

REPORT TO: CORPORATE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT and GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 8 DECEMBER 2020

REPORT OF: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (CORPORATE AND SUPPORT SERVICES) AND DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT TITLE: LIBRARY SERVICE RESTORATION PHASE 2 AND ONE STOCKPORT HUB

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report presents an update on plans for the restoration of Library Services whilst we continue to live with Covid-19, including an update on plans for One Stockport Hub.
- 1.2 The approach is based on the guiding principles as set out in this report and considers the impacts on customer journey; costs, resources needed and the level of risk.
- 1.3 CRMG is asked to note the council’s current position, work undertaken and the next steps for the restoration of further library buildings

2. Service Restoration – Phase 1 (Current Position)

- 2.1 Services at seven library buildings have been restored within Stockport. These are Hazel Grove, Heaton, Marple, Reddish, Bramhall, Brinnington, Cheadle. All these library buildings have been restored with the same opening days as they had pre-covid.
- 2.2 Key services restored are order and collect book borrowing and digital access. Open plus is unavailable during government social distancing guidelines. It should be noted that no other Library Service in the UK has reinstated the use of Open Plus at this time.
- 2.3 Figure 1 below shows the spread of service restoration across Stockport to date

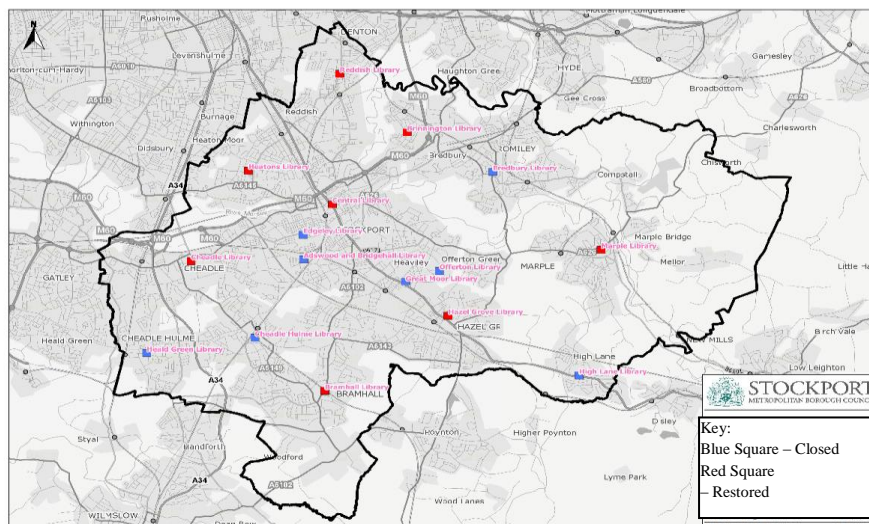


Fig 1. Map of Stockport and the location of library buildings

- 2.4 The council has closely followed the guidance provided in the Libraries Connected Service Restoration Toolkit as well as undertaking its own risk assessments to inform library service restoration.
- 2.5 The toolkit sets out several stages of library service restoration:
- a) Digital and remote services offered plus some home delivery. Most staff working from home. No public access to buildings.
 - b) Digital and remote services, plus some home delivery and order & collect service. Many staff working from home. No public access to buildings.
 - c) Digital and remote services, some home delivery, order & collect, ticketed IT access. Some staff still working from home. Extremely limited public access to buildings. Library opening hours limited, and number of branches open limited.
 - d) Digital and remote services, home delivery, order & collect, ticketed IT access, browsing and self-service within libraries, controlled mobile libraries. Majority of staff working in libraries. Public access to buildings with key control measures. Increased number of libraries open and opening hours expanded.
 - e) Digital and remote services, home delivery, IT access, browsing, mobile libraries, events and activities, staff support and interaction. Staff working within libraries. Public access to buildings. Control measures in place but slightly relaxed (e.g. no limit on time public can spend in library). All libraries open for standard hours.
 - f) New services and offers developed in addition to the existing library offer - service transformation.
- 2.6 In Phase 1 of reinstating library services the decision was taken for the health and safety of library users and staff to be the priority in the first phase of reinstating library services; to take a staged approach to reinstating services in order to pilot the new way of working; and to retain consistent opening hours across libraries as much as possible based on previous library user feedback. The first tranche of libraries to reopen were those that presented the best space and physical layout for a covid-safe service to be offered, with the first four opening on 13/17/20.
- 2.7 The service offered contained elements of stage 3 and 4 in the list above including digital and remote services, an enhanced home library service for those unable to visit a library, order and collect, booked IT access, over half of the library staff working in libraries, public access to library building with control measures in place and full opening hours (with the exception of Open Plus hours) in those libraries that had opened.
- 2.8 Libraries are currently receiving 15% of the average visits in 2019/20, book issues are at 15% of the average in 2019/20 and use of Public Network Computers is 22% of the average hours used in 2019/20.
- 2.9 Restoration dates and current opening times for each library building can be found in Appendix 1.

