

**Transforming Warrington's
Public Libraries
Our Strategy for 2019-2022**

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Executive Summary

Mission statement

“Warrington libraries will make a meaningful, visible and measurable difference to the lives of people in Warrington; a place of enjoyment, reflection, calm, inclusion, safety, insight, inspiration, creativity and learning.”

We are immensely proud of our library service and the role Warrington took in establishing public lending libraries. At a time of significant socio-economic change Warrington took the bold step in 1891 to pass a Local Act allowing for the free lending of its library books, a year before the rest of country had this privilege through the passing of the Libraries Act of 1892. The campaign of the people of Warrington is often credited as helping to force the government’s hand to offer free lending books nationwide

We’re glad we did, because our libraries have had a significant impact on the lives of many people. Libraries are a trusted space, integrated into the local community and accessible to all. They support and facilitate education, skills development, empowerment, good health and wellbeing of individuals by providing a space for children and adults to learn and develop informally.

There has been a rapid advance of socio-economic and technological change over the last 20 years which has been unprecedented. It has reached into all aspects of our lives - the way we work, the way we relax, the way we research or seek information, how we access services and much more. With this change has come new possibilities, but it has also brought challenge:

- How do we ensure all our communities can keep up with the change and have equal opportunity and access to ever-evolving new technological possibilities?
- With an abundance of information available from a range of sources, how do people make sense of the information they want and need?
- In a fast paced world where can communities go to access calm and welcoming environments, designed to support lifelong learning, creativity and wellbeing.

Our local population is also changing – Warrington is growing, ageing and diversifying. By 2040 we expect Warrington’s population will have grown by 7.1% (from 2017, to a total of 227,300). The number of residents over 65 will have grown by 44.6% (from 2017, to a total 58,450)¹.

As a result, we recognise that our libraries also need to evolve. This new strategy is our first step in that direction. It brings together the ideas generated from stakeholders and community members in Warrington; drawing on best practice and guidance from across the UK and the wider world.

¹ Source: NOMIS population projections

With this in mind, our strategic aims are set out in section 3. In summary they include:

SA1 – Encourage enjoyment of learning, literature, creativity, culture, imagination and play.

SA2 - Provide children and young people with an engaging and relevant offer to support 'the best start in life'.

SA3 – Embrace technology and digital formats, supporting greater inclusivity in accessing new media.

SA4 – Support positive health and wellbeing.

SA5 – Enable access to up-to-date, accurate and trusted sources of information.

SA6 – Provide attractive, welcoming and inclusive community spaces – a safe and social space for all.

This strategy represents a journey that we are on. It will evolve and grow alongside the library service, its users and its stakeholders. We will monitor our success in a number of ways, adapting our approach when needed. Delivery of the strategy will be a team effort, with LiveWire, local users, Warrington Borough Council and our many key partners working together to achieve.

DRAFT

1. Introduction

“At the moment that we persuade a child, any child, to cross that threshold, that magic threshold into a library, we change their lives forever, for the better. It’s an enormous force for good.”

Barack Obama

Background

This strategy has been developed following a 2 year period of consultation, reflection on the existing library service and a growing ambition to modernise our library offer to make it fit for a changing society.

Public services have been through a significant and sustained period of austerity, which has seen funding reduce across all public services. Since 2010, Warrington Borough Council has delivered a budget reduction of £122m, equivalent to £1,318 per Warrington household.

Warrington’s libraries are managed by the Community Interest Company, LiveWire. In 2016, in response to the need to reduce public spending, LiveWire consulted on a proposal to reduce the number of libraries from eleven to nine and to introduce a wider reaching outreach provision. This would have seen closures at Padgate, Penketh, Lymm, Stockton Heath and Culcheth, but with new provision at Great Sankey, Bewsey and Dallam, and Broomfields.

The feedback from local people clearly demonstrated that the existing libraries are important to local communities. The plea was for LiveWire and Warrington Borough Council to work with local people to do all that we can to protect and modernise our local libraries.

