Sheffield City Council

Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Lynne Richardson, Business Manager, Libraries, Archives and Information Services

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Report of:	*Ajman Ali, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services*
Report to:	*Communities, Parks and Leisure*
Date of Decision:	*29 January 2024*
Subject:	*Continued support for Volunteer Run Libraries 2024 -2026*

Type of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken	Initial		Full	x

Insert EIA reference number and attach EIA : 2519

Has appropriate consultation/engagement taken place?	Yes	x	No	
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes		No	x

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes		No	x

If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-

*"The (**report/appendix**) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (**insert relevant paragraph number**) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."*

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to seek Committee's approval for proposals to support libraries in the city for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2026.

The report seeks approval to:
- establish a fund of £135,700 in 2024/2025, from which grant awards will be distributed to Associate Libraries and do the same again in 2025/2026; and

- Provide a package of support for both Associate and Co-delivered libraries as set out in this report on the basis that

Together, the grant and support package will be £209,000 for each of the two years.

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> **Recommendations:**
>
> It is recommended that the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee:
>
> a) Approves the council distributing a grant fund of £135,700 per year to Associate Libraries to assist with their continued sustainability for the period 1st April 2024 until 31st March 2026, subject to relevant agreements and criteria being satisfied.
>
> b) Approves support for Associate and Co-delivered libraries from the Libraries, Archives and Information Service and other Council services continuing until 31 March 2026, as set out in this report.

Background Papers:

'The Future of Sheffield's Library Services', Cabinet Paper February 2014

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed.	Finance: Adrian Hart
		Legal: Marcia McFarlane
		Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton
		Climate: Kathryn Warrington
	Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.	
2	**SLB member who approved submission:**	*Ajman Ali, Executive Director – Neighbourhood Services*
3	**Committee Chair consulted:**	*Richard Williams, Chair of Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee*
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for	

submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
Lead Officer Name: *Hilary Coulson*	**Job Title: Head of Libraries, Archives & Information Service**
Date: *17th January 2024*	

1.   PROPOSAL

1.1   Introduction

1.1.1   The proposal in this report is to continue the package of support for eleven Associate Libraries in the city for the next two years. This support has given confidence and stability to volunteers, enabling their libraries to deliver a range of quality services to their communities, including Welcome Spaces. Volunteer run libraries are resuming their fundraising activities following the pandemic, but now face extra demands because of high energy costs. The current budget for this package is £209k per year; this includes grant fund of £135k per year.

1.1.2   In February 2014, the Council's Cabinet approved recommendations in the report 'The Future of Sheffield's Library Services'; members wanted the Council to keep as many libraries open as possible beyond the statutory service. This led to the current arrangement where:

(a) statutory services are delivered by Council staff and those services operate from the Central Library, eleven Community Hub Libraries and the Home Library Service); and

(b) non-statutory services being operated by volunteer-led organisations. These consist of five **Co-delivered Libraries** whose running costs for the premises, running costs for their library services, and materials are funded by the Council; and eleven **Associate Libraries** that receive support of a grant from the Council.

1.2   Key Challenges

1.2.1   Since 2014 the Council has provided grant funding and support packages that help to avoid closure of volunteer operated libraries. The intention has always been that Associate Libraries would develop their financial sustainability to invest in their buildings and further develop the services they offer their local communities.

1.2.2   Also, Since 2014, good progress has been made with the introduction of new and innovative ways to fundraise. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent rise in cost of living, has stifled this progress. The increasing cost of

utilities continues to be a challenge for libraries that also provide safe, welcome, and warm spaces for communities to visit.

1.2.3   This report does not propose change to the model for supporting five Co-delivered Libraries; however there needs to be a future review of this approach given that ten years have passed since the Council started this approach in 2014.

1.3   **Resources & Support funding that uses for the budget of £209k**

1.3.1   Provision of resources below, will be subject to each grant recipient entering individual grant agreement with the council. The agreement will govern payment of the grant and other terms and conditions. There will also be a Memorandum of Understanding that details the support package.

