

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

RECORD OF OFFICER EXECUTIVE DECISION

TITLE:*	Libraries Unlocked – Phase 3
Decision Taken By:	Mark Fitton – Strategic Director for Adults and Communities
Cabinet Member	Karen May, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
Decision Made*	Approval of Phase 3 roll out of Libraries Unlocked
Is this Report Exempt as per Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	No
Decision taken under the following delegation:	Decision delegated by Cabinet on 20 December 2019 to: authorise the relevant Strategic Director to take all appropriate action to implement the Libraries Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities in relation to strategic matters
Division(s) Affected	Redditch Borough, Tenbury Wells, Wythall, Hagley, Bewdley, Alvechurch
Date of Decision*	20 March 2025
Summary of Decision*	<p>A Library Strategy for Worcestershire was written in 2019/20 following formal public engagement, a Local Government Association Library Peer Challenge and the creation of a Library Needs Assessment.</p> <p>The Strategy, which sets out a medium-term vision for the service and a context for future service transformation, received Cabinet approval in December 2019 and included the implementation of an open library service delivery model aimed at securing the future of Worcestershire’s library network while providing opportunities to deliver efficiencies and meet the needs of Worcestershire residents</p> <p>Building on two early adopter Libraries Unlocked implementations at Droitwich and Stourport in June 2022, a further seven locations went live between February and August 2024 at Evesham, Pershore, Bromsgrove, Rubery, Kidderminster, St John’s, and Malvern Libraries.</p>

Following the successful Phase 2 implementation of Libraries Unlocked, a third implementation phase is proposed across remaining Worcestershire libraries except for libraries where return on investment (ROI) is over 5 years.

Subject to approval from the Hive Board, work will be undertaken to explore opportunities and implications of implementing Libraries Unlocked at The Hive. At the time of publication of this report the ROI is unknown at the Hive.

Libraries in scope of Phase 3

In scope: WCC freehold properties subject to pre-implementation surveys (ROI)	In scope: subject to lease and PFI contract negotiation (ROI)	Out of scope (ROI)
Redditch (1.58)	Bewdley (2.13)	Upton (5.81)
Tenbury (3.54)	Wythall (2.25)	Woodrow (6.59)
	Hagley (3.94)	Broadway (12.35)
	Alvechurch (2.44)	Catshill (8.86)
		Warndon (2.65)*

*Deferred to Phase 4 due to delays to Fairfield Centre building project

Delays to the Fairfield Centre building project have moved the implementation of Libraries Unlocked at Warndon Library out of scope of Phase 3.

The feasibility of progressing Libraries Unlocked at Wythall, Hagley and Alvechurch libraries remains subject to on-going negotiation with Woodrush High School, Hagley Parish Council and PFI funders.


There is a high risk that it will not be possible to complete negotiations on Libraries Unlocked satisfactorily at Wythall, Hagley and Alvechurch libraries, within the timeframe of the Phase 3 Libraries Unlocked implementation, if at all.


Implementation of Libraries Unlocked at Bewdley Library and Wythall Library will also be subject to agreement of new lease arrangements with landlords on acceptable terms (current ten year lease arrangements at both locations expire in 2026).

If Libraries Unlocked goes ahead at Redditch, Bewdley and Tenbury libraries, it will deliver **£65k** estimated net efficiencies and require **£132.3k** estimated capital investment. These figures rise to **£102.5k** and **£232.3k** respectively if it becomes possible to progress Libraries Unlocked at Wythall, Hagley and Alvechurch.

	<p>Where Libraries Unlocked implementation goes ahead the reduction in staffed opening hours will continue to align to relative library need, with higher need libraries seeing a lower reduction in staffed opening hours.</p> <p>Once the implementation of Phase 3 Libraries Unlocked is complete and negotiations have been completed with key stakeholders at other in-scope sites a review will be undertaken to ensure that the distribution of staff resource across the library network broadly aligns to relative library need. Where there are substantial exceptions to this broad principle, adjustments to opening hours or staffing models will be explored.</p>
<p>Reason(s) For Decision*</p>	<p>This third phase Libraries Unlocked implementation will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. increase library opening hours 2. improve the availability/accessibility of library services to a wider, more representative audience to optimise service participation and reach across Worcestershire 3. grow libraries as community assets by increasing use of library space by community partners 4. future-proof Worcestershire’s library network through a flexible, cost-efficient service delivery model delivery 5. deliver net library staff efficiencies of between £65k and £102.5k to meet 2025/26 efficiency targets (alongside £63k surplus savings from Phase 2)
<p>Alternative Options Considered and Rejected</p>	<p>Option 1 – Do nothing. This does not enable the necessary efficiency savings to be made. It also does not allow for Library opening hours to be extended or library access to be improved.</p> <p>Option 2 – Implement Libraries unlocked technology in all remaining Libraries. This option does not take into account return on investment in Libraries Unlocked at each location.</p> <p>Option 3 – Reduce opening hours. Whilst this option would enable efficiency savings to be made, it results in a reduction of the Library Offer, does not future proof Libraries and is not congruent with Worcestershire Library Strategy.</p>
<p>Summary of any financial implications</p>	<p>The roll out of Libraires unlocked Phase 3 could incur capital expenditure ranging between £37.3k - £267.3k dependent on which sites are progressed. Delivery of Phase 3 has been initially included within the 2025/26 Capital programme (pending formal decision) and forms part of the Council’s borrowing requirement. Decisions to do nothing or delays in implementing the project will affect in year financial efficiency savings of £135k which was approved by full council as part of the 2025/26.</p>
<p>Summary of any legal implications</p>	<p>The Council as a Library Authorities has a statutory duty under s.7 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. This decision is implementing an</p>

