

Libraries Service Plan 2024-2025

1. Overview of Service

The Library service delivers direct access to reading, information, ICT and digital resources; as well as impactful work in the areas of literacy, social and digital inclusion, health and well-being, and lifelong learning.

The council provides a vibrant network of 44 branch libraries across the county, with locations spread across towns, villages, and the city of Oxford. As well as this, the service has other core elements, such as the home library service (providing access to housebound individuals), a library in HMP Bullingdon, a growing range of digital content available 24/7 (including eBooks, eAudio, eMagazines and Newspapers; and various online resources), an award-winning Business and Intellectual Property Centre, and a diverse programme of activities and events.

Since the launch of the Libraries and Heritage Strategy in June 2022, with its focus on People, Place, and Partnerships, the service has focused greater emphasis on increasing participation, developing our offer in priority areas (specifically, health and wellbeing; digital; and children and young people), pursuing more strategic partnerships, and judging our performance on the impact that we are having on individuals and communities across Oxfordshire.

Libraries are a statutory service; under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 it is the duty of every council to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.” The library network is supported directly by volunteers, with Friends groups providing vital funding for staffing and developments. The service demonstrates significant value for money¹ (and), in terms of its reach and the difference it makes on key Council priority areas, as illustrated in the ‘snapshot’ diagram overleaf.

¹ It is worth noting that recent research undertaken by the University of East Anglia has discovered that the services delivered by a typical branch library are worth £1M/year, and that a libraries’ value, on average, equates to six times their running costs. (*Libraries for living and for living better*, 2023)



CURRENT DELIVERY

- ZEZ permit support
- local provision, reducing travel
- Library gardens
- Significant shift to e-collections/delivery
- Green Libraries Partnership
- Green waste bags distribution
- Benson Library (carbon neutral)

- Service is free to join, free to use
- Free access to ICT and WiFi in all libraries
- Free 24/7 online resources
- Free activities across sites for all ages
- Digital Helper sessions
- Access to City Council and Citizen's Advice
- HAF programme
- Period poverty support

- > 7k MECC interactions in libraries in 2022/23
- Reading Well/books on prescription stock
- Drop-ins by Macmillan, Stop Smoking, MIND etc.
- >1.5k volunteer sessions across the service
- Home Library Service reaching 1k people
- Braille/content for print impaired people
- Physically active activities

- Rhyme and Story time sessions in libraries
- Summer Reading scheme and activities
- BookStart provision
- Coding clubs, Maker-space and STEM events
- Working with Family Hubs, Health Visitors etc.
- Stay, Play and Learn
- Books to Help offer
- School class visits
- BIPC focus on young entrepreneurs

- Business & Intellectual Property Centre/spokes
- Libraries located in areas of deprivation
- Online and library-based learning courses
- Friends Groups
- Agile working touch-down points in libraries
- Response to cost of living & Ukraine crises
- Library as warm places

FUTURE AMBITION

- Full carbon neutral buildings and service
- E-fleet for deliveries
- Biodegradable book jackets, tickets etc.

- Expand digital helper and inclusion offer
- Remove library fines
- Libraries Asset Development Plan

- Grow HLS service
- Develop social prescribing
- Human Library links
- Library of Sanctuary
- Targeted activities

- Expand Early Years provision
- Every Child a Library Member ambition
- Online storytimes

- Further support agile working for community
- Co-location opportunities
- BIPC sustainability
- Community agreements

2. Service Priorities, Principles, and Milestones

Beyond the alignment with key Council priorities, Libraries’ ‘customer-facing’ priorities in 2024/25 will be (in a continuance of the strategic focus from 2023/24):

- Children and Young People
- Digital Inclusion
- Health and Wellbeing

The service will continue to uphold our overarching principles of ‘Customer First’ (i.e. putting the customer at the forefront of all our thinking), and ‘One Service’ (i.e. pulling together and thinking as a whole team, rather than working in silos – as this benefits our customers).

Additionally, the team will be working to become more sustainable (i.e. financially) and effective within available capacity and resources.

