support the delivery of library services, to extend access to the library beyond core opening hours, and to extend the range of library events and activities we can offer.

In addition to asking volunteers to offer their time for the direct delivery of services in libraries, we will also encourage the organisation of 'friends groups', through which volunteers with different skills can help us to promote library services in the local area, and to raise income. Increasing the involvement of volunteers in the delivery and promotion of library services, will help us to ensure that local libraries remain rooted in the communities they serve, and that services are closely attuned to local needs.

✓ **Promoting the service**

One of the recurring themes of our public consultation was the need to promote libraries more effectively, as many people who would benefit from public library services are unaware of the changes that have occurred in libraries in recent years, and the range of services on offer.

The need for more effective promotion has also been recognised nationally, and in 2013 the Society of Chief Librarians launched four 'universal offers' to define what any good public library service should be able to provide in the areas of:

- Reading
- Information
- Digital inclusion
- Support for health and wellbeing.

Hertfordshire will support these universal offers, and will benefit from national marketing campaigns, such as those that have been so successful in raising awareness of the Summer Reading Challenge.

We will make the most of the opportunities presented by the new strategy and the remodelling and rebranding of libraries to promote our services to customers, partners and communities. We will develop a communications plan alongside the implementation of the strategy to include promotion through traditional marketing, through social media, through schools and partner organisations, and by encouraging local community contacts to become ambassadors for the service.
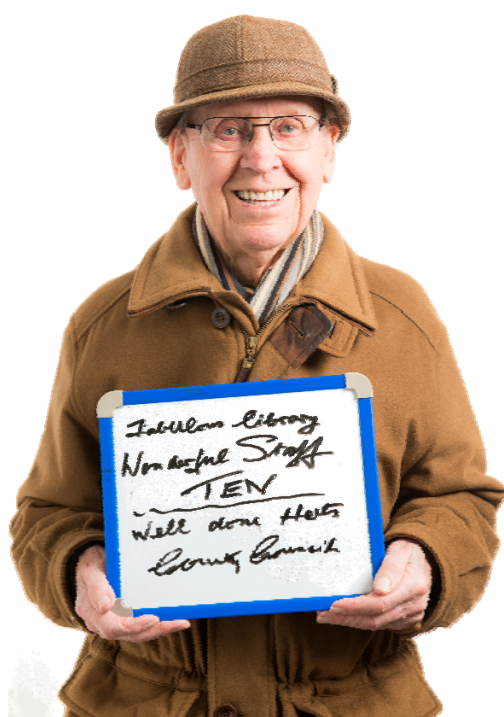
Delivering Inspiring Libraries

This new strategy for Hertfordshire Library Service sets the direction for the service over the next ten years, and will inform future decisions about the operation and delivery of library services. Improvements to the service will be delivered as resources and opportunities allow. Some of the changes described in the strategy can be achieved quite quickly, whilst others will take time to develop and evolve.

As the proposals are progressed, appropriate consultation will be undertaken with residents and stakeholders likely to be affected, and any identified equalities issues will be addressed.

This is an innovative and ambitious programme, designed to ensure that Hertfordshire continues to be a leading library authority. Hertfordshire libraries will look different in future, but these developments will ensure that the service remains relevant and sustainable in a changing world and that its value to local citizens and communities endures.

Our Ambition

Hertfordshire Library Service's ambition is to inspire Hertfordshire residents by creating:

A sustainable library service, delivered in partnership with local residents, organisations and communities.

A service that is ambitious in its use of technology and digital formats for the benefit of customers.

Libraries that enrich the lives of Hertfordshire residents of all ages through reading, learning and access to culture.

By 2024 Hertfordshire Library Service's aim to:

- Attract more visitors (physical, virtual and outreach)
- Be open to residents for longer hours
- Cost the taxpayer less