



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 MARCH 2020

SMART LIBRARIES – PERFORMANCE REVIEW

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the performance of SMART libraries following implementation in April 2019.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

- 2 On 18 July 2016, the Cabinet approved the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-20, “Providing Less: Supporting More” following a period of consultation. This authorised the Director of Adults and Communities to develop a strategy implementation plan, subject to further reports being made to the Cabinet and this Committee. Part of the implementation was the exploration of technology as a means of sustaining library services.
- 3 In November 2016, the Cabinet authorised the Director of Adult and Communities to undertake a pilot of SMART library technology at Syston library.
- 4 On 22 February 2017, the Council approved a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) saving of £1.3 million for the Communities and Wellbeing Service to be delivered by 2020/21.
- 5 On 12 September 2017, the Committee considered a report, including the results of the Syston pilot and the full business case for SMART libraries, which recommended that the Cabinet authorise the Director of Adults and Communities to implement SMART library technology, where possible, within the following libraries: Ashby de la Zouch, Blaby, Birstall, Broughton Astley, Coalville, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Hinckley, Loughborough, Lutterworth, Melton Mowbray, Oadby, Shepshed and Wigston Magna. The Cabinet subsequently approved this recommendation on 15 September 2017.
- 6 On 8 February 2019, the Cabinet received an update on the installation of the SMART library implementation technology across the 14 sites, noting that Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough were not able to be adapted.

Background

- 7 The installation of SMART library technology enables customers to ‘swipe’ their library card to obtain entry to and exit from a library and provides self-service kiosks for borrowing, returning and renewing items (including the payment of charges)

without staff support. This offered the potential for increasing opening hours, whilst enabling a reduction in staffing costs.

- 8 The full business case identified that the full implementation of SMART library technology (including the replacement of existing self-service kiosks) would deliver an annual saving of c£230,000, predominantly from a reduction in staffed hours. In addition, it would increase customer access to libraries through extending (unstaffed) opening hours by approximately 30 hours per week at each library.
- 9 The SMART library project managed the installation of new self-service kiosks across 16 Council run libraries and the introduction of self-access technology in 14 of these libraries, followed by a reduction in staffing to contribute to the MTFS targets for the Communities and Wellbeing Service. Two libraries were not able to be adapted - Market Harborough is an open plan shared space which houses the Hallaton treasure and as such had significant insurance liabilities; the landlord declined consent to adapt Melton Mowbray library.
- 10 This report sets out an evaluation of the project after the first six months of operation. All statistics cover the time period April–September 2019, unless otherwise stated.

Progress

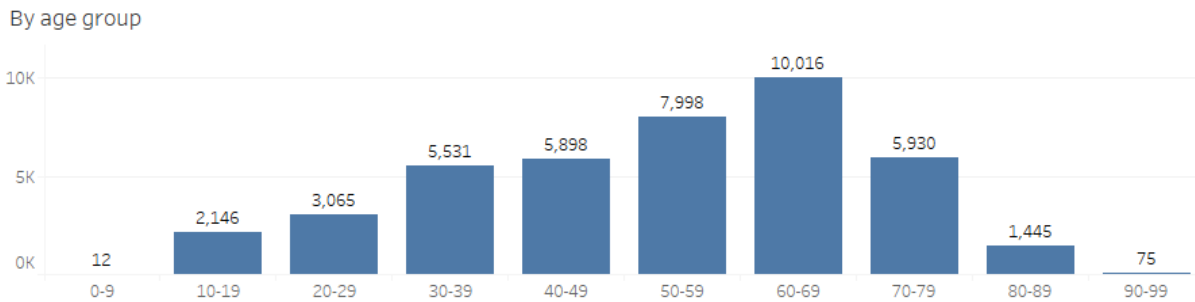
- 11 Implementation was completed on time with the new service commencing on 1 April 2019.
- 12 The 14 libraries adapted are all County Council funded and fall into two categories according to size. The table below sets out the libraries, together with the relative changes to staffing and opening hours:

| Category of library | Previous number of open staffed hours | New number of open staffed hours | Total number of hours open (SMART and staffed) |
|---|--|---|---|
| Major: Coalville, Hinckley, Loughborough, Oadby and Wigston | 38 | 28 (-26%) | 65 (+78%) |
| Shopping centre: Ashby de la Zouch, Birstall, Blaby, Broughton Astley, Earl Shilton, Glenfield, Lutterworth, Shepshed and Syston | 31 | 16 (-48%) | 65 (+110%) |