In terms of key activities across the year, Libraries have identified the following milestones (see overleaf), which are tied back to the core Libraries and Heritage Strategy themes of People, Place and Partnerships:

Key Milestones

The following table outlines the key activities that will be delivered across each quarter (i.e. Q1, Q2 etc.), with links to the nine corporate priorities (i.e. CP1,2,3 etc.); and / service priorities (i.e. CYP, DI, and H&W).

Our aims for People – our libraries and heritage services will support people to reach their full potential:	Activities:	Milestone (Q1, Q2 etc.)	Corporate/ Service Priorities (CP/SP)
1) Widen reach and participation: Meet a greater range of audience needs, and sustain an engaging programme of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and develop engagement activity, particularly activities linked to key strategic priorities (i.e. climate action; childrens and young people, digital inclusion, and health and wellbeing) 	Q1-4	CP: 1,2,3,7 SP: DI, H&WB, CYP

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review our offer to schools (including class visits) and our support for staff in this area, (i.e. training on facilitating class visits, running story-times) and focus on areas of the county where there is low take-up/high disadvantage 	Q2-4	
2) Support digital inclusion: Improve ICT digital offer and collections access through our libraries, online catalogue and other activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with ICT, refresh Libraries’ hardware and public access offer (including staff PCs and phone system; People’s Network and printing facilities) Work towards the re-tender for the Library Management System (current contract runs expires March 2026) Building on the Digital Helper and Coding Club offer/volunteer programme 	Q1-4 Q2-4 Q2-3	CP: 2 SP: DI
3) Enable Children’s development: Create opportunities for children and young people and support for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with Children’s, the Early Years’ team, Health Visitors, Registration and others, develop the Libraries Early Years and young families offer (including Bookstart, rhyme times and story times, holiday activities) 	Q1-4	CP: 7 SP: CYP, H&WB
Our aims for Place – our libraries and heritage services will be recognised as valuable community assets and we will strengthen their role in ‘place making’ and their position at the heart of their community:	Activities:	Milestone (Q1, Q2 etc.)	Corporate/ Service Priorities (CP/SP)
4) Cement role of the library as a community hub: Further develop links to the local community, co-location/ partnership opportunities, and, critically, improve the standard of the libraries network (i.e. asset development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with Property, implement the Asset Development Programme, deliver key projects, and establish the overarching procurement and governance arrangements. Further explore how to maximise use of green spaces outside of libraries 	Q1-4 Q2-3	CP: 1, 2, 9 SP: CYP, DI, H&WB
5) Reach new communities: Grow engagement amongst communities in areas of higher deprivation and lower current take up of Library services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shape up an improved Young Adults offer (in terms of library settings/furnishings, collections, technology, engagement activities) taking a lead from local young adults and the award-winning work of the BIPC in this area. Deliver on Year 2 of the shared Public Health and Libraries partnership plan, which focuses on targeted interventions and focus on deprived wards (see also below). 	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4	CP: 2, 3, 7, 9 SP: CYP, DI, and H&W

<p>6) Be more sustainable: Develop our service, staffing structure and collections policy and practises to maximise customer access and sustain quality within available resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress an organisational and network structure redesign of Libraries to ensure it is fit for purpose and sustainable • Review and begin to revise our collections strategy/policy/processes to ensure that we are meeting community needs and service priorities 	<p>Q1-4 Q2-3</p>	<p>CP: 9 SP: CYP, DI, and H&W</p>
<p>Our aims for Partnerships – <i>our libraries and heritage services will deliver on national and local priorities, increasing our strategic and operational collaborations with a wide range of partners:</i></p>	<p>Activities:</p>	<p>Milestone (Q1, Q2 etc.)</p>	<p>Corporate/ Service Priorities (CP/SP)</p>
<p>7) Further develop partnership working with Public Health and others, working through libraries to maximise our community’s health and wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and analyse community profiles for each library, capturing key community data for each library, and developing the local offer to meet needs • Home Library Service: identify ways in which we can develop the service, widen participation, celebrate, and support our volunteers, and secure future funding 	<p>Q1-2 Q2-3</p>	<p>CP: 3 SP: H&WB</p>
<p>8) Invest in partnership working and skills for staff and volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress a Libraries Workforce Development strategy • Establish a Libraries Volunteer strategy and identify opportunities to widen participation and strengthen the volunteer voice 	<p>Q1-2 Q2-3</p>	<p>CP: 3, 7, 9 SP: CYP, DI, H&WB</p>
<p>9) Work with partners in the private and education sectors to ensure our services contribute to learning, sustainable economic development and entrepreneurship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to embed a sustainable model for the continuation and further development of Oxfordshire’s Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) • Support the Music Service in delivery/collection of instruments for pupils across the county 	<p>Q1-2 Q1-4</p>	<p>CP: 9 SP: CYP, DI</p>
<p>10) Develop Libraries through partnership: Working with local communities and local/regional/ national organisations, we will seek improvement and best practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively engage with community groups and commercial partners to use library spaces more (to generate more income) • In partnership with Communications, continue to develop a marketing and communication strategy for Libraries, and progress roll out of new branding 	<p>Q1-4 Q1-4</p>	<p>CP: 2, 9 SP: CYP, DI, and H&W</p>

