

Transforming Warrington's Public Libraries Our strategy for 2023-26

Services

Digibar

Neighbourhoods
Community
Room 1

Neighbourhoods
Community
Room 1



Bewsey and Dallam Hub library



Silver Foxes group at Burtonwood Library



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Foreword

When we first launched this strategy in 2019, we reflected on the pride we felt in 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 a new Public Libraries Act in 1892.

We reflected on the rapid advance of socio-economic and technological change over the last 20 years, which 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. We acknowledged the change that was yet to come, with a growing, ageing and diversifying population and the evolution our library service needed to undergo to reflect our changing communities.

None of us, however, were prepared for the significant societal change and challenge we were about to undergo with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, we played our part to slow the spread of the disease and temporarily closed our library buildings. Section 4 provides more information on our response. But it is worth highlighting here the creative methods put in place by a small cohort of staff who continued to work over the COVID-19 closure period to ensure that residents continued to have access to library resources; through our digital book collections, a new order & collect service, our online study resources and series of online activities for residents to access from home.

The Home Library Service continued as a befriending service with the Library Team regularly contacting the services' 120 clients and accompanying volunteers, all of whom fell into one of the government's vulnerable categories, to identify if any of them require any support or assistance.

In 2022 we're now settling back in to normality as all services, businesses, community spaces and transport are back open with COVID restrictions removed. But there is undoubtedly a lasting impact and behavioural change on a societal level due to COVID-19, from working patterns to travel choices to shopping choices, and for some of our more health vulnerable members of society their willingness to mix with other people.

On top of this we have also faced the UK exit from the EU, and more recently the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the most significant conflict in Europe since WW2. Together all of these issues are impacting on people's day to day lives, with cost of living and access to goods probably being the most obvious issues.

The library service, and more broadly LiveWire CIC and Warrington Borough Council, are far from immune from these challenges. At the time of writing, energy costs and inflation are increasing costs significantly for everyone, including the library service.

We find ourselves facing an uphill battle: to recover the user numbers we lost over the COVID-19 closure period; and to maintain our library service at a time of significantly increasing costs.

We've taken big strides over the last 3 years to improve our library buildings, to work more openly and inclusively with local residents, communities and partners, and to deliver a more varied and inclusive libraries activity and outreach programme. Prior to COVID our user numbers were still falling, but at a slower rate. We were making positive progress but the challenge we now face is unprecedented and this strategy, whilst still retaining an ambitious mission and vision, recognises the need to think differently and work differently in order to achieve our vision.

As we did in 2019, we thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy, the ongoing level of support for our library service continues to inspire. Delivery of the strategy will be a team effort. LiveWire, local users, Warrington Borough Council and our many key partners will work together to achieve our aims. It's going to be tough, but together we will continue to deliver a library service to be proud of.



Mulan Culture Community group at Stockton Heath Library



Warrington Central children's library

CLIPPER

1. Introduction

“Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities.”

R. David Lankes

This strategy is a refresh of our 2019-2022 strategy, which is available via the Council's website at warrington.gov.uk/libraries

Public services continue to face much reduced allocation of funding from Government. Warrington Borough Council have made around £173 million in savings since 2010 – and by 2023 we have to save at least another £18 million.

Nevertheless, Warrington's libraries, which are contracted to LiveWire CIC to manage, have been retained with an increase in library provision following the opening of GT Sankey Neighbourhood Hub and the Bewsey and Dallam Community Hub. Overall opening hours across the Borough have increased by 28.5 hours per week. We've invested £750,000 of capital funding in our library buildings and £150,000 into our library stock. By the end of our investment period we will have invested over £1m into our library buildings.

We now have 4 active Friends of Library groups in Stockton Heath, Culcheth, Penketh and Padgate. Our volunteer network is incredibly important to delivering a range of activities and in acting as champions for our libraries – working as equal partners in building our library communities.

2. About our libraries

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

What will I find in Warrington's libraries?

