

Crossgates Library – Needs Assessment



Assessment Undertaken by:

LCC - Community Hub & Libraries Service

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Purpose of the Assessment:

Leeds City Council's Community Hub & Libraries Service is undertaking a needs assessment to inform the future direction of the library provision in the Crossgates area of Leeds. The assessment will consider the needs of the community and relevant demographic groups to ensure Leeds City Council provides a service that is compliant with statutory obligations and ensures financial resilience.

The needs assessment will evidence the status of the current Library Service provision for Crossgates residents and highlight how LCC are currently meeting statutory duties. It will also identify whether further improvements or changes are required to ensure the library offer is relevant, sustainable and fit for the future.

The following design principles have been used to ensure the needs assessment considers the library offer appropriately:

- Meet legal requirements.
- Shaped by local needs.
- Focus on public benefit and deliver a high-quality user experience.
- Make decisions informed by evidence.
- Support delivery of consistent England-wide core offers.
- Promote partnership working, innovation and enterprise.
- Use public funds effectively and efficiently.

Background:

The Leeds strategic vision for a library service is to become one of the best library services in England with support for wellbeing at the heart of everything we do. With a core purpose of providing:

- **Books, reading and cultural activity** – access to a rich resource of reading material (including digital resources) and a diverse cultural programme to engage and excite customers
- **Learning** – access to a wide range of informal learning opportunities, including digital skills
- **Knowledge and discovery** – access to a high-quality information service, including business support and heritage services.
- **Connected communities** – a safe and welcoming space for community use and engagement

The needs assessment sets out the current Library Service provision and service offer, it also considers how well it is reaching the resident population. The needs assessment is based on data held by the library service and continued feedback from all stakeholders. This will include:

- Patterns of library activity sourced from the Library Management System, computer booking system and locally collected library data.
- Indicators of deprivation levels in library catchment populations sourced from LSOA profiles using Office for National Statistics (IMD) data.
- The current library offer and how this is meeting DCMS national libraries taskforce outcomes & the 'Leeds Library Vision'

National Context:

Following the introduction of austerity measures by the government in 2010, all local councils were required to find savings and new income sources to close the resulting funding gaps. Over the intervening period the costs to maintain statutory requirements, most notably in the social services sector, grew considerably.

The financial squeeze has led to several high-profile cases of local councils across the country issuing a Section 114 notice. This means that no new expenditure is permitted, with the exception of funding statutory services including the safeguarding of vulnerable people and honouring existing contracts. Leeds City Council has also been exposed to this financial pressure and as with all other local authorities, continues to deliver much needed services to the local community whilst striving to ensure financial resilience.

In 2016 the national Libraries Taskforce published *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021* in which it sets out the strategic vision and commitment to public libraries in England. It recognised the challenging times that councils are facing in running Library Services and calls for radical thinking to protect frontline library services, acknowledging the need for councils to work in 'new and different ways' to 'thrive and not just survive'.

The Library Taskforce described libraries as vital community hubs - bringing people together and giving them access to the services and support they need to help them live better. The report sets out an ambition for individuals to:

- Choose to use libraries, because they see clear benefits and positive outcomes from doing so.
- Understand what library services offer, and how they can make the most of what's available to them.
- Be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills and information they need to improve their quality of life.
- Receive trusted guidance through the evolving information landscape and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world.

The Society of Chief Librarians (now renamed Libraries Connected), and partners including The Arts Council and The Reading Agency, state that they are committed to keeping library services relevant and accessible. The Universal Offers cover the key areas of service which customers and their stakeholders see as essential to a 21st century library service. They are:

- Culture and Creativity
- Health and Wellbeing
- Information and Digital
- Reading
- As well as: the Children's Promise and Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise

To deliver these ambitions, councils are encouraged to use common design principles to develop their library services which:

- Meet legal requirements
- Are shaped by local needs
- Focus on public benefit and deliver a high-quality user experience
- Make decisions informed by evidence, building on success

Local Context:

Over many years Leeds City Council has been investing in Community hub and Library provision with the aim of integrating frontline services, developing a better customer journey, and safeguarding the future of the services we deliver to local communities. This has continued to be the case despite many years of funding cuts and austerity, combined with the challenges of the Covid pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

It remains Leeds City Council’s intention to invest in the library offer for the Crossgates area, and a new community hub and library service will be developed and delivered. However, the development is no longer financially viable at the Farm Rd site. This is due significant and sustained acts of vandalism including arson whilst the building has been unoccupied, combined with the financial crisis within the public sector that is well documented with other local authorities across the country.

Despite the above challenges. The Library Service has maintained a presence in the area by negotiating a space within the local Crossgates Shopping centre. This has safeguarded a library presence in the area, and using the outcome of this Needs Assessment will shape what is delivered from there moving forward to ensure continuity for the local residents.

Equalities Duty:

Local Authorities have a duty when planning and delivering services to give due regard under the Equality Act 2010 to consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective; accessible to all, and which meet different people's needs. This needs assessment has also been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (see attached).