1.3.2   Grant funding:
         In each of the two years 2024/2025 and 2025/26 a grant of £135,700 (which will not be offered on a competitive basis), will be awarded to Associate Library groups operating libraries, these are set out 1.3.3. below. Current grant agreement terms will be reviewed, updated and given to each current recipient who fulfils the terms of their current agreements.

1.3.3   Ecclesfield Library
         Frecheville Library
         Greenhill Library
         Gleadless Library
         Jordanthorpe Library
         Newfield Green Library
         Stannington library
         Totley Library
         Tinsley Library
         Upperthorpe Library
         Walkley Library

1.3.4   Operational support provided by the Council.

         There is an operational cost to the Sheffield Library Services (Library Service) supporting the Associate libraries to remain on the Library Management System and part of the single Sheffield catalogue of books and materials, this has been costed at £73,300 and includes:

         - Library Volunteer Network Officer and other staff who support the development and sustainability of the volunteer run libraries through advice, guidance, and hands on support in relation to governance, policy development, training, I.T., stock management, information governance and library standards.

- Van deliveries for reserved books and other materials.

- Licences for relevant software related to the Peoples Network.

1.4 Support for Associate & Co-delivered Libraries from within existing resources

The Council's support for Associate and Co-delivered libraries for financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26 should continue. This is in addition to the support and resources described above and is necessary to ensure compliance (for example statutory compliance in relation to the building and information compliance in relation to data), co-ordination (for example book-stock circulation) and compatibility (for example IT compatibility).

1.4.1 <u>Running costs and resources for Co-delivered Libraries</u>

As set out in the 2014 cabinet report "The Future of Sheffield's Library Services", five Co-delivered Libraries will continue to benefit from all the services and resources of a Council-run Community Hub Library, but without the staffing.

1.4.2 <u>Website</u>

The Library Service will continue to include information on volunteer run libraries on the Council webpages. This will include social media such as the Library Service Blog, Facebook and Twitter, with links to the 'Volunteer Libraries in Sheffield webpage' and other appropriate webpage links.

1.4.3 <u>Training</u>

Volunteers will continue to be offered training on the Library Management System by the Library Service and other Council Services. Training sessions and standards will include data protection and safeguarding processes. Council-run Community Hub libraries may be offered as a free venue for Volunteer Library groups to undertake training organised by the Library Service.

1.4.4 <u>I.T. assistance</u>

Library Service staff will support the volunteer-led libraries with technical queries relating to the operation of the Library Management System and The Peoples Network. Where appropriate volunteers will be able to contact the IT helpdesk directly to resolve IT issues.

1.4.5 <u>Compliance</u>

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The Council's Library Service and other relevant Services will work with and support the volunteer-led libraries to enable them to comply with their legal obligations.

Benefits and Risks of the preferred option

1.5

Benefits:

1.5.1
- A period of continued stability as our communities recover post pandemic and endure the rise in cost of living.
- Maintain delivery standards across volunteer libraries.
- Improved community cohesion due to stable service provision and volunteering opportunities.
- Volunteering opportunities will support community mental health and wellbeing, which has been exasperated by the pandemic and cost of living crisis.
- Improved community empowerment through participation and strong community links of the volunteer libraries.
- Continue to develop the independence and sustainability of the volunteer run libraries.

1.5.2
Risks:

- Due to changes in volunteering levels, income generation opportunities and external funding, some volunteer libraries may struggle to continue operation.
- Cost pressures are increasing, particularly utilities which could increase up to 80 percent, the grant was originally set at 2013/2014 level running costs and has since been reduced by 30 percent, therefore the grant level may not be sufficient.
- If there is a budget reduction in future years for the Libraries and Archives Service, it may not be affordable for the service to continue to pay for all of the Co-delivered libraries from its core budget.

2 HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

2.1 Communities and Neighbourhoods

A library serves as a cultural hub in a community providing activities, events and information. Volunteer run libraries are adept at providing for community needs, able to respond quickly to new developments and changing requirements. They also provide a feeling of ownership to a community, involving them in what it delivers, and the benefits of the resource are recycled back into the community.