In response a new Libraries Modernisation Working Group was established to develop a new set of proposals. This was chaired by the Council’s Chief Executive, and including representation from local library users, the Voluntary and Community Sector, LiveWire and the Council.

The proposals were to invest in the book fund and library buildings, to modernise the library offer and to develop plans to attract income and savings, with the intention to sustain libraries as community hubs. These were accepted by the Council, who committed £1.15m of capital investment and by LiveWire who committed to maintain the libraries budget at its current level for 3 years and increase the bookfund to £150,000 per year.

In order to deliver on the proposals a new Libraries Partnership Board was established, taking over the reins from the Working Group. New proposals for our libraries have been and are continuing to be developed. These reflect the needs of local communities, with a focus on income generation and alternative cost savings. Local people have been fully engaged throughout this process. Four library Working Groups have been involved in developing proposals to enhance the library offer. Alongside this, four Friends of Libraries groups are now established and a broader range of community activities are delivered by the commitment of these local volunteers.

About this strategy

In light of this progress, this strategy has been developed by the new Partnership Board and aims to provide a longer term direction of travel. It brings together the ideas generated from stakeholders and community members in Warrington; drawing on best practice and guidance from across the UK and the wider world.

Our mission statement draws on feedback from local users, who have explained why they believe libraries are important; evidencing the positive difference made to the lives of many people. We've heard individual stories from those who have felt scared, outcast or unfulfilled. We have also engaged with individuals who are illiterate or who do not have English as their first language; all of whom credit libraries with making the difference they needed.

However, library usage is reducing year on year - membership, book issues and footfall in library buildings has all declined. This isn't just a trend in Warrington, but across the country.

We want more people to benefit from the opportunities that libraries offer. That means we need to refresh our library offer to make sure we are relevant in the modern world. For our library service provide a greater or different offer, but with less public funding from Government, will be a big challenge. This strategy does not aim to make a radical transformation overnight. Conversely, it envisages a gradual evolution towards library hubs, each of which maintains a core library offer whilst also offering specialisms related to the Mission Statement and our population needs.

Therefore, this will be an evolving document as opportunities become clearer and plans widen further. The purpose is to set the strategic direction for progress, outlining the key elements that are important to our users and stakeholders. This will be enabled by action plans led by key parties such as LiveWire, Friends of Groups and the Partnership Board.