- Book to borrow 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-book and e-audio service.
- A request service for reading materials stocked at other libraries; supported by a nationwide inter-library loan service.
- Computers and the Internet; including free WIFI.
- [Online Reference resources](#) accessible at any time, including Pressreader and Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- A Home Library and Read to Me service for those unable to visit a library in person.
- Local history information

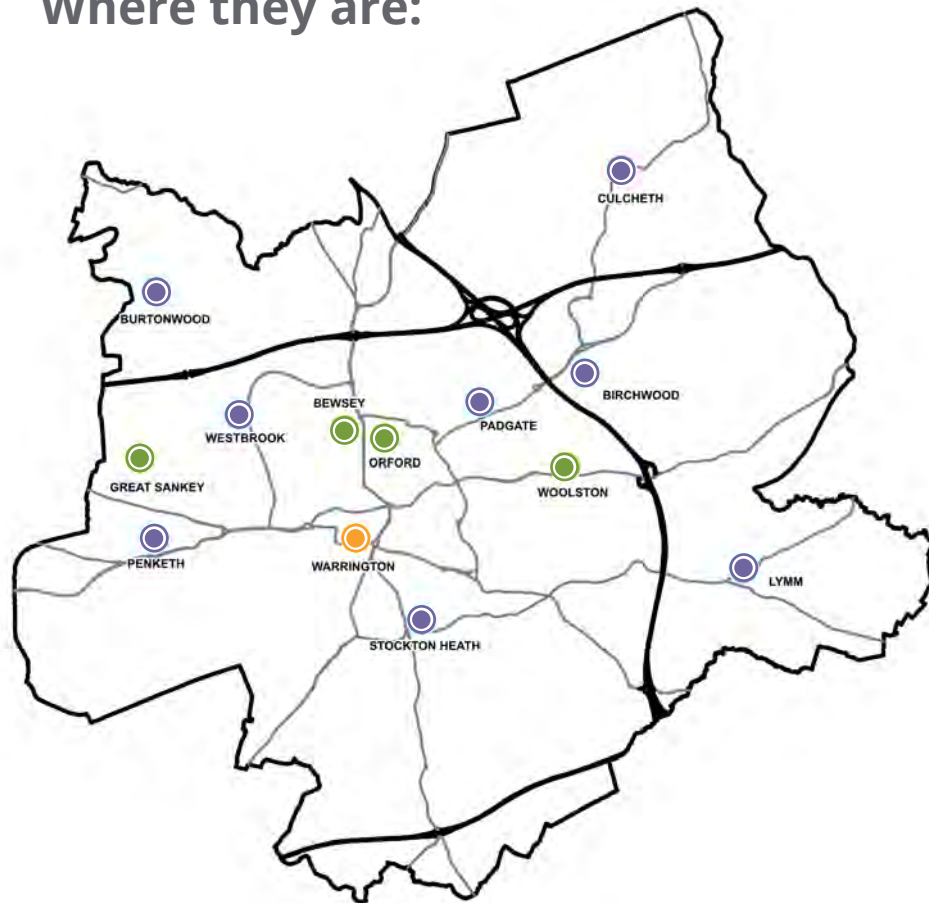
- Initiatives to improve adult literacy, e.g. Quick Reads are short, exciting stories ideal for adults who are new to reading or who find reading difficult.
- Support, guidance and materials in different formats for those who have difficulty reading.
- Books in other languages.
- Support for local reading groups.
- Volunteering opportunities.
- Activity programmes for adults, children and young adults.

Literacy and reading programmes, events and activities tailored to the specific interests and needs of the communities they serve, e.g. [Summer Reading Challenge](#), [BookTrust Storytime](#), Read to Relax and Holiday Activities Food programme (HAF).

- These are supported by collaborations with education providers, learning organisations, arts, community and health partners, authors and poets and alongside booksellers, publishers and the media.



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.
-  **Warrington Central Library** – town centre library which hosts our main reference resource, archives and other specialist and community provision.



Christmas display at Golden Square pop-up library



Library at Great Sankey Neighbourhood Hub

The difference Warrington's libraries make - personal stories

Just wanted to say a big thank you - I couldn't stop smiling after Mum's phone call. As the weather worsens and Mum has to spend more and more time indoors it starts to drive her 'dolally' (her word) because she needs things to keep her busy. This happens every year, but this will be so much worse and was a real concern to us both. Having a safely procured supply of decent reading material (and another person to connect with) is a massive help. I'm so very grateful for all your time and thoughtfulness.