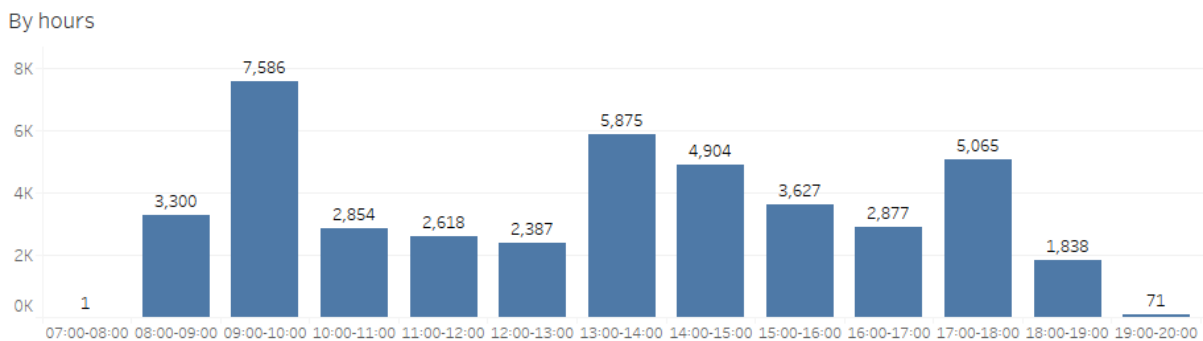
Usage and performance

- 13 To use the library in SMART mode, customers scan their library card at the door and put in their unique PIN to gain entry (known as a login). In the first six months there were 43,010 logins across all 14 libraries. There has been a steady increase across months, with September being the highest to date at 7,720.

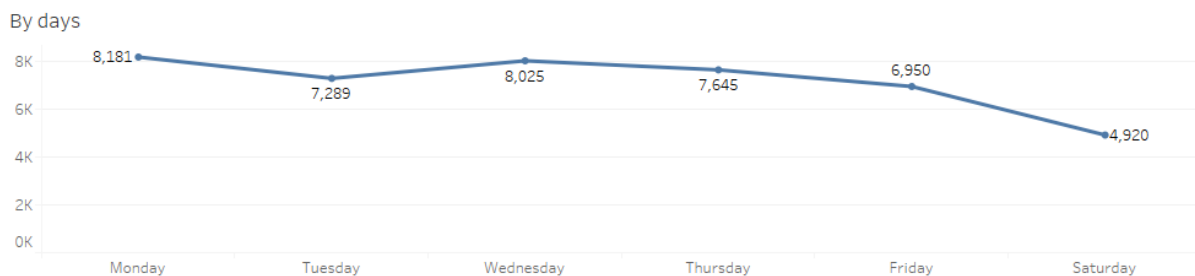
- 14 In the first six months of SMART operation, 8,981 library members registered for SMART access across the County. 6% (579) of these come from non-SMART libraries. 20.7% (8,402) of the 40,626 active library members across the 14 sites are now SMART library members.
- 15 All SMART library members need to undertake an induction before their card is activated. To make this process more user friendly and to reduce the impact on staff, an online version of the induction was introduced. This has proved popular and to date roughly half of all inductions are completed online.
- 16 The age category providing the largest number of logins was the 60-69 age group which is consistent with library use in general:



- 17 The most popular time to access a SMART library was between 9am and 10am:



- 18 The most popular day for accessing a SMART library is a Monday:



- 19 Early evidence has indicated that as the system settles in there has been a perceived increase in people visiting the libraries in staffed hours. This has been more so in the smaller shopping centre libraries. This indicates that people who have not wished to become SMART library members have shifted to the revised hours where staff are available.

- 20 The Communities and Wellbeing Service analysed the impact of the project on traditional library metrics of book loans, visits, computer usage and membership. The following information compares metrics for April-September 2018 with those for 2019. It should be noted that during the 2018 period some libraries will have experienced short-term closures in order for work to take place, so this may have affected their performance, but only to a small degree.

Loans

- 21 Loans across the 14 SMART libraries declined on average by 8% from 375,660 (April-September 2018) to 345,569 (April-September 2019). In major libraries, (where the reduction in staffed hours was less) a smaller decline was reported: 4% from 214,556 (April-September 2018) to 205,292 (April-September 2019); in the shopping centre sites the average figure was 13% from 161,104 in 2018 to 140,277 in 2019. This compares to a 2% increase in loans at community managed sites (from 132,691 to 135,156), a 5% decrease in mobile library loans (from 21,582 to 20,448) and maintenance of the status quo at Melton and Market Harborough (from 80,080 to 80,262).
- 22 A key annual campaign that impacts on loans of books to children is the Summer Reading Challenge. The impact of the project on these loans was minimal, showing a small decrease of 1,000 loans (from 207,000 July-September 2018 to 206,000 in July-September 2019). This was balanced with a 10% increase (from 1,162 in 2018 to 1,275 in 2019) of children joining a library and a small increase (from 5,435 in 2018 to 5,804 in 2019) of children completing the challenge of 1%.
- 23 Given that the SMART library changes represented a significant change to library operations, and set against declining national library trends, the current early position represents a fairly stable performance.

Visits

- 24 Visits decreased on average by 6%¹ (from 432,618 April-September 2018 to 406,920 April-September 2019). However, this showed a wide variation between sites, with visits at one shopping centre site decreasing by 28% (Ashby Library had 24,140 visits between April-September 2019 compared to 33,484 visits between April-September 2018). Visits to the busier Loughborough and Wigston libraries increased by 3% (from 82,920 to 85,379) and 6% (from 35,574 to 37,655) respectively.