2. About our libraries

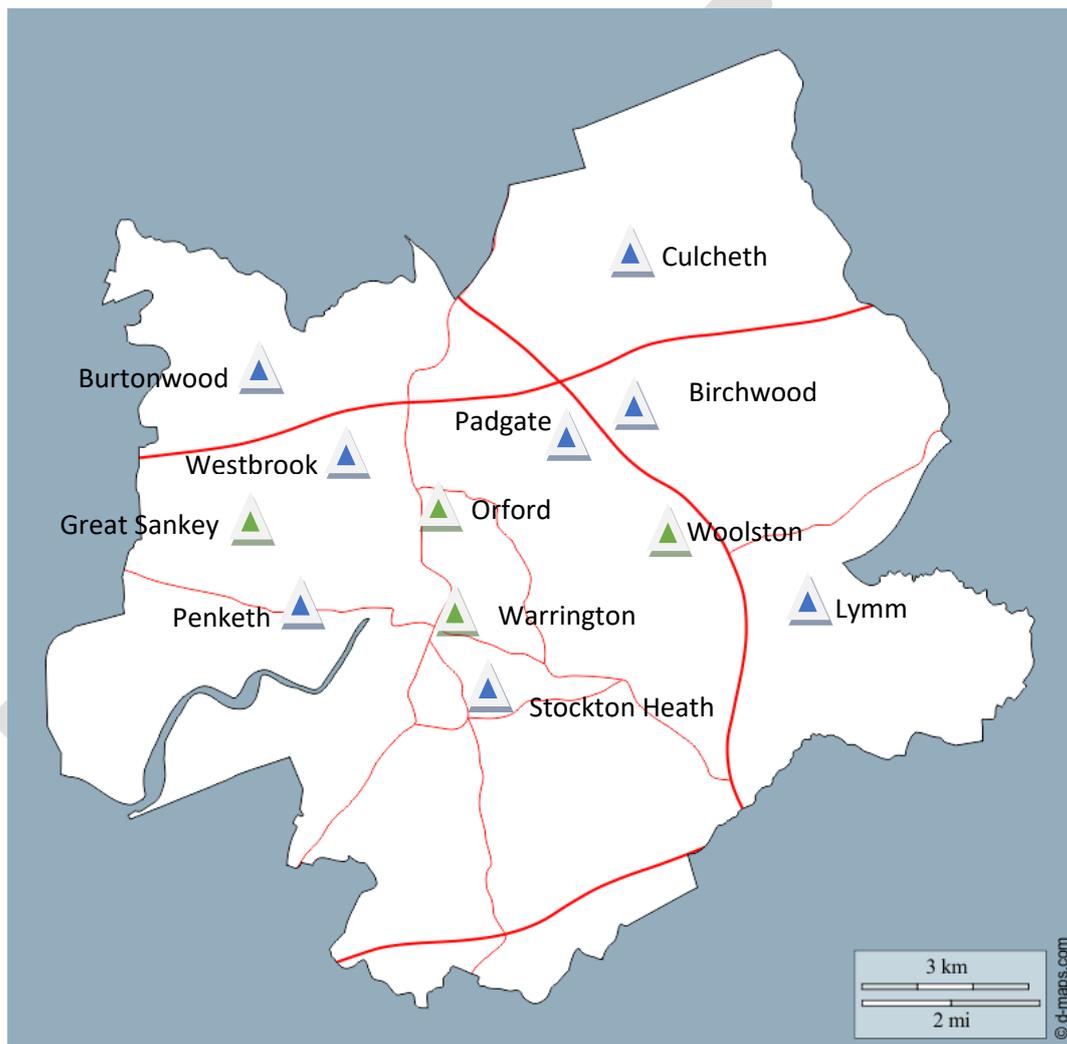
Where they are:



Hub libraries – Co-located or integrated libraries that offer the full library service alongside other wellbeing services, such as leisure, health or culture.



Community libraries – Neighbourhood based spaces in which the core offer is the library service, but which might also hold other services such as a Post Office, or sub-let some space to other local users such as Parish Councils.



About our current offer:

Warrington's Public Libraries are managed by LiveWire Warrington. LiveWire's offer ensures everyone has access to reading, information and technology by providing a network of libraries across the town which includes:

- a main town centre library
- libraries fully integrated with leisure, lifestyles and other services delivered in 'hub' buildings
- community libraries
- outreach library services

The core library service offer includes access to:

- Book loans for adults, children and teenagers
- Specialist Book collections to support health and wellbeing, e.g. Reading Well which includes collections such as Books on Prescription covering topics including dementia, mental health and other long-term conditions.
- An e-books service
- Computers and the Internet; including free WIFI
- Online reference resources 24/7
- A Home Library and Read to Me service for those unable to visit a library in person
- Activity programmes for adults, children and teenagers
- Initiatives to build confidence and self-esteem to improve adult literacy, e.g. Quick Reads are short, exciting stories ideal for adults who are new to reading or who find reading difficult
- Support for local reading groups
- Volunteering opportunities
- A request service for reading materials stocked at other libraries; supported by a nationwide inter-library loan service which includes the provision for items to be ordered online or in person and delivered to a LiveWire library of the borrower's choice
- Support, guidance and materials in different formats for those who have difficulty reading, or for whom English is not their first language

In addition, library staff aim to establish, develop and nurture lasting partnerships across the Borough to improve the quality of services, particularly for those whose needs might otherwise be neglected.

This includes working in collaboration with education providers, learning organisations, arts, community and health partners, authors and poets and alongside booksellers, publishers and the media.

This enables LiveWire to deliver a robust series of literacy and reading programmes and design events and activities tailored to the specific interest and needs of the communities they serve, e.g. Rugby Reading Champions, Reading Ahead, Read to Relax and Fit, Fed and Read.