Mum's quite used to being asked to show off her garden! You taking the time to do something like that is such a great way to build a connection and dispel any awkwardness, I'm sure. That's where your approach really shines through....

(Feedback from a relative of a Home Library Service client during COVID-19 pandemic)



Read to Relax group at Lymm Library



Two of our youngest members

Reading Friends is a lifeline and something to look forward to, after what could be a long isolated week. It is a breath of fresh air and a reason to look forward to coming and socialising. The library itself offers a wonder of reading opportunities to lift the spirits.

Reading Friends is an essential part of my life. I am totally dependent on meeting people here and though I am not absolutely housebound, I rely on this group for support. The library staff who run this group are excellent in allowing time if someone has a problem - they give time occasionally for "chat". The library itself is always very welcoming - a relaxing place.

Feedback from Reading Friends members

Just a short thank you note to the LiveWire team for the Order and Collect Service you are providing during these dark days of Covid. With all Warrington libraries closed, the online service is a real lifesaver, particularly for the over 70s like myself who rely more than most on a good read to help cope with lockdown. Keep up the good work.

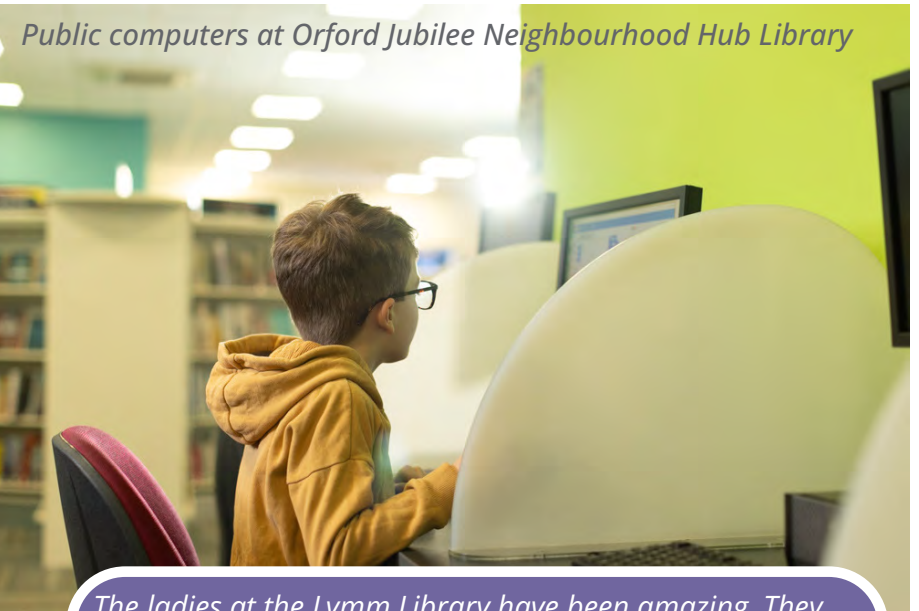
(Order and Collect Client)

LGBTQ+ promotion at Lymm Library



Thank you for letting me volunteer this year- I really enjoyed helping children with their reading and with the craft activities and I think it will be good for my cv.

(Young volunteer in the Summer Reading Challenge volunteer programme)



Public computers at Orford Jubilee Neighbourhood Hub Library

The ladies at the Lymm Library have been amazing. They are so helpful with helping me sort our printing & internet. We have just arrived in the UK from South Africa and if it wasn't for them I would have been very stuck, sorting out all the forms and applications. My 2 children love coming to the library and ask to come on the days they are open. It's a great outing while we are waiting for them to be placed at school. We will continue to come after school too.

(Library user, Lymm library)

Thank you for providing an enjoyable and educational experience. I learned lots, and I thoroughly liked ever single bit of it.