3. Staffing Position

- 3.1 Since March 2020, 11xFTE (25% of staff) have been seconded to the contact centre to support our covid response. Their current activity is for order and collect calls (3xFTE) and locality test and trace (8xFTE).
- 3.2 During the national restrictions, there have been at least 10 staff who have had to self-isolate. As a result of this, open libraries' staffing bubbles were affected. To mitigate this, staff were between buildings alongside the use of casual staff to fill gaps to ensure the service remain open to the public.
- 3.3 The staff establishment of the library service is 35.3; 34xFTE Library Assistant (Scale 4) and 1.3xFTE Library Support Assistant (Scale 2).
- 3.4 Reinstated browsing will enable 3xFTE to return from the contact centre. Additional staff will also be released from front door duties.
- 3.5 Recruitment has been undertaken to fill vacancies of 3.4xFTE.

4. GM Position with Library Restoration

- 4.1 When compared to other districts in Greater Manchester, Stockport's position is not dissimilar. At the time of writing, due to the national and local restrictions across Greater Manchester, there are eight districts operating at a reduced service level. As in our case, when the national guidance permits, a number of GM library services are planning to increase their service to some extent.

5. Library Service Restoration – Phase 2 Planned/Underway

- 5.1 The council's intention has always been to have a phased opening of library services, returning to as full a service as possible, within a covid-safe operating model (in line with the most up to date government covid-safe guidance) and taking account of additional constraints that are likely to continue to apply. These staffing availability/redeployment to essential activity related to the pandemic; workforce absence – in particular due to self-isolation requirements; and the space and layout of some library buildings.
- 5.2 Plans were originally made to open at least two further libraries in September, but these plans had to be placed on hold due to the immediate requirement to establish a local test and trace service – contacting those who have tested positive for covid to carry out contact tracing. This was established in mid-August and test and trace demand has been significantly higher than initially expected – initially due to challenges within the national system itself and more recently due to increasing numbers of those testing positive for covid.
- 5.3 Section 3 above contains more detail about staffing considerations for the service.
- 5.4 Plans were revised for browsing to be reintroduced in November enabling further libraries to reopen. However, the national restrictions put in place from 5 November expressly restricted browsing within libraries. It should be noted that some neighbouring library services have had to scale back or have even chosen to close during these restrictions (for example, East Cheshire and Salford libraries were closed, and a number of GM authorities offered a much-reduced service). Stockport's current service was able to continue under these restrictions with no change. However, as soon as the guidance allows book browsing will be reinstated.

- 5.5 Providing that any new restrictions from 2 December allow browsing to be reintroduced in libraries, a reduced hours service will be reintroduced at Edgeley Library on Saturday 5th December 2020 and at Bredbury Library on 16th December 2020 as well as targeted community provision in Bridgehall and Offerton given the low car ownership and higher levels of digital exclusion in these areas.
- 5.6 Services in Cheadle Hulme and Heald Green will follow.
- 5.7 High Lane and Great Moor Libraries will remain temporarily closed. There are good public transport links between High Lane and Marple (open since July) and between Great Moor and Hazel Grove (open since July). However, for library users who cannot physically access alternative libraries, the home library service is available.
- 5.8 Our libraries have developed their on-line offer during the pandemic and this will continue. Examples of activities include online story time sessions for families, author talks and most recently, the Stockport Children's Book Awards – where children across Stockport have chosen their favourite books for their age group ([https://www.stockport.gov.uk/2020-childrens-book-awards-winners.](https://www.stockport.gov.uk/2020-childrens-book-awards-winners))

