

## **Halton Library Service Strategy to 2023 : DRAFT**

We have a vibrant and modern library service in Halton and despite challenges over the past few years the service continues to thrive and expand in a complex landscape.

We have made significant improvements to services including the introduction of a free ebook and digital magazines catalogue, the recent refurbishment and modernisation of Widnes Library, and the nationally recognised Community Library Service – offering services to our older community and those living with dementia.

Our library strategy is ambitious and reflects our commitment to continue to meet local and national needs.

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**Cllr Phil Harris**  
**Executive Board Member for libraries**

### **Introduction**

Our mission is to achieve the best outcomes for the people of Halton through access to knowledge and creative activity.

- We will inspire a community of readers
- We will support the health and wellbeing of the community
- We will offer welcoming, vibrant spaces for people to meet
- We will support learning at all ages
- We will offer access to inspiring cultural activity
- We will reach out to the community and expand activity across the Borough

### **Background**

Halton Library Service is delivered through four public libraries and as an outreach service across the Borough; this includes the Community Library Service our bespoke offer to care and residential homes, and the Home Library Service, delivered in partnership to provide services to those unable to access our static buildings.

The Service is an early adopter of new technologies including open source software solutions, embracing innovation to improve customer experiences and financial efficiency.

The library service is a key resource for our community, providing access to books, learning opportunities, cultural activity, and information. The buildings are important meeting spaces which offer a welcoming, neutral environment and host a range of events and opportunities for the whole community.

Figure 1: Key facts about Halton Libraries 2017:

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Figure 2: Services and facilities delivered by Halton Libraries:

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### National Context

The national Universal Offer framework has been developed by the Society of Chief Librarians to represent core services which our customers and stakeholders see as being integral to a 21<sup>st</sup> century public library service.

The Universal Offers are delivered in Halton and tailored to meet local needs.



The Government Libraries Taskforce was created to deliver the recommendations of the [Independent Library Report for England](#). They have produced [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021](#) which provides a vision for libraries that is reflected in this local strategy.

## Overview of strategic priorities

### Inspire a community of readers:

We work with individuals, groups and schools to encourage and provoke a love of reading.

- Books

Central to inspiring reading, our contemporary book collection is co-curated by specialist library staff and the community, using our online suggestion scheme for physical and digital stock. The collection includes audio books, large print titles and access to free ebooks through our digital platform. The catalogue invites customers to engage through interactive elements including the opportunity to add book reviews and ratings.

- Pre-school literacy

Every child's reading journey begins before birth and that is why Halton Library Service are developing plans to support [Bump Booster](#), encouraging parents to read, and sing to babies in the womb. For under 4's we already provide a range of Rhymetime activities and coordinate [Bookstart](#). Children can join the library at any age and borrow books for free.

- Summer Reading Challenge

The [Summer Reading Challenge](#) is the UK's biggest reading event for children, run by the charity The Reading Agency. Every summer Halton Library Service supports this campaign to encourage children to read six books during the school holidays. Each year there is a different theme and children receive incentives to celebrate their success. Our levels of engagement with this programme are increasing each year as more children in Halton discover the joy of reading through our constantly improving engagement with schools.

- Support for schools

We annually evaluate the schools we are working with; providing class visits in all libraries, bespoke visits to meet national and school curriculum needs, and we offer opportunities to attend free author events. The role of Halton Library Service in supporting schools provides children across the Borough with a wide range of chances to be engaged in quality reading activities. We have a unique relationship with Saints Peter and Paul Catholic College where the school learning resource centre catalogue is integrated with ours, and every pupil and teacher is a library member.

- Reading groups

Halton Library Service hosts a variety of reading groups including [Chatterbooks](#) group for children. In 2018, in partnership with [The Reader](#), we are launching Read and Relax groups for adults. Group members choose to read aloud, share personal reflections or simply listen, and in this way people can form real connections with the stories and with each other.

- Time to Read

[Time to Read](#) is a pioneering partnership between twenty two library services, sharing knowledge and learning across the North West with the purpose of developing reading in adults through shared projects and promotions. 2018 will see the launch of the first Great North West Reads campaign, all partner library services promoting the reading of one book.

### **Support the health and wellbeing of the community:**

Our libraries are actively supporting people to take control of their health and wellbeing with access to information and specialist resources.

- Reading Well Books on Prescription

[Books on Prescription](#) are collections of books endorsed and promoted by health professionals. The titles in each of our libraries support readers to understand their health and wellbeing and currently target dementia, young people's mental health, and long term conditions such as diabetes. The next phase of the project will be the production of a list supporting common mental health problems like anxiety and stress.

- Memory bags and boxes

We have a collection of memory boxes and memory bags which can be borrowed from any Halton Library. These specialist resources have been developed by library staff to stimulate memories and discussion for people with dementia. Each one contains a collection of books, photographs, replicas and multi-sensory objects around a theme such as school days, transport or holidays. This collection continues to grow in response to need and the expansion of our work with care and residential homes across the Borough, with carers, and health professionals.

- Wellbeing Wednesdays

Introduced in 2016 Wellbeing Wednesdays are a weekly opportunity to take a break and unwind in the library with some mindful colouring in or a game of Scrabble. They are an opportunity to meet new people and relax away from the bustle of daily life. Expanding this

project in 2018 will include working with partners to develop information sessions and wellbeing learning opportunities.