(Participant on Halloween Coding Event at Golden Square Pop Up library)

Key facts about Warrington Public Library Service in 2019-20

2019 figures are being used as the last true figures for comparison

499,824
book issues



7,500
ebook & audio
downloads



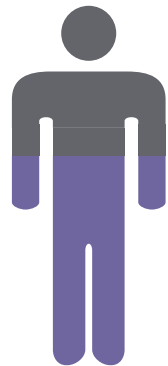
5,676
talking books issued



25,784
registered library

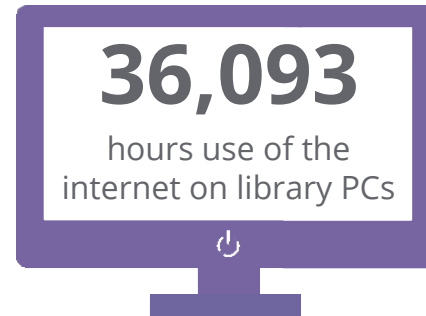


↑
549,342
physical visits to
libraries



58
members of staff

} 32.6
full time
equivalent



36,093
hours use of the
internet on library PCs



3,869
activities held
in libraries



Library
buildings open
for over
23,489
hours



Over **£1.5m**
spent on
delivering the
library service

3. What we intend to do

Our mission:

“Warrington libraries are valued community spaces that make a positive difference to the lives of the people that use them. They are welcoming spaces for all and offer the opportunity for reading, learning, enjoyment, reflection, calm, safety, creativity, insight and inspiration.”

Our ambition is for everyone in Warrington to:

- choose to use libraries because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so;
- know what services are on offer in our libraries and how to make the most of what's available;
- be introduced to new ideas, opportunities, tools and skills through their engagement with libraries;
- supported to access trusted information and guidance from libraries that will help them to make informed choices and confidently take part in and enjoy the town, its heritage, culture and its employment opportunities.

Outcomes

We want our library services to be delivered in a way that creates a clear social return on our investment and ensures their contribution to the following outcomes for the people and

communities of Warrington:

- Cultural and creative enrichment;
- Increased reading literacy and learning;
- Improved digital access and literacy;
- Helping everyone achieve their full potential and supporting social mobility for local residents;
- Healthier and happier lives;
- Greater prosperity by supporting small businesses and economic growth;
- Stronger and more resilient communities.
- Social connectivity and combating loneliness
- Environmental sustainability

Design Principles

- In developing our future library services we will use the following design principles so that they:
- Meet legal requirements;
- Are shaped by local needs;
- Focus on public benefit and deliver a high quality user experience;
- Make decisions informed by evidence;
- Support the delivery of a consistent England-wide core library service offer;
- Promote partnership working, innovation and enterprise;
- Involve local people and communities

We will ensure that the values of transparency, sustainability, inclusiveness and free universal access run through all of our service developments and associated decision making.

We will actively consider different models for service delivery; encourage the diversification of funding to support sustainability of our library services and support the need for an appropriately trained and qualified workforce, working with community volunteers where appropriate.



Library at Orford Jubilee Neighbourhood Hub

Our strategic aims

Our public library service will...



Strategic Aim 1:

Encourage and promote enjoyment of reading, learning, creativity, culture, imagination and play.

We will provide a range of resources to help people achieve their goals, including maintaining a varied and regularly refreshed book stock.

We will work with partners to deliver a holistic, vibrant, 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.

We will seek opportunities to work with partners to offer outreach provision to help those communities who struggle to get to library buildings, for example people living in care homes.

Our expert library staff will use their experience, knowledge and skills to develop a varied programme focused on delivering our strategic aims. They will be supported to develop new ideas, opportunities and skills.

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 Visual and Print Impaired People's Promise](#).



Strategic Aim 2:

Provide children and young people with an engaging and relevant offer to help them fulfil their full potential.

We will celebrate the unique and important offer libraries can make towards encouraging a love of reading from a young age, and the positive difference this can make towards learning.

We will ensure there is inclusive, 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.



Choosing books at Orford Jubilee Neighbourhood Hub Library



Strategic Aim 3:

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, keeping safe online and liaising with partners seeking their expertise and ideas.

We will improve our online information about the library service 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, such as augmented and virtual reality, enabling us to work with partners to develop digital programmes and new media opportunities.