Community libraries whether Council or Volunteer-run, provide a welcome and safe place in the community which anyone can access, and membership is not required. In recognition of this, all Volunteer libraries and Council Libraries are part of Sheffield Safer Places and provide

- Police surgeries
- Access to council services via the Peoples Network computers.
- Welcome spaces

Education, Health and Care

2.2

Libraries provide centres of learning for local communities and volunteer libraries offer a wide range of volunteer positions available. It has been shown that volunteering is of significant benefit to people's health and wellbeing, improving mental well-being, self-rated health and life satisfaction. A survey by the British Household Panel Survey found higher well-being in those who volunteer 'frequently' compared with those who have never volunteered; and an association has been documented between volunteering and a reduction in mortality[i], reduced pain, and muscular strength.

All volunteer libraries provide educational activities for a wide range of age groups including families with young children and babies and early engagement with reading can significantly improve young people's educational outcomes.

Libraries also provide a safe environment for carers, that are both free and accessible to get information, signpost to support services and meet people.

Economy and Development

2.3

England's public libraries generate value of at least £3.4 billion each year, according to recent analysis (July 2023) by economists from the University of East Anglia (UEA). Their analysis extrapolated the findings to all of England's 3,000 libraries, giving a national total of £3.4 billion. Using Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) spending data for the year 2021/22, this represents a return on investment of at least six times cost.
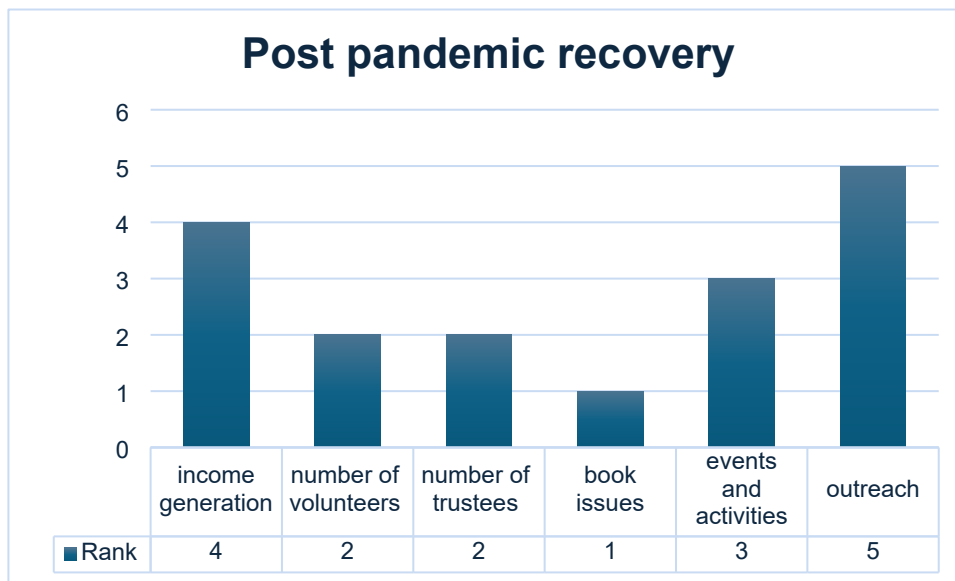
3.   HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

3.1   Consultation Overview 2023

In 2023 the Library Service sent a survey to complete by the volunteer-run libraries, which focused on 3 key areas:

- Fundraising activity
- Key challenges for the volunteer run libraries
- Support needed

Each set of questions was designed to identify the level and type of support needed to ensure the volunteer run libraries are viable and sustainable and that we understood the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic and the cost of living crisis. The graph below shows the volunteer run libraries haven't fully recovered from the Pandemic, with book issuing and number of volunteers

being amongst their biggest challenges. Rank 5 indicates fully recovered, 1 indicates least recovered.