6. Developing the Phase 2 plans

- 6.1 The following considerations have been taken into account whilst planning the phases of service restoration.
- Covid Safety - how easily can the building be adjusted to meet government guidance – this was prioritised in phase one
 - Overall Footfall - consideration of last year's operational statistics to understand the levels of demand for each area and community
 - Digital Usage - in areas of recorded high digital demand, consideration of alternative digital support offers
 - Community - consideration of those who are vulnerable or in areas of deprivation - home library service in phase 1 and other services in phase 2
 - Geography - ensuring a geographical spread of services across Stockport
- 6.2 Resourcing factors include:
- Consideration for the redeployment of existing staff to other services (Test and Trace)
 - Extension of the staffing bubbles across the service and impact of staff self-isolating and the bubbles they work within
 - Recruitment to vacancies
- 6.3 Community / Neighbourhoods:
- Library officers are currently working with Stockport Homes to develop targeted services in Bridgehall and Offerton communities where the space available limits the ability of staff and library users to social distance

6.4 Both the libraries and digital teams are also working with community organisations to identify and support opportunities to increase digital access from alternative locations. For example, the council has used GMCA funding received to install screens to enable Starting Point to run Edgeley Digiknow sessions again safely once restrictions allow.

6.5 Covid Restrictions / guidance:

- Future government changes to national restrictions may affect the approach
- The introduction of browsing and a reduction in use of order and collect will enable the staffing further library services
- Open Plus is difficult to introduce within the current guidelines; no other library services in the UK are using Open plus at this time

6.6 Building / H&S:

- All safety measures are aligned to DCMS/Libraries Connected guidance for both physical & staffing including bubbles; as well as, feedback from those using the service
- Bridgehall and Offerton library buildings remain unsuitable for restoration due to Covid guidance from the Health & Safety team;
- Changes and staffing needed to reopen Central Library safely are prohibitive and One Stockport Hub has been proposed as a temporary town centre offer, also addressing the closure of Stockport Museum due to covid
- Other buildings could be made Covid safe however, this would require further considerations such as additional staffing and layout alterations
- Lessons learnt in relation to managing covid risk, including the need for pragmatism, have informed future decision making

6.7 National and Local Covid restrictions:

- The changing landscape of national and local restrictions and covid transmission rates have influenced decision making and added a further layer of complexity with regards to the timings of the second phase of our restoration plan

7. Options Considered

7.1 In developing Phase 2 plans, two alternative options were considered:

- Maintain current position and restore two Libraries. The newly restored libraries have normal opening hours. 6 out of 16 library buildings remain closed. This was discounted due to the impact on those areas of the borough that would remain without a library service.
- All libraries restored with reduced opening hours. 2 out of 16 library buildings remain closed. This was discounted due to the inconsistency this would add to library opening hours across the borough – library users have previously fed back that consistency of opening hours is important to them - staffing implications

including implications for staffing bubbles, and the reduction in hours this would require at our busiest libraries.

8. One Stockport Hub

8.1 Plans for One Stockport Hub have been developed to provide a temporary Central Library provision in the town centre whilst Covid restrictions are in place that impact the provision of library services from Central Library.

8.2 The report was presented to the Corporate Resource Management and Governance (CRMG) Scrutiny Committee on 22 September 2020, who resolved as follows;

- That the Cabinet be recommended to undertake further work on the future of the Central Library building and subsequently undertake a further round of consultation on the proposal to develop a 'One Stockport Hub' making clear what the Council's plans are for the Central Library building
- That the outcome of the further round of consultation be reported back to this Scrutiny Committee

8.3 At the meeting of 6th October, the Cabinet approved the following recommendations;

- Note and approve in principle the proposal to develop 'One Stockport Hub'
- Note and approve the work to consider any future change of use for the Central Library building, which would include engagement with the public and relevant stakeholders
- Note the recommendation from the Corporate, Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny Committee and the response to the recommendation as set out in Section 8 of this report
- Delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration and Borough Treasurer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Citizen Focus and Engagement and Cabinet Member for Economy & Regeneration to take all necessary steps to implement the proposal set out in this report