Libraries will reflect the move towards digital and technical services brought about by COVID-19. Digital spaces will be enhanced to attract young people to use the libraries.

Two elements to digital spaces are physical and virtual:

- Physical digital spaces has been developing gradually over the last few years with the introduction of the Digital and Health post and an implementation of a programme of digital activities, the continuation of which is only achievable through the training of frontline staff. This has now been completed and our sites are now working to deliver their own digital sessions.

- Virtual digital spaces are through external partnerships which are developing outside of the library buildings with key community organisations. This started with The Youth Zone to engage groups in digital activities. This has helped the service to work towards encouraging people to gain the confidence to visit library sites, to continue their digital journey. The virtual spaces focus on the expansion of the library service social media presence, continuous review of all online resources and the development of engaging users in the virtual activity programme.



Strategic Aim 4:

Support positive physical and mental 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 [Books on Prescription](#), [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. We will also support the wider ambitions of the town's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

We will offer support and provide opportunities for people who are living with economic challenges which impacts on their wellbeing



Strategic Aim 5:

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 of information – including focusing on supporting those with physical impairments or health conditions, or those people who have limitations in accessing or processing information.



Strategic Aim 6:

Provide attractive, welcoming, inclusive and environmentally sustainable 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 libraries' 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 on a regular basis considering patterns of use and ensuring a wide range of access across the Borough.

We will successfully market the services and events that are available within libraries.

99% of our population will live within 2.5 miles of a library location. We will develop and maintain a sustainability and investment plan, focused on:

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

Libraries by their very nature are "green" in that our resources are loaned and shared by the larger community and unwanted books are sold on rather than disposed of.

- We will employ environmental practices when designing and refurbishing our buildings to reduce the environmental impact of day-to-day operations and minimise consumption of resources.
- We will promote information about environmental issues, making information more accessible for residents.
- We will look to adopt technological solutions to reduce the library's environmental Carbon footprint. For example introducing PressReader, will allow library users access to over 8,000 newspapers and magazines, without having to hold paper copies in our sites.



Library Services

Vending

Pool Viewing

Bewsey and Dallam Hub Library

4. Challenges from the pandemic

Warrington's public libraries, a safe haven and valuable resource for communities, have not been immune from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, Warrington's libraries closed their doors, temporarily suspending their in-person services from 17th March 2020 and the majority of our library staff were furloughed. During the pandemic some of our furloughed library staff volunteered to assist the social care teams and vaccine centres in the town. By repurposing themselves these staff played a vital role in supporting the town's approach to tackling COVID-19.

Though our libraries were closed to the public, the small cohort of staff who were not furloughed used creative methods to ensure that residents continued to have access to library resources; specifically we increased our digital book collections, introduced an order & collect service, removed barriers to remotely access our online study resources and hosted a series of online activities for residents to access from home. The Home Library Service continued as a befriending service with the Library Team regularly contacting the service's 120 clients and accompanying volunteers, all of whom fall into one of the governments vulnerable categories, to identify if any of them require any support or assistance. Then, where necessary, signposting into the relevant support services.

The efforts provided by our small library team yielded positive results for our libraries, as 1,938 residents signed to be members to access our online collections resulting in loans of our e-collections increasing by 196% compared to 2019/20; 81 residents regularly accessed the Order and Collect service;

we launched our own [Yourlivewire Libraries Facebook page](#) which attracted 450 followers and delivered 15 online events engaging 370 residents. Online events included:

- Code club activities.
- Story and rhyme time sessions.
- Virtual reading group.
- Quizzes.
- Reading for Wellbeing including [Mood-Boosting Books](#) and daily online reading sessions
- Promoting and signposting to trusted mental health & wellbeing sites and resources.
- Hosted the delivery of short 10 minute performances for adults in response to lockdown measures to show that 'stories' are not just for children.
- Men's health month in addition to posts raising awareness of issues relating to men's health a slideshow was developed in partnership with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Despite the positive impact our libraries had on those residents who engaged with them, and the contribution staff made in response to COVID-19 there continued to be gaps in how library staff were able to engage and support Warrington's communities during lockdown. These include:

- The limitations of digital delivery including a lack of skills and knowledge amongst staff when embracing the digital world, with a lot of staff "learning as they go".
- Digital exclusion as not all residents had access to equipment that would support them to access our digital platform.
- Ability to provide a quality interaction with residents via the online programme.
- Consistency, visibility and reach of our online activities.