The aim is to continue to build on the existing offer by seeking out new opportunities to build confidence in reading, develop citizenship skills and inspire community engagement.

The difference we make – case studies.

A Young Volunteer who began her journey in Year 7 and is now in her first year of a Community Development and Youth Work degree and has chosen to return to Padgate Library on placement from university because it was her inspiration for her future career...

“I am not from a privileged background and have sometimes struggled with school work. I will always credit the confidence I have gained in being a young volunteer with Livewire libraries to lead me on to aim higher and achieve my goals in life. It gave me so many opportunities and new skills and will continue to help when I face new challenges. I have acquired many new skills through my work in the library. My confidence has grown and my reading widened. ”

Member of the Read to Relax group who joined soon after being diagnosed with Fibromyalgia...

“After that first session the group soon became the highlight of my week... The group is like a family. I really believe it has triggered my recovery ... It saved my life.”

A borrower who suffers from agoraphobia...

“I could see what it was doing to my husband, my children and I had to think of something and I thought of the library. The library was my doorway out of hell - because it was hell ... It helped my children enjoy a trip out with me. When you have children you don't want them to see you crumple. You don't want to pass the panic on to them. ... I've joined poetry groups and crochet groups... I am nearing sixty now and I have days when I cannot do stuff but I can do the library... Agoraphobia isn't the end of the world I thought it would be. ... Libraries save lives.”

A young man who moved to the UK from Yemen aged 14 took part in Reading Ahead (then called the Six Book Challenge) to support his study for his English GCSE. He was named Young Adult Learner of the Year by NIACE in 2015 and is now studying for a PhD...

“Being able to read with confidence felt like the difference between being blind and then being able to see.”

Reader who has books delivered by a library volunteer...

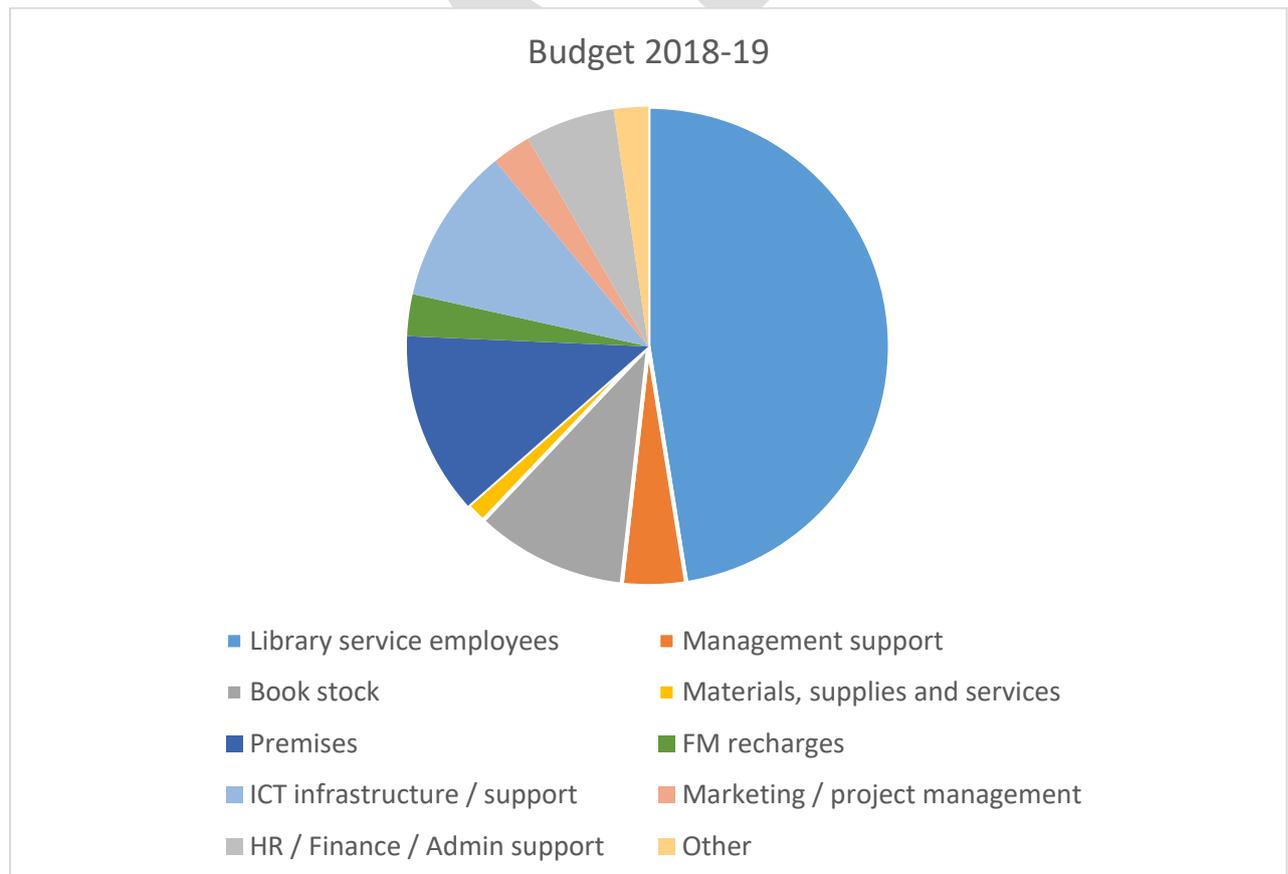
“Being deaf it is so important to be able to read a good book.”

