

Report to Cabinet

13 April 2022

Subject:	Arts Council England – Libraries Improvement Fund funding for Sandwell Libraries and Archives
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Culture and Tourism Cllr Danny Millard
Director:	Director of Borough Economy Alice Davey
Key Decision:	Yes Agreement requested to accept £495,000 funding from Arts Council England to Implement Library+ in 10 libraries (Corporate Plan action C6). and The project will be significant in its impact to extend access to the Council’s libraries.
Contact Officer:	Business Manager – Libraries and Archives. Dawn Winter Dawn_winter@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to receive funding of £495,000 from Arts Council England’s Libraries Improvement Fund to roll out Library+ to 10 libraries, following a pilot at Thimblemill Library, in line with action C6 of the Corporate Plan.
- 1.2 That the Director of Borough Economy be authorised to accept the funding from Arts Council England’s Libraries Improvement Fund on terms and conditions agreed by the Director – Borough Economy in consultation with legal services to enable roll out of Library+ to proceed.
- 1.3 That the Director of Borough Economy, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to:



- Prepare any necessary Tendering documentation;
- Procure, in accordance with the public procurement rules, the Council's procurement and financial regulations a contractor(s) to carry out works on site; to award a contract and to enter into or execute under seal any financial agreement(s) as may be deemed necessary in relation to the project; and
- Accept Grant funding from the Art Council England on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director of Borough Economy in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer.

1.3 In connection with 1.1 and 1.2 above, that the following action points identified within the financial appraisal of the funding application by Strategic Finance, be implemented to reduce any risk to the council:

- That cost estimates are reviewed to ensure that any future costs can be managed within the allocated funding.
- That a corporate Risk Register is produced for the project, with target risk scores and dates for mitigation included.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Inward investment from Arts Council England will enable the delivery of the Library+ project at 10 of the borough's libraries.
- 2.2 Approval to accept the Arts Council England funding will enable officers to complete and submit the necessary grant paperwork.
- 2.3 The project will enable access to the council's libraries to be extended beyond current advertised opening hours
- 2.4 By authorising the Director of Borough Economy to oversee the implementation of recommendations will ensure the timely and efficient roll out of this key project.
- 2.5 The project will assist in the Council's efforts to help residents access libraries for books, computers, events and activities for longer and allow local groups to use libraries outside of advertised opening hours.



2.6 Strategic Finance colleagues have carried out an appraisal of the funding application, which has been evaluated against HM Treasury Green Book guidance. The appraisal process recorded a score of 72%, with some areas of risk identified. The full appraisal is set out at Appendix 1. The appraisal has recommended action points to mitigate any risk to the council, these action points are detailed in Section 1.3 above.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><i>Best start in life for children and young people</i> Extending access to libraries gives more opportunities for families to attend for books and reading as well as ensuring staff concentrate on delivering 'quality' activities e.g storytimes and homework support</p>
	<p><i>People live well and age well</i> Extending access and enhancing outside spaces of libraries gives greater opportunity for residents to enjoy their local community assets. It also increases the opportunity for local groups to use the library with residents benefitting from their activities</p>
	<p><i>Strong resilient communities</i> Library+ enables Sandwell Council to retain its libraries in local communities and extending the access gives more opportunities for residents to come together in the spaces.</p>
	<p><i>A strong and inclusive economy</i> The project will deliver direct improvements within neighbourhoods and make areas more attractive to live in. By delivering this ambitious project will further demonstrate Sandwell Council's ability to get things done whilst working with a major national funding agency and hopefully lead to further funding opportunities in the future.</p>
	<p><i>A connected and accessible Sandwell</i> Extending access to libraries gives residents more opportunity to use library free public access computers and wifi in their neighbourhood. Especially important for those without access at home.</p>