Looking ahead / Outcomes from the pandemic

It is clear that our libraries have risen to the challenges presented by COVID-19 and are continuing to do so. This is evident in the 60% recovery rate in physical visits to our libraries and the 80% recovery in issue figures at the close of 2021/22, when compared with 2019/20.

Many library services are facing increasing financial challenges following COVID-19. Despite this our library service continues to demonstrate and build upon the role we play in our community. We strengthen communities by tackling social isolation and support residents to find employment. We offer educational platforms for informal and formal learning and digital inclusion. We support positive physical and mental health and wellbeing and are a gateway to knowledge and information.

We offer a wealth of written and digital literature and opportunities for cultural engagement, and support equality, diversity and inclusion.

Now is the time to be ambitious and to try new initiatives in order to better engage Warrington residents in our services. This will be achieved through:

- Marketing our library services in different ways
- Continuing with investment in our buildings as part of the library modernisation plan.
- Delivering a bi-annual Litfest.
- Delivering a quarterly activity programme where events will be accessible either digitally or in library and community settings.
- Experimenting with different offers to support diversity and encourage dialogue, for example Drag Queen storytime.

- Exploring opportunities to expand our digital offer.
- Working with existing partners and developing links with other organisations to further the library offer.
- Ensuring that we work within the framework of the Libraries Connected Universal Offers which underpin the strategic aims set out within this strategy.



Padgate Library re-opening after refurbishment on the 28 June 2021



Children's books in Woolston Neighbourhood Hub Library

5. What will success look like?

The delivery of this Strategy will be overseen by Warrington Borough Council and LiveWire Warrington in partnership with the Warrington Libraries Partnership Board. The Board will monitor the following objectives or project achievements.

We will have:

- **Completed a programme of investment in library buildings by 2023.**

All of the libraries identified as requiring investment will have completed improvement projects.

- **Realised opportunities for income and / or savings to maintain a high quality borough-wide library service.**

We will have looked again at innovative ways to continue to deliver library services in a sustainable way, within the context of significantly increased costs and to maximise the use of our library buildings. We will work together with local communities to do this.

- **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 to read format. It will be kept up-to-date and planned in advance to allow for effective marketing.

There will be recognised and regular marketing of events and activities, promoting the inclusive 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 issues
- E-book and audio book issues
- Specialist health book issues
- Library visits
- Number of and attendance at events and activities
- Community usage of libraries (e.g. local groups, schools, etc.)
- Library memberships, including number of first time members and the demographic mix of library users.
- People's Network PC usage
- Library outreach

- **Strengthened our volunteer programme, including our relationship with Friends of Library groups.**

The role of volunteers within the library service will be clearly set out with a Volunteer Management programme in place.

Friends of Library groups will have regular contact with Library Managers from LiveWire CIC and a partnership approach to activities and events will be in place.

- **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 in person and online.

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

LiveWire will undertake an annual user satisfaction survey, focused on measuring the difference libraries have made in delivering the mission statement and strategic aims.

Case studies will be developed of individual users to get a qualitative understanding of the benefit of libraries.

Feedback will form a key part of an annual report to demonstrate the success of the libraries offer. This will also provide key facts and figures about our libraries, including staff, opening hours and outline budget as set out in section 2 of this strategy.

- **Delivered an environmental sustainability plan**

The environmental benefits of borrowing from libraries will be clearly communicated and further environmental improvements to our service will have been made.

- **Secured relationships 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 improvements made. This might also include consideration of opening times, number of library buildings or online access to library facilities.**

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

- **Make a positive contribution to community engagement and cohesiveness. Provide opportunities for social mobility and personal independence.**

Find out more about Warrington's libraries and the work of the Libraries Partnership Board at:
livewirewarrington.co.uk/library
warrington.gov.uk/libraries



The last 100 books returning from Golden Square pop-up back to Central Library