Key facts about Warrington Library Service in 2017-18 (infographic)

- **45** members of staff (26.8 full time equivalent)
- **26, 854** Members – **12.8%** of the Warrington population
- **599,276** physical visits
- **567,611** Book issues
- **5,438** EBook downloads by **482** customers
- **70,476** Website visits
- Free public Wi-Fi in every static library
- £67,441 additional income generated (not management fee)
- Open for over **23,350** hours
- **3,089** activities held in libraries

Financial considerations:

The total library budget for 2018-19 was £1.6 million. A breakdown of how the money is spent is set out below:



3. What we intend to do

Mission statement

“Warrington libraries will make a meaningful, visible and measurable difference to the lives of people in Warrington; a place of enjoyment, reflection, calm, inclusion, safety, insight, inspiration, creativity and learning.”

We have deliberately chosen an ambitious and wide ranging mission statement. Our statement draws directly on the feedback we received from library users, stakeholders and staff about the difference libraries make to their lives and the lives of our residents.

To help us achieve our mission we have six strategic aims. Our strategic aims capture the ethos and outcomes we want to achieve.

Strategic aims

Our public library service will...

SA1 – Encourage enjoyment of learning, literature, creativity, culture, imagination and play.

We will work with partners to deliver a holistic, vibrant and creative programme of events and activities for service users of all ages.

We will focus our activities on supporting our mission statement, particularly targeting those people in our communities who need an extra helping hand.

Our expert libraries staff will use their experience, knowledge and skills to develop a varied programme focused on delivering our strategic aims.

Activities and opportunities in each of our libraries will be easily accessible, created in formats that are easy to understand and well-advertised.

We will continue to maintain a local collection of accessible reading materials and information in physical or digital formats to support those with reduced vision as part of our commitment to Libraries Connected, The Six Steps.

SA2 - Provide children and young people with an engaging and relevant offer to support ‘the best start in life’.

We will ensure there is inclusive and diverse fiction and non-fiction print and digital resources and targeted activities available for children and young people.

We will engage with children, young people and families, seeking their ideas and involvement in strengthening the library offer.

SA3 – Embrace technology and digital formats, supporting greater inclusivity in accessing new media.

We will continue to provide free access to Wi-Fi and online information.

We will dedicate some of our events and activities programme to enabling access to technology and digital platforms, hosting events such as Coding Clubs, and liaising with partners seeking their expertise and ideas.

We will improve our online information about the library offer and continue to offer online access to a range of services and information.