Post pandemic recovery

	income generation	number of volunteers	number of trustees	book issues	events and activities	outreach
■ Rank	4	2	2	1	3	5

Source: Survey of Volunteer run Libraries 2023/2024, SLAIS.

In general, the results of the survey show the model of operation and the level and type of support provided to Associate and Co-delivered libraries continues to work effectively. The survey looked at the areas of support provided by SCC and asked how essential is this. The table below shows the areas of support the volunteer run libraries said were most essential (Note: top 5 ranked out of 17 areas of support).

Rank 1 (Top concern)	Training for management committee
Rank 2	IT equipment and Public Network computer service
	Provision of copiers and printers
Rank 3	Network meetings
	Support with promotion
Rank 4	Self-service kiosks
Rank 5 of 17	Advice on statutory compliance/building maintenance

Fundraising activity throughout most of 2023 has been improving following the standstill caused by the Pandemic. However new challenges have been arising, potentially a direct cause of the cost of living increases, limiting the number of people who are able to volunteer. However, for some volunteers, the library is a refuge for the day and respite from heating charges for their home.

The top concern regarding the financial challenges is the availability of grants and the cost of energy.

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Rank 1 (Top concern)	Availability of grant funding
Rank 2	Energy/Utility Costs
Rank 3	Impact of Cost of Living Crisis
Rank 4	Fundraising knowledge and skill
Rank 5	Lack of trustees
	Building/Maintenance Costs
Rank 6	Lack of volunteers

Source: Survey of Volunteer run Libraries 2023/2024, SLAIS

The grant value was based on the running costs of the volunteer run libraries in 2013/2014 before the handover, and the grant level was reduced by twenty percent over 3 years between 2018 and 2020. With increasing fuel and running costs, the level of the grant is unlikely to cover all the running costs for 2024/2025 and would need to be supplemented by reserves or by additional fundraising. However, it was always anticipated the volunteer run libraries would be required to do additional fundraising to improve their sustainability and develop their service offer.   The significant increases in energy and utility costs, means they need to raise more income to cover costs. Stannington Libraries energy costs in 2021/2022 was 25% the value of the grant they received from SCC. In 2022/23 energy costs were 84% of the grant value.

4.   **RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

4.1   Equality of Opportunity Implications

4.1.1   As a Public Authority we need to take into account the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

4.1.2   An Equality Impact Assessment has measured the impact of the proposal on the protected characteristics within the Equality Act, and where possible mitigations will be put in place.

4.1.3   The continuation of the grant and support package will help to keep all libraries in Sheffield open and maintain a range of services and support for the citizens of Sheffield, including people with protected characteristics. Therefore, the proposal maintains an overall positive impact, and there would be an overall negative impact if the proposal was rejected.

4.2   Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1   The Council continues to face significant financial challenges and must make difficult decisions about services that the people of Sheffield care deeply about.

4.2.2   The Library Service has supported Associate and Co-delivered libraries within its existing budget and resources as far as this has been possible. The support proposed by the Library Service with existing resources is

outlined in section 1.3. Budget reductions for the Library Service make it increasingly difficult to fulfil all the support described for Associate and Co-delivered Libraries. This level of support the council provides will need to be reviewed in future years.

4.2.3   The grant of £209,000 per year for 2024/25 & 2025/26 is in the libraries service budget and therefore will be contained within existing resources.

4.3   Legal Implications

4.3.1   The Council has a general statutory duty under section 7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to its constituents. This duty includes the requirement to:

- Keep adequate stocks of books, records, films etc for borrowing or referencing purposes; and
- Encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library services.

4.3.2   Section 9 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, allows the Council to make contributions towards the expenses of any other person providing library facilities for members of the public; this allows the council to distribute funds as proposed in the report.

4.3.3   The council may rely on the duty and power set out above to provide support and grant funding to these libraries.

4.3.4   The proposed distribution of funds and support to volunteer-led, are unlikely to constitute "financial assistance to 'an enterprise'" under the Subsidy Control Act 2022, and therefore not likely to be a subsidy. Nonetheless subsidy control implications must be considered and reviewed in each year of the award.