3. Key Performance Indicators

Our key performance objectives for 2024-25 are to improve upon Key Performance Indicator (KPI) performance levels (i.e. from 2023-24 levels); and, to develop a more outcomes-focused, rationalised set of performance targets for 2025-26

Strategic Plan Targets

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators											
Measure Name			Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Digital Inclusion through libraries: number of hours of use of public computers in libraries			1, 2, 8	number	Monthly	Bigger is better	Bigger Green -5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood		
			People								
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
5,500	5,500	5,500	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	5,500	5,500	5,500
Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators											
Measure Name			Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Number of physical visits to libraries			2, 3, 7, 8, 9	number	Monthly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood		
			People, Place								
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
120,000	125,000	125,000	130,000	125,000	120,000	115,000	110,000	90,000	90,000	95,000	115,000

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators

Measure Name	Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater				
Number of people engaged with via Making Every Conversation Count	3	number	Monthly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood				
	People, Partnership										
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
450	450	450	450	450	450	450	400	400	400	450	450

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators

Measure Name	Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater				
NEW Number of volunteer hours contributed to the library service	3	number	Yearly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood				
	People, Partnership										
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
											27,500

Service-level Targets

Service – Key Performance Indicators

Measure Name	Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater				
Attendance at events/activities delivered in libraries linked to strategic priorities (i.e. Health and Wellbeing; Digital Inclusion and Children and Young People etc.)	1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9	number	Monthly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood				
	People, Place, Partnership										
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
8,000	8,000	10,000	10,000	8,000	8,000	10,000	10,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000

Service – Key Performance Indicators												
Measure Name				Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Percentage of branch transactions completed at self-service				2	Percentage	Monthly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Average	James Hazlewood		
				People								
Targets												
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	
75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	75%	

Service – Key Performance Indicators												
Measure Name				Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Customer satisfaction with service				1	Percentage	Yearly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Latest	James Hazlewood		
				People, Place								
Targets												
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	
											>67%	

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators												
1. Measure Name				Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Number of library issues (books, DVDs, CDs, e-loans)				1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9	number	Monthly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood		
				People								
Targets												
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	
250,000	250,000	250,000	270,000	270,000	270,000	250,000	250,000	200,000	220,000	220,000	250,000	

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators											
Measure Name			Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Digital Inclusion through libraries (number of searches via online reference resources)			1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9	number	Quarterly	Bigger is better	Bigger Green -5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood		
			People								
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
		180,000			180,000			180,000			180,000

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators											
Measure Name			Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Number of active borrowers (library members who have borrowed at least one item a year)			2, 3, 7, 8, 9	number	Monthly	Bigger is better	-10% Amber -15% Red	Latest	James Hazlewood		
			People								
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000	65,000

Strategic Plan - Key Performance Indicators											
Measure Name			Council/L&H Strategic Priority	Unit	Frequency	Type	Tolerances	YTD	Measure Updater		
Number of volunteers contributing to the Library service			3	number	Yearly	Bigger is better	-5% Amber -10% Red	Sum	James Hazlewood		
			People, Partnership								
Targets											
Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
											800

4. Horizon Scanning

The key opportunities and challenges facing Libraries in the next two – five years are:

