



Report to Communities & Localism Select Committee

Date:	29 June 2023
Title:	Healthy Libraries Pilot Programme
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure
Contact officer:	David Jones, Head of Libraries David.Jones@Buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All
Reason for report:	For members to be informed of and invited to comment on the pilot of the Healthy Libraries programme and further development plans.

Background

- 1.1 Buckinghamshire is generally a healthy county, with life expectancy for both men and women higher than the England average. However, there are variations in health outcomes across the county, with some areas experiencing significant hardship.
- 1.2 [Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of Buckinghamshire residents, in particular those living in areas with greater need and groups with poorer health outcomes.
- 1.3 [The Buckinghamshire Libraries Vision and Strategy](#) was formally adopted by Cabinet in March 2023. One of the four strategic priorities is to promote health and wellbeing, to maximise the contribution libraries can make in this area.

Healthy Libraries pilot

- 2.1 A pilot programme between Buckinghamshire Libraries and Public Health was undertaken between February and April 2023 to test and develop an overarching health and wellbeing framework for libraries. The aim was to develop and deliver

health and wellbeing activities based on the needs of the local communities, using an asset-based approach.

- 2.2 Public Health commission a wide range of services to promote and support healthy lifestyles across the life course. They adopt and encourage an asset-based approach to the delivery of services and to working with communities and focus on improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities for those living in areas with greater need and groups with poorer health. They saw the potential to engage more communities through the library service.
- 2.3 Research shows that being a library user, and attending health and wellbeing activities in libraries deliver a positive social return on investment. In 2015 the Arts Council reported, “we predict the medical cost savings associated with [regular] library engagement at £1.32 per person per year ... an average [NHS] cost saving of £27.5 million per year”¹. A report commissioned by Suffolk Libraries based on a review of three of its health and wellbeing activities, supporting early years, older people, and mental health calculates the social return on investment of £8.04 for every £1 invested².
- 2.4 Buckinghamshire Libraries have historically made important contributions around key health challenges such as mental health, loneliness and social isolation, obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. However, we knew that there was scope for the library offer to be developed further. As community hubs with strong links to local stakeholders and residents, libraries are ideally placed to support local communities. Increasingly the emphasis for the service has been on promoting health and wellbeing, inclusion, and in enabling access to information and services - particularly for the most vulnerable.
- 2.5 Healthy Libraries is a programme of activities, information and staff training that aims to promote happier and healthier lives for Buckinghamshire residents. The aims of Healthy Libraries are to:
- Support the implementation of the Buckinghamshire Libraries Vision and Strategy, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Public Health workstreams.
 - Promote the role of libraries as community hubs for health and wellbeing.
 - Upskill library staff and volunteers to support service users’ health and wellbeing.
- 2.6 The initial proposal for a pilot was within an agreed number of libraries in areas with poorer health and wellbeing outcomes (including wards within the Opportunity Bucks programme): Aylesbury, Chesham, High Wycombe, plus Buckingham and Burnham. Since the Burnham library is managed under a group model which

¹ [The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries | Arts Council England](#) (page 7)

² <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/assets/pdf/suffolk-libraries-a-predictive-impact-analysis.pdf> (page 29)

includes Gerrards Cross and Iver Heath libraries, Healthy Library activities were also delivered from these sites.

Below are some of the initial outputs from the pilot period:

- 46 sessions ran across the pilot libraries in conjunction with a wide range of partners, covering children's and adult's mental health, dementia, healthy eating, menopause etc
- 803 participants during Early years Communication Week in February
- 160+ individual training sessions for staff and volunteers to equip them to support people's health and wellbeing
- Reconfiguration of 11 library spaces to support 'Cosy Corners' a warm and cosy space within the library that provides resources and information to support families living with dementia
- Provision of new equipment including two 'Magic Tables' and various sensory items specifically to support autism and those living with dementia
- 117 loans from the Reading Agency's newly purchased "Your Health" Collection were recorded
- Two health stations installed in Aylesbury and High Wycombe libraries and 92 portable blood pressure kits now available for loan in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Micklefield libraries
- Distributed 80 copies of the book "Pulling Through" by Catherine Jessop for World Book Night to local health support groups. The book is about navigating life changing illness. A more detailed description of the activities and events can be found in the Appendix Healthy Libraries Programme.

2.7 All of the activities were delivered within the existing staff resources of those involved in the pilot, with additional funding by Public Health to support the development of the framework and the implementation of various activities.

2.8 A communications plan and visual identity for Healthy Libraries was developed in partnership with the Communications team to promote the events that took place during the pilot period. This included:

- Social media - utilised the existing libraries' channels as well as corporate social media channels.
- Printed materials – including posters/flyers and pull-up banners that are displayed in the pilot libraries.
- Internal and External newsletters – including the library customer newsletter.
- [Healthy Libraries](#) campaigns website page was developed.

2.9 The evaluation of the pilot activities is underway and will inform future targeting and roll-out to other libraries, sharing learning on delivering and promoting activities and identifying other local partners to engage with. The evaluation will include the following:

- Reviewing statistics and outputs from the pilot
- Collating feedback from customers, library staff and volunteers involved
- Gathering feedback from partners involved in delivering projects
- Reviewing the outcomes of the pilot, where possible, and the extent to which the pilot has been able to deliver against the council's strategic priorities.

2.10 Initial anecdotal evidence from customers and staff has been positive e.g., since the launch of Dementia 'Cosy Corners', there have been regular visits from care homes and individuals to access health information and activities.

3 Legal and financial implications

All of the pilot activities were delivered within the existing staff resources of those involved in the pilot, with additional funding by Public Health to support the development of the framework and the implementation of various activities. Any future financial costs arising from the roll-out of the Healthy Libraries programme would be delivered within the existing staff resources and Public Health grant as done with the pilot activities, and are not a pressure on the Council's General Fund. Any financial implications arising from the implementation of the Healthy Libraries framework would be subject to the usual financial processes and value for money assessments.

There are no direct legal implications for this strategy.

4 Corporate implications

The development of the Healthy Libraries framework for Buckinghamshire Libraries will contribute to the council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the libraries strategy, and Public Health workstreams. Four of the pilot libraries; Aylesbury, Chesham, High Wycombe and Micklefield libraries are within the Opportunity Bucks programme wards.

5 Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

The development of the Healthy Libraries framework is at an early stage and local councillors and community boards will be engaged and consulted as the work progresses subject to the outcome of the pilot.

6 Communication, engagement & further consultation

A communications plan will be for the roll out of the programme including bulletins and updates to councillors, Town and Parish Councils and Community Boards.

7 Next steps and review

It is planned that following the evaluation of the pilot, a roll-out of the Healthy Libraries programme will begin in summer 2023.

Background papers

[Buckinghamshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

[Buckinghamshire Libraries Vision and Strategy](#)