4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 In September 2021, an 'Expression of Interest' (EOI) was submitted by the Council to be involved in an application for funding, Sandwell Libraries and Archives following an invitation from the Arts Council to seek funding under the Arts Council England's Libraries Improvement Fund.
- 4.2 Staff less libraries have been in operation in libraries across the country for some time now. Most authorities use it as an opportunity to extend opening hours and/or reduce the number of hours that libraries are staffed. It means that users can access books, computers, study space and allows groups to meet at times convenient to them.
- 4.3 Following the development of proposals for a pilot installation, funded by Libraries budget at Thimblemill Library in Smethwick, Sandwell Libraries and Archives were invited by Arts Council England to apply to its Libraries Improvement Fund for funding to roll out the technology to 10 further libraries (Bleakhouse, Brandhall, Langley and Rounds Green – all in Oldbury, Cradley Heath and Oakham in Rowley Regis, Great Bridge in Tipton, Hill Top in Wednesbury, and Great Barr and Stone Cross in West Bromwich). Sandwell Libraries and Archives has been successful in securing £495,000 from the Libraries Improvement Fund to enable this project to proceed. The pilot was launched on 21st March 2022 and means that Thimblemill Library is now accessible to residents from 8am until 10pm, increasing opening hours by 50 hours per week, from 42 hours to 92 hours (this is a 119% increase). Extensive consultation with key stakeholders and evaluation monitoring will be undertaken during the pilot – and this will feed into the roll-out of the wider programme.
- 4.4 Arts Council England's schedule for draw down of the funding requires the first £247,500 to be paid at the start of the project (April 2022). A further £198,000 by 8th November 2022 and the remainder (£49,500) by 10th June 2023.
- 4.5 Library+ is the name given to Sandwell's version of unstaffed libraries. Installation of the technology and associated building works that may be required will mean that residents will be able to access their local library using their library card and a private PIN number. There will be restrictions on use (e.g. unaccompanied children will not be allowed to use the service) and users will need to sign up to a robust membership agreement and take part in a short induction. Misuse of the facility will



mean users will be excluded from further use. CCTV is included in the installation to monitor use and ensure safety of users.

- 4.6 Library+ in Sandwell will mean that residents can access their local library from approx. 8am until 10pm (dependent on library) and staffed hours will remain as advertised for now. We will however, take the opportunity to review staffed hours to ensure that staff are on site at the most appropriate times and delivering quality services and activities e.g. story times or homework support. It will also mean that staff who have expressed an interest in leaving the service via the planned leavers scheme may be able to do so without having a severe impact on service delivery.
- 4.7 It is intended to work in partnership with Friends of Libraries groups to secure match funding of £25,000 to improve the external spaces of the 10 libraries to further enhance access.
- 4.8 Contractors will be appointed either via an existing council framework or via a tendering process to procure the technological solutions and any associated alterations to buildings to enable Library+ to be delivered.
- 4.9 Future management and maintenance responsibility of the equipment will rest with Libraries and Archives this will include ongoing maintenance.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 No alternative options have been considered for this project. Whilst the 'Do nothing' approach is an option, it would result in the loss of potential inward investment along with a missed opportunity to make libraries more accessible to local people. As such it is not considered a satisfactory option.



6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The total project budget is £550,000. £495,000 of this from Arts Council England, £25,00 from Friends of Libraries Groups and the Federation of Friends and there will need to be ‘Match Funding’ ‘in kind’ of £30,000 over the 2 years of the project in the form of a project manager. This will be funded from Libraries and Archives budget.</p> <p>There are no staffing implications other than: Some staff who have expressed an interest in leaving the service could be allowed to go under the planned leavers scheme.</p> <p>Ongoing maintenance and repairs of the facilities will be the responsibility of Libraries and Archives</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>There will be a need for legal support in entering a grant funding agreement with Arts Council England</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>The following risks have been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The £25,000 of match funding via Friends groups may not be secured which would result in Libraries and Archives underwriting this cost. - Timescales for the delivery of the project will need to be very carefully managed. Any unforeseen delays could be an issue.
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>The facilities will be open for use by any group regardless of ethnicity, gender or any protected characteristic. An initial stage Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out.</p>
<p>Health and Wellbeing:</p>	<p>The project will have a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. By increasing access to libraries and upgrading the outside spaces residents will be able to enjoy the benefits accessing their local library at a time convenient to them.</p>
<p>Social Value</p>	<p>The project will help to encourage people to use their local library at a convenient time and location. The project will help to put Sandwell ‘On the Map’ as a place that values its libraries. It will hopefully demonstrate that Sandwell is a place that ‘gets things done’ and welcomes inward investment from funders.</p>



7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Financial Appraisal Report 29th March 2022

8. Background Papers

None