Item	Challenge or opportunity?	Potential service resource impacts	Potential timescale
Rising population	Both - challenge in terms of available resources, suitability of current facilities; opportunity in terms of widening participation, meeting (future) needs	Current resource levels are pitched at current/historic population levels, and the reality is that the service cannot deliver more services to more people with significantly less resource	Now, to at least 5 years
Aging population	Both - challenge in terms of available resources; opportunity in terms of widening participation, meeting needs	Traditionally, older people tend to be relatively heavy users of libraries and hence an aging population will likely create greater needs/numbers, and pressure on targeted (such as Home Library Service) and universal offers	Now / ongoing - cannot predict anything other than further increases in relative and actual terms
Political change	Both - there is generally little prominence given to libraries at, in particular, central government level; and local elections could impact strategic support and direction	Hopefully, greater emphasis on the role of Libraries could bring funding from wider departments, beyond DCMS (such as Education, Environment/Rural Affairs, Health and Social Care, Levelling Up, Work and Pensions etc.), to deliver through libraries. However, this appears generally unlikely!	Within 2 years (general/local elections)
Sector Strategy	Opportunity - At time of writing we are still awaiting a new public libraries strategy (Baroness Sanderson)	Unknown at time of writing, however there has been a relative vacuum in this area in recent times, (with the last strategy effectively 'concluding' in June 2021 having never gained significant traction) and one would hope for aligned funding	TBC 2023, likely 3 to 5 years
Economy	Challenge - libraries are historically used more heavily in austere times. At the same time the economic climate/rising costs will impact on supply chain efficiencies, availability, and operating costs; and ultimately service sustainability	The service currently benefits from significant discounts from suppliers but with growing costs, these are likely to be squeezed and we will likely get less of our money as contracts are reviewed. Utility costs for the network will put increased pressure on operational budgets. Finally, general revenue budgets are as stretched as they can be, and diversifying income generation is struggling to keep track with budget pressures.	Next 3 to 4 years

5. RAID Log (Risks, Assumptions, Issues and Dependencies)

<p>Risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget: Service can't afford to run current network on the available financial resources – currently holding c.20% vacancies in key teams, regular emergency closures, no budget for staff holidays or sickness, no budget for outreach or marketing • Rising costs: Library books/resources, utilities (i.e. cost of running libraries), travel (i.e. delivery vans, Home Library Service) are all experiencing increasing costs • Demographic Change: Library Service unable to substantially respond to changes in demographics as a result of lack of resources, leading to deteriorating service or declining use/relevance to local communities • Recruitment and retention of staff: As with many public-sector organisations, attracting new staff and retaining high quality staffing is a growing issue • BIPC: Do not have sustainable funding for BIPC initiative past March 2024, which jeopardises the future of this innovative and award-winning service 	<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget will be maintained at a level sufficient to maintain current scope of operations • Staffing: Service will have a full complement of staff throughout the year • Demand for service will remain steady/increase at a manageable level • Suppliers: Key suppliers will remain solvent and providing a cost-effective and efficient service • Volunteer numbers will be maintained at current/sufficient level
<p>Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget/Income: As noted above, in Risks, the current budget is insufficient to sustain the present scope of network/offer. The service benefitted from a reduction in its income target in 2022/23, in recognition of previous unreasonable, rising targets (against the backdrop of falling income levels/potential). Service is exploring increasingly diverse and innovative ways of meeting the remaining challenging income target but this is not keeping track with pressures and rising costs • Lack of awareness and profile of services/offer among council, public and partners • 'One way' partnerships: Partners 'take advantage' of the service, or do not always fully consider its/library customer needs • Corporate support: The capacity and consistency of support from critical internal teams, such as HR and Property, is stretched and sometimes does not meet service requirements 	<p>Dependencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate support: Support from HR, Property, ICT, Finance is critical to enable the service and team to operate effectively • Volunteers: Libraries are relatively dependent on funding from Friends groups and volunteer support to maintain key functions • Suppliers: Libraries are reliant on a limited number of suppliers, in terms of stock and library management system and could not operate the basic service without these • IBC: Effective access to and support with IBC • ICT: Service is reliant on ICT hardware, software and network provision