8.4 In addition, a motion was passed at Full Council on 22 October to:

- Re-open Stockport Central Library as soon as social distancing restrictions have been removed; and
- Not to permanently close or remove library services from Stockport Central Library unless and until there has been a proper public consultation that makes this intention clear and sets out the alternative plans for the building so that Stockport residents can have their say

8.5 Consultation was undertaken over a six-week period and ended on 19th October. Clarification was issued part way through the consultation that this is a temporary move. Despite this, a petition against a permanent move was signed by 4001 signatories and was presented at Full Council on 22 October.

- 8.6 The council's own consultation received 1005 responses. Comments received from the consultation were varied, with some clear support for the proposal to bring together a range of services in the town centre alongside some objections to the proposal to move library services from the current Central Library building; more respondents than not expressed an intention to visit the One Stockport Hub. There was also strong support for the provision of advice and information through the Hub, alongside access to heritage and archive services and keen support for a Children's library in the Hub. Where appropriate, suggestions made as part of the consultation exercise were included in the plans for One Stockport Hub or included in other workstreams.
- 8.7 Within the consultation carried out by the council, of those who responded, 45% stated that they will or probably will visit OSH. Of these 40% did not currently use any library services. 29% of respondents stated they probably will not visit, or that OSH is not for them.
- 8.8 Further engagement was carried out with Stockport Youth Engagement group (made up of young people from the Youth Participation group and Stockport College students), who expressed enthusiasm about the potential for a new community hub and the fact it would be based in a more accessible location close to shops and buses.
- 8.9 There was clear support from individuals and groups for services that would be more accessible to disabled residents and an interest in contributing to the design of services in the Hub to support this.
- 8.10 The full consultation report is provided at Appendix 3
- 8.11 Where appropriate, suggestions made have been included in the proposals for One Stockport or included in another workstream. These have included;
- Provision of a 'Heritage Access Booth' to improve access to the heritage collection
 - A Parent and Child changing facility – adjacent to the children's library
 - Acceleration of a workstream to consider future uses of the Central Library building
 - A focus on accessible information, advice and guidance in One Stockport Hub
- 8.12 Whilst the council has taken a number of steps to clarify that One Stockport Hub is not proposed as a permanent replacement to Central Library, both the Corporate, Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny Committee and consultation findings have highlighted that there is a need to address the question of the future of the Central Library building.
- 8.13 Work to consider what uses may be appropriate for this iconic building in the future has been brought forward as requested by this committee. An Options Appraisal will be produced considering a range of uses for the building, including its current usage. Following the Options Appraisal, the Council has committed to carrying out further engagement with the public and relevant stakeholders, should a permanent move of any services from Central Library be proposed – for example, as the result of a successful Future High Streets Fund bid.
- 8.14 Furthermore, given the priority that consultation responses gave to information, advice and guidance being available in the town centre, future uses for One Stockport Hub for the delivery of town centre services are being considered for such

a time at which library and heritage services may no longer be delivered from this location.

Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the council's current position, work undertaken and the next steps for the restoration of further library buildings
- b) Note the ONE Stockport Hub update, consultation findings and steps the council has taken to address the findings.

Further Information:

Libraries Connected Service Restoration Toolkit

<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/service-recovery-toolkit-2020-word>

CRMG 22 September 2020 Agenda item 8: CREATION OF A ONE STOCKPORT HUB IN STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE

<http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=144&MId=27163&Ver=4>

Cabinet 6 October 2020 Agenda item 10: CREATION OF A ONE STOCKPORT HUB IN STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE

<http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1015&MId=27101&Ver=4>

Full Council Meeting 22 October 2020 Motions: RE-OPENING STOCKPORT CENTRAL LIBRARY AND TRANSPARENCY ABOUT ANY FUTURE CLOSURE PLANS

<http://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=27093>

Contact officers for accessing background papers and discussing the report:

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9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 Restoration dates and current opening times for each library building

9.2 Appendix 2 Pre-Covid Usage Charts and Supporting Data

9.3 Appendix 3 The full consultation report for One Stockport Hub