	<p>aspect of the Council's Library Strategy which sets out how the Council will continue to fulfil this duty.</p>
<p>Consultation process and results</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Equality duty Implications</p>	<p>A full Equality and Public Health Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of the recommendations.</p> <p>This identified potential negative impacts for age, disability, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion & beliefs, gender reassignment and sexual orientation.</p> <p>The potential negative impact relates to reduced access for unaccompanied under 15's and for people with a disability or people with prams and pushchairs who rely on a lift to reach upper or lower library floors. Potential negative impacts also relate to increased vulnerability of groups who are at higher risk of hate crimes because of their race, religion & beliefs, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the potential negative impact, the recommended course of action can be justified because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries Unlocked has seen very positive take-up at Phase 1 sites. Following launch in June 2022, 78% of Stourport Library's active customers and 63% of Droitwich Library's active customers are now active Libraries Unlocked customers • Core staffed library opening hours are retained throughout the week facilitating access as normal for all people with a protected characteristic and anyone preferring to visit the library when staff are present • Potential positive impacts have been identified for groups who are at higher risk of hate crimes because of their race, religion & beliefs, gender reassignment or sexual orientation who prefer to visit the library during quieter Libraries Unlocked opening hours • Survey feedback from Phase 1 and 2 Libraries Unlocked customers highlights the benefits of the service for people with a disability whose experience of visiting the library is improved during Libraries Unlocked opening hours as it provides a quieter environment <p>The following mitigating action has been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full coverage CCTV will be installed, which is monitored by Worcestershire County Council security during the following Libraries Unlocked opening hours: 5pm and 8pm Monday to Friday and all day Saturday • under 15's will be surveyed to identify their preferred times for visiting libraries unaccompanied, and staffed library opening

	<p>hours will be scheduled to align to those preferred visiting times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • library resources and facilities will be re-arranged to optimise their availability on the entrance level of the library • core staffed opening hours will be co-ordinated across libraries in the same cluster to optimise availability of staffed library opening hours across the library cluster • Libraries Unlocked membership will be refused to/removed from customers whose behaviour does not comply with library acceptable behaviour guidelines • Advice on safe library layouts will be sought from local Design Out Crime teams • Local emergency service personnel will be briefed on Libraries Unlocked and given access • Libraries Unlocked membership will not be granted to customers until they have completed a face to face Libraries Unlocked induction with library staff which details health & safety and behaviour requirements/protocols • A mandatory in-person, Libraries Unlocked induction will be required before Libraries Unlocked membership is granted to customers to ensure a good understanding of health & safety and behaviour protocols and of risks • A full Libraries Unlocked Risk Assessment will be completed for each location • A dedicated 24/7 emergency phone line will be installed at each location to contact local emergency services if required • Clear instructions for emergency procedures and clearly signposted evacuation routes and fire safety equipment will be provided • Security and fire alarm systems will link automatically to suppliers for a timely response  <p>EqualityPublicHealthF ull_Libraries Unlocked</p>
<p>Social Value Implications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries Unlocked enables people to access library services outside core working hours, and often offers a quieter environment. As a result it positively impacts social value in the local community, economy and individuals by enabling a wider, more representative population to benefit from services which support the following social value outcomes; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People enabled to fully participate in their community ○ Improved wellbeing through arts, culture and sport ○ Improved digital inclusion ○ Increased development employment opportunities and skills levels ○ Increased volunteering and community participation ○ Improved mental health ○ Learning and training for people to enter and progress in work

Any Conflict of Interest declared by a consulted Cabinet Member/ any dispensation granted*	N/A
Background documents*	
Signature	
Reference/Date Published	For use by Democratic Services only
Monitoring Officer Review needed	Yes/No (delete as appropriate)

*Legal Requirement

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