4.4   Climate Implications

4.4.1   This decision to continue the funding for volunteer libraries will mean that all the climate impacts of running these services, both positive and negative, will continue. Further assessment on the contribution Volunteer Run Libraries to reduce the climate impact may include:

- The continued use of the buildings as a community asset, review of condition and potential for retrofit and improvement of building performance.
- The impact of service location on transport emissions, including consideration of demand reduction, decarbonisation and active travel;
- The potential for Volunteer-run Libraries to benefit from the forthcoming Local Renewable Energy on Community and Council Buildings programme, as well as the importance of improving the energy efficiency of activities which use energy.

- How libraries could contribute to the development of the green economy, including supporting green jobs and skills.
- What role libraries could play in influencing the conversation on climate change action, working with stakeholders to increase positive climate action in the city.
- Whether or not opportunities exist to improve the sustainable consumption of resources, to ensure libraries are minimising resource use and production of waste.
- Identifying any contributions libraries can make towards increasing biodiversity, carbon storage capacity and flood management through sustainable use of land.
- The contribution libraries can make to a just and fair transition to a low carbon world, recognising that we do not all contribute equally to climate-change and we will not all be impacted equally by its effects.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Option 2 – Removal of all grant and funded support

This option provides no funding for the Associate libraries and removes all support packages beyond which can be provided at no cost to the Council.

Strength of this option

5.1.1

- This option would save £209k per year.

Weaknesses of this options

5.1.2

- Consultation with the volunteer run libraries shows a slip in their financial sustainability due to the Pandemic, and therefore sole reliance on fundraising and reserves is unlikely to be a sustainable option.
- A high probability that a number of libraries would close.
- Volunteer-run libraries may lose volunteers and struggle to recruit more due to a loss of stability and confidence of Council support.
- Any library closures would have a negative impact on the health, well-being and prosperity of the communities where libraries closed.

Option 3 – Maintenance of grant, but removal of other funded support

5.2

In this option the Associate libraries would still receive a grant, but the support package would be reduced or cut altogether. This means they would not have access to any Council library book stock and resources, the Library Management System/I.T, and the Peoples' Network (computer access) or any Council staff support.

Strengths of this options

5.2.1
- This option would save the Council £62k per year.
- The financial sustainability of the volunteer libraries would be maintained.

Weaknesses of this option

5.2.1
- The quality of the service would significantly reduce as they would not have access to the city-wide book stock and resources and would need to buy significant amounts of new books to retain a viable library service.
- This option would impact on all communities in Sheffield as currently books can be collected and returned to any of the 28 libraries in Sheffield which would no longer be possible as Associate Libraries would no longer have access to the city-wide catalogue.
- Without guidance and support from Council staff, the quality of the library offer is likely to reduce – i.e. reduced access to training, governance support, ensuring compliance with data protection, equalities/

5.3 **Option 4 – 10% reduction in grant and support**

This option would be to continue with the grant and the support package, but with a ten percent reduction on the grant.

5.3.1 Strengths of this option

- This option would save the Council £13,570 per year

5.3.2 Weaknesses of this option

- A ten percent reduction in grant, plus the weak financial position of the libraries due to the Pandemic, plus rising energy costs, could mean some libraries can no longer cover their basic running costs.

6. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The current arrangements for Associate and Co-delivered libraries expires on 31st March 2024.
- Continued support will increase the likelihood of all volunteer run libraries remaining open and vibrant for the period 01 April 2024 to 31 March 2026.
- Continued support for Associate libraries will give added confidence to trustees and volunteers, at a point they are taking on longer-term and new lease responsibilities.

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- Supporting the volunteer run libraries to remain on the Library Management System means that all Sheffield library members can access any library in Sheffield using a single, city-wide library card.
- Continued support will provide a period of financial stability and growth that will attract more volunteers and trustees and give them additional time to build capacity and develop external funding opportunities.
- The proposal will ensure the standards and controls relating to the operation of the Council's Library Management System by volunteer libraries are maintained.

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