We will ensure a robust ICT infrastructure is in place to support technological advancements, enabling us to work with partners to develop digital programmes and new media opportunities.

SA4 – Support positive health and wellbeing.

We will provide a range of services that include creative activities and volunteering opportunities to help connect people.

We will continue to offer key services such as Reading Well, and a home library and Read to Me service.

We will dedicate some of our events and activities programme to initiatives that build confidence and self-esteem, encourage group activities to help prevent loneliness, and provide a space that encourages positive mental wellbeing.

SA5 – Enable access to up-to-date, accurate and trusted sources of information.

We will support people to access quality information and online services in key areas such as careers, health, personal finance and welfare benefits.

We will work with partners and key organisations to ensure we are signposting or supporting access to accurate, up-to-date and relevant information.

We will review, and improve where required, access to sources to information particularly focused on supporting those with physical and impairments or health conditions, or those people who have limitations in accessing or processing information.

SA6 – Provide attractive, welcoming and inclusive community spaces – a safe and social space for all.

Engagement with users and stakeholders will be an ever present way of working, with clear pathways for feedback, consultation and involvement in decision making, focused on providing welcoming and inclusive community hubs.

Friends of library groups and library volunteers will be actively encouraged and their unique offer to the service celebrated and well managed.

We will continue to improve accessibility for people with physical impairments or limiting health conditions.

We will review opening times, considering those members of the community who currently struggle to access libraries during existing core hours.

We will develop and maintain a sustainability and investment plan, focused on:

- maximising investment into library buildings,
- new programmes and opportunities through external funding,
- income opportunities focused on sustainability, and
- reducing costs that do not undermine the delivery of our strategic aims.

4. What will success look like?

The delivery of this Strategy will be overseen by the Warrington Libraries Partnership Board.

Whilst we will continue to monitor key indicators, book issues should not be the only demonstration of success. The Warrington Libraries Partnership Board will also monitor the following objectives or project achievements.

We will have:

- **Completed a programme of investment in library buildings and book stock by 2020.**

Each of our libraries is developing an improvement plan based on their own individual needs. Whilst some libraries such as Woolston, require minimal intervention, others are developing further reaching business plans. Ideas include developing new partnerships with local groups or organisations such as parish councils, business and community provision, food and drink, culture and arts offers, dementia friendly opportunities and much more. Within three years all of these opportunities will have been fully developed, with required investment undertaken.

- **Where possible, realised opportunities for income and / or savings to increase sustainability of the library service.**

As above our investment plan will have been completed, which will have allowed us to make demonstrable and sustainable savings and income generation.

- **A vision and programme of activities for each library – personalised to reflect the local community and specialisms of staff.**

This will be accessible both online and at each library in an easy read format. It will be kept up-to-date and planned in advance to allow for effective marketing.

There will be a recognised and regular marketing of events and activities, and the general offer that Warrington's libraries provide, focused on reaching out to people who currently do not use the libraries.

- **Maintained or increased library usage, measured through key performance indicators.**

Our key performance indicators will include:

- Book loans
 - E-book issues
 - Library visits
 - Attendance at events and activities
 - Library memberships
 - People network PC usage
- **An ongoing engagement process to monitor the difference libraries makes to people's lives and to generate ideas and opportunities for activities and events.**

Library staff will encourage users to feedback on their experience and will record feedback regularly.

There will be a variety of ways in which users can feedback, including at sites and online.

LiveWire and Friends of Libraries groups will continue to work positively together to develop user-led ideas and activities.

There will be a particular focus on capturing feedback from any new visitors or members.

This feedback will form a key part of an annual report on the success of the libraries offer throughout the year.

- **Secure relationship with partners, focused on adding value to the library offer.**

New partnership opportunities will have been identified and new activities or events delivered in library locations either by or with partners. This could include free or chargeable events or alternative services.

- **Reviewed accessibility to libraries, and where appropriate made improvements. This might also include consideration of opening times, or online information about library facilities.**

A review will include consultation with key stakeholders, analysis of data and consideration of best practice in other areas.