Computer usage

- 25 Computer use in SMART libraries saw a small increase over the previous year (2% in major libraries (from 36,903 to 37,636) and 1% (from 15,608 to 15,804) in shopping centres).

Membership

- 26 In total, 10,028 people joined the library across the 14 sites during the first six months of the project. Of these, 1,537 also became SMART library members (15%).

¹ 2018 figures exclude Syston library due to faulty beam counter; Glenfield library operated normal staffed hours during April and May 2019 due to a faulty door panel.

Health and safety

- 27 As part of the project, a range of actions were put in place to mitigate health and safety risks for members of the public as they use the library in non- staffed hours. These have included:
- Live CCTV monitoring of all sites with voice over system that enables communication between public and monitoring site;
 - Emergency locked down phone provided with shortcuts to 999 and the County Council's Property Helpdesk;
 - All customers required to undertake an induction before having their card activated;
 - All customers required to sign a Customer Use Agreement to acknowledge their understanding of the system and their responsibilities as users of it;
 - First aid kit at all sites;
 - Floor plans showing emergency exits on view in all sites and on library website – customers shown these at home sites and advised to consult plans if going to an unfamiliar library.
- 28 There have been 24 incident forms completed for incidents taking place during SMART hours. This compares to 41 during staffed time over the same six- month period. The incidents include people falling asleep, technology failure, three incidents of theft and some mostly low level anti-social behaviour.
- 29 Managers have undertaken a review of these incidents and met with health and safety representatives and an issue log is in operation to monitor both the level of incidents and any potential solutions identified as a result of the review.
- 30 The most frequent issue has been one of tailgating where users follow someone into the site without using their card. Few seem to do so with any intention other than to make use of the library and there does not seem to be any serious incidents taking place as a result of this.
- 31 Officers have reviewed other authorities where similar systems are in place to see if there are any additional mitigation around health and safety that can be considered and are confident that the measures put in place across Leicestershire are robust.

Feedback

- 32 Informal canvassing of customer and staff views following the introduction of SMART libraries has taken place. Perceptions of the positive impacts and concerns so far seem to reflect similar messages.
- 33 Positive feedback indicates that the facilities are still well used, with good information provided on how to use self-access, extended opening hours have been beneficial, and libraries have been better for quieter study for certain times of the day when in SMART operation. In addition, new people have joined the library and customers have more ownership of the space, feeling trusted to make use of the space without staff.
- 34 Concerns have reflected the tailgating issue, some technical issues affecting doors, customers being unclear about opening hours and lack of toilet facilities during self-access times.

- 35 Formal complaints have been minimal, with 14 recorded in the first six months of operation.

Resource Implications

- 36 The net budget for the Communities and Wellbeing Service (part of the Adults and Communities Department) for 2020-21 is £5.1m. In line with the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy this will reduce to approximately £5.0m per annum by 2023/24. It is recognised that given the scale of these reductions, service delivery will change significantly.
- 37 The SMART libraries project has realised £239,000 in reduced costs.
- 38 The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the contents of this report.

Conclusions

- 39 On balance the first six months of SMART library operation has been positive. Overall performance has remained stable and the robust mitigating measures that have been put in place to ensure public safety have kept incidents at low levels.
- 40 Public reaction to the implementation of self-access has understandably been mixed, but the high number of logins in the first six months would seem to indicate that the people who value the service use it regularly. 21% of active library users have registered for SMART membership in the first six months of operation, and to date this figure has increased to c25%. Further work to communicate the benefits of SMART membership will be built into service planning for 2020-21.
- 41 Public access has increased in the larger libraries by 94% and reduced costs by c£230k. A range of non-financial benefits have also been realised, including reduced incidence of kiosk failure/breakdown requiring action by operational staff, compliance with the requirement for all payment points to offer contactless card payment facilities and improved, performance, reliability and user friendliness of new self-service kiosks.
- 42 Further work is anticipated to develop wider community use of the facilities during SMART time and also to increase opportunities for stakeholder organisations to utilise the facilities as potential workspaces and touchdown points. Officers will continue to closely monitor the safety elements of the project to ensure that customers remain confident in their use of self-access.

Background Papers

- Report to the Cabinet on 18 July 2016: Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2020 <http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4604&Ver=4>
- Reports to the Cabinet on 23 November 2016 and 15 September 2017: Progress with the Implementation of the Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-20
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MID=4607#AI49882>
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MID=4863#AI52290>

- Report to the Cabinet on 8 February 2019: Progress with SMART Library Implementation - <http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MID=5600#AI58604>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

- 43 A full Equality and Human Rights Assessment was undertaken as part of the project and is accessible as Appendix D to the report to Cabinet dated 8 February 2019. The action plan attached to the assessment identified 22 actions to be taken to mitigate the impact of self-access. Of those, the following four are still outstanding:
- The provision of visual instructions for using library technology - due for completion 2020;
 - Investigation into the possibility of friends' groups or volunteers having a greater role in the running of the library during smart hours – currently on hold due to Communities and Wellbeing restructure, to be picked up later in the year;
 - The provision of touchscreen technology to provide additional support and information during smart hours – pilot being undertaken during 2020-21;
 - 12 month progress report - due May 2020.

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