Current Offer:

The Current service provision taking place from Crossgates Shopping Centre meets the statutory need of local residents and strengthens the Crossgates community through the ability to access resources, information and guidance that improve reading & literacy, develop skills and promote health & wellbeing in safe and welcoming community spaces that provide a platform for community participation.

The table below indicates outcomes set out by DCMS national library taskforce, and how the Leeds libraries vision, including the current Crossgates service meet those outcomes.

DCMS National Libraries Taskforce Outcomes	Council Vision/strategy	Crossgates Service Offer (temp site)	Customer impact/benefit
Improved reading and literacy	✓ Children’s and young people’s education and personal development	Reading and literacy -General and specialist book collections available on location, and via the online library catalogue (delivered for free to site)	-Improved literacy skills -Increased enjoyment of reading

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Digital inclusion, adult education, skills and employability including business start up ✓ Community capacity building and inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Readers groups -Weekly Storytime/Rhyme time sessions x 2 (additional groups delivered each week due to smaller space) -Ready, Steady Readers scheme (0-5) -Summer Reading Challenge -Northern Dreaming Gifting books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More confident reading -Speech and language development -Positive parent/child engagement
Healthier and happier lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓Health and wellbeing ✓Community capacity building and inclusion ✓Asset Based Community Development ✓Reducing poverty and inequality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Safe & welcoming community spaces -Specialist book formats -Self-help book collections - Social Groups - chess, film, friendship, knit and natter, craft group, games and jigsaws etc -Participation in diverse health promotions -Dementia Friendly Libraries -Autism Friendly -Libraries -Volunteering Opportunities -Digital Support to reduce digital exclusion -Warm spaces offer -Winter coats scheme - Money Information Centre support and info 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More connected with local community activities -Increased social networks & interaction. -More positive about physical and/or mental health -Increased self-esteem -Safe spaces for health visitors to meet patients -Reduced social isolation
Improved digital access and literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓Children's and young people's education and personal development ✓Digital inclusion, adult education, skills and employability ✓Community capacity building and inclusion ✓100% digital Leeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -X 10 public access PC free to use -Low-cost public printing -Digital drop ins -E books/E magazines/E comics/E newspapers and E audio -Digital support to help customers with any enquiry -Tablet lending -Access to a wide range of online information resources and tutorials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More confident to access information and support services online. -More motivated & confident to learn or look for work. Engaged with technology
Greater prosperity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Education and personal development ✓Digital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Employment and skills support -Access to BIPC support – business start up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More motivated & confident to learn or look for work. -More

		inclusion, adult education, skills and employability ✓ Business start up	-Access to job shop offer – light touch, voluntary employment support	likely to volunteer. More likely to gain employment. -More confident to access information and support services online.
Cultural and creative enrichment		✓Children’s and young people and families education and personal development ✓Health and wellbeing	-Creative writing groups - Author and poet talks/events -exhibitions -summer reading challenge -Leeds book awards Workshops/events/activities	-More connected with local community activities -Increased social networks & interaction -More motivated & confident to learn or look for work -More likely to volunteer
People achieve their full potential, and stronger more resilient communities		✓Digital inclusion, adult education, skills and Employability ✓Reducing poverty and inequality ✓integrated Community Hub offer	-Food bank vouchers -Signpost customers to partner and council services e.g. Money Buddies, C.A.B and Welfare Rights, housing, social care. -Scan documents in support of applications such as Blue Badge, Council Tax support, Disabled bus pass, Leeds Homes and Housing benefit. -Light touch digital support helping customers online complete Blue Badge applications, Council Tax support and Leeds Homes online applications	-As above, including supporting customers to be more resilient. -Support around poverty and inequality

Data Analysis:

Library Use

The library service in the Crossgates area of Leeds is well used by the local community. Over a 12-month period (Sept 2022 to Aug 2023) Crossgates Library was the 14th busiest community library for book issues out of 37 across the city - compared to being 13th busiest for the same period in 2018/19.

COVID Recovery rate

For Community based libraries and combined community hubs/library sites, Crossgates Library has recovered well from the impacts of the COVID epidemic on library use. The average level of book borrowing for community-based sites is 77% of pre-COVID levels and Crossgates Library has achieved 78%. Benefitting from a shopping centre location this library remains in the top 15 book issuing libraries in Leeds.

Similarly, Crossgates Library has recovered 78% of its pre-COVID public PC use, compared to 53% across other community-based library and community hub/library sites in Leeds.

Book Borrowing

Across users of all ages, book borrowing is evenly split across Monday to Saturday, with Saturday being a little busier (approx. 10% busier). However, for customers aged 16 and under the Saturdays are approximately 50% busier than any other day of the week.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data

A review of library customers borrowing books during the 12 months to August 2023 reveals that there were 42,428 Leeds residents that borrowed books across 37 library sites. Of this figure, 7,002 residents across the city borrowed a book and was resident in some of the city's most deprived neighbourhoods, impacting 17% of all residents that had borrowed a book from a Leeds library.