### **Offer welcoming, vibrant spaces for people to meet**

Our libraries are great places to meet, share, and get involved. There is value in the role of libraries as spaces that welcome anyone and are non-threatening. In Halton our libraries are attractive spaces, well placed to tackle loneliness and social isolation, and enhance community cohesion through events, and an activity programme that invites people to visit.

- Reading Hack

[Reading Hack](#) is a volunteer programme for young people and we have two well attended groups in Halton. The project encourages volunteers to engage with libraries, support events, and inspire others. Taking part can support applicants in their Duke of Edinburgh Award as well as increasing confidence and skills.

- Supporting people

In Halton we aim to make our libraries welcoming for all and to support this pledge we have added specialist training to our staff induction and development programme. This includes [autism friendly](#) education, awareness training from [Vision Support](#), and [dementia friends](#) information sessions to help the library service frontline team meet the needs of all of our customers.

- Fun Palaces

[Fun Palaces](#) is a national initiative to promote community and invite people to share their passions with local people. 2018 will be the third year Halton Library Service hosts Fun Palaces which we see as an extension of our role as community venues under a national banner that raises the profile of libraries.

### **Support learning at all ages**

Learning has always been at the core of what libraries offer including resource materials, books, the internet and spaces to study. In Halton we have expanded this offer to include online learning and access to new skills opportunities.

- Digital support

All library staff can help you get online and develop digital skills that can enhance life chances, impact on social isolation and introduce people to new things; as well supporting

the move to Government online including Universal Credit. We will continue to offer one to one drop in support in all our libraries.

- Science and digital making

Supporting identified national and local skills gaps related to STEM careers, in 2016 we introduced a programme of informal science learning opportunities, showcasing new activities like robotics, computer programming and engineering, and helping people to develop new skills like coding at our [Code Clubs](#). We have also established incredibly popular Lego and K'nex clubs that provide playful learning opportunities that encourage creativity and problem solving. This offer continues to evolve as technology changes.

- Micro:bit Foundation – library lending project

The [micro:bit](#) is a programmable mini computer. Supported by donations from the micro:bit foundation, Halton Library Service is part of an innovative project to loan these computers from all of our libraries, allowing people to take their learning home, and expand and share their ideas.

- North West Universal Learning Offer Group

Working in partnership with library services across the North West this group, led by Halton Library Service, aims to work together to build learning experiences for customers through shared practice and funding. 2018 will see the launch of North West Learn Fest, a regional learning festival showcasing the role of libraries in providing informal learning opportunities.

- Staff development programme

Our library staff undertake an induction programme that includes helping customers to get online and develop digital skills, offering Universal Credit support, and building confidence to promote reading to customers. The online training programme that forms part of the induction has been developed by the Society of Chief Librarians and is funded by Arts Council England. Commitment to staff development continues to evolve to meet the needs of our community, and third party training provision is sought to ensure staff remain appropriately skilled and empowered to deliver an excellent library service.

### **Offer access to inspiring cultural activity**

Libraries are a catalyst for democratising arts and culture and in 2017 we offered access to exciting experiences including performances of the internationally acclaimed [Ada ada ada](#) show, visits from bestselling authors, and stand-up comedy workshops, all supported through external funding.

- Picture Halton

Picture Halton is our online photographic resource where searchable images are available for purchase. We continue to expand this online collection to share these unique images with customers across the world.

- Culture

Plans for 2018 include supporting the BBC Civilisations campaign with a look at the role of engineering in shaping Halton, and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, with a local perspective on the women's movement.

- Supporting National Activity

National spikes have regularly resulted in additional external funding for our activities and in 2018 these will include supporting British Science week, BBC Civilisations, BBC Get Creative and Safer Internet Day.

### **Reach out to the community and expand activity across the Borough**

Library users live and work across the Borough but don't always access our library buildings. Having identified a need to support older, isolated customers, carers, those with long term health conditions, mental health conditions and the disabled we have introduced two sustainable services to deliver books and more to our wider community.

- Community Library Service

The Community Library Service is a bespoke offer to care and residential homes that includes book loans, reading aloud, IT support, shared reading, reminiscence work and activity tailored to those living with dementia. Recently recognised by Arts Council England in a [report](#) exploring the contribution of public libraries to the well-being of older people the service is expanding to more facilities in 2018.

- Home Library Service

In 2015 we brought the home library back in house to fully exploit its potential and increase the reach of the service, ensuring quality and value for our customers. We now deliver books selected by library staff and delivered in partnerships with the meals on wheels team.

- Marketing

The library service has a [quarterly programme](#) marketing events and activities, positioning the libraries as diverse and active community destinations. The library service [twitter](#) presence is an effective marketing tool and social media training will improve engagement on this platform to increase impact.

All of our work is underpinned with strong partnerships on a national, regional and local level. These include:

- Society of Chief Librarians

The [Society of Chief Librarians](#) is the support organisation for the public library sector. Membership provides Halton Library Service with an extensive peer network, access to resources including the Universal Offers, high profile partners including the BBC, British Library and Wellcome Trust, and a wide range of training and development opportunities.

- National Koha Development Forum

Created and chaired by Halton Library Service the forum brings together all organisations using Koha as their library management system and this includes representatives from schools, universities and public libraries across England. Koha is an open source product so this group explores how the product can be improved and how new content can be generated.

- North West & Yorkshire Book Consortium

The consortium works to ensure that stock buying is the most financially efficient for member library services including Halton. Buying as part of the consortium allows greater negotiating power with suppliers.