Looking solely at Leeds residents that had borrowed a book from Cross Gates Library, it can be seen that 2,200 residents visited Cross Gates Library to borrow a book and 467 of these residents were from a deprived neighbourhood impacting 21% of residents that visit Cross Gates – which is above the city rate of 17%.

When the data for residents living in the 10% most deprived areas of Leeds is further reviewed for Cross Gates Library, it can be seen that for the 467 Library Book Customers of all ages and those under 16, borrowing is evenly split across Monday to Saturday.

Membership

In the past 12 months to January 2024 Crossgates Library was the 8th busiest community site for new customers joining the Library Service. Between March 2022 and Feb 2023, the site was the 4th highest. Between March 2021 and Feb 2022, it was ranked 15th.

Feedback / Concerns Raised by Local Residents

A number of issues have been raised by Members of the public, some of whom are unhappy about the relocation of the Crossgates library service from the Farm Rd site. The below sets out those concerns, and the associated mitigations.

Issue Raised	Mitigation
The library provision is open to the wider shopping centre which makes it unsafe for younger children to browse the books on her own	<p>The shopping centre is a very safe space, and there have been no issues relating to safeguarding whilst operating from this location. Younger children should also be supervised by their parents at all times whichever community hub or library they visit.</p> <p>Proposed further re development of the shopping centre location will provide an enclosed childrens Library area (a glass</p>

	front) making the site less open to the main shopping concourse
There are not many free places left to use	The library will remain a free to use space as that is a statutory requirement
There is nowhere to sit quietly and read, or to keep warm and have some company	<p>The Library space currently operates as a warm space – providing free hot drinks, and a space to relax.</p> <p>The permanent location for the Crossgates Library provision will review what space is needed to support reading/work etc based on current use and customer feedback.</p>
There used to be space for exhibitions and display but there isn't any now	<p>LCC will review current usage / customer feedback and adjust the current offer to support how the community needs will shape the local library provision.</p> <p>It is anticipated this will provide better space for displays/exhibits</p>
The story and rhyme time groups used to be better in the old building as there was more space, there is no room to move any more	The space for these sessions is smaller in the shopping centre location, however LCC have increased the number of sessions delivered to ensure there are more opportunities for families to access.
There used to be low cost printing available and there isn't any more	There is the same low cost printing available at the shopping centre location
The library isnt open late any more, it has to close when the shopping centre does at 6pm	<p>In the vast majority of community based sites across the city there is now only one later night option – which is Wed until 7pm typically. Currently the late night at the shopping centre location is Wed until 6pm in line with when the centre closes. This equates to one hour per week less than other sites (other than the few largest locations e.g. Central Library, Compton Centre)</p> <p>Nearby sites with a late night option are:</p> <p>Seacroft community hub & Library, 1 Seacroft Avenue, Deacon House, Leeds, LS14 6JD Late night Wednesday till 7pm</p>

	<p>The Compton Centre community Hub & Library, Harehills Lane, Leeds, LS9 7BG. Late nights, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday till 7pm.</p> <p>Halton Library, 273 Selby Rd, Halton, Leeds LS15 7JR, late night Wednesday till 7pm.</p>
<p>The choice of books is smaller now and there is not much to browse from any more</p>	<p>Whilst the book stock that we had in place in the old library site was larger, a significant amount of this stock did not issue (was not taken out by the public). The majority of the stock we have in place at the shopping centre issues well (see data section above), and we work hard to refresh that regularly so there is still good choice available. We also have the online library catalogue which allows any member to order any title and have it delivered to site for free. This allows access to in excess of 1,000,000 books</p>
<p>I was looking forward to the library being a 'one stop' shop</p>	<p>LCC will add 'One Stop' centre facilities to the existing Library offer in order to develop a Community Hub in Crossgates. The design of this will be supported by customer feedback.</p>

Summary:

This Needs Assessment has shown the current Leeds City Council library provision located within the Crossgates Shopping Centre meets all the required statutory obligations. The library offer is both comprehensive and well accessed by residents, and the feedback does not identify any areas of unmet need. However, further assessment of the feedback offered by users of the service, indicates development should be considered to support an expansion of the existing library offer to include the services found in 'Community Hubs' across the City.

A review of alternative accommodation within the immediate Crossgates area has not identified any existing LCC assets suitable to support the library service. Condition reports of the Farm Rd site in which the library operated from has identified significant backlog maintenance pressures. Substantial investment would be needed to meet modern standards in terms of compliance and the aspirations of the Community Hub & Libraries Service. The current budgets available within the existing Community Hub Development programme is well below the level of funding required to redevelop the Farm Rd site to support a financially sustainable service.

The recommendation of this report is to: negotiate and enter into an extended lease for appropriate space within the Crossgates Shopping Centre. Also, further expand the existing library provision to support the development of services found within Community Hubs across the city of Leeds.