

Portfolio Holder Decision

Libraries LIF round 3 funding bid

Portfolio Holder	Portfolio Holder for Customer & Transformation
Date of decision	14th December 2023
	Signed

1. Decision taken

- 1.1 The Portfolio Holder for Customer & Transformation approves the submission of an application by Warwickshire Libraries to the Arts Council's Libraries Improvement Fund totalling £373,000 over 3 years to support the purchase and implementation of a Sensory Mobile Library Service.

2. Reasons for decisions

- 2.1 The funding bid will enable the library service to extend its sensory offer, by providing a fully equipped, accessible electric vehicle with an immersive and interactive sensory room environment for children, young people (CYP) and adults, with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, dementia, and other health related conditions.
- 2.2 The vehicle will provide parents and carers of children and adults with neurodiverse issues an easier and appropriate means of accessing the library and its services, by reaching communities outside the existing library network and extending the library offer as a free, inclusive, welcoming, safe, trusted space. In addition, the mobile library will be able to travel to areas where the community does not traditionally engage with local services, be that for financial or societal reasons.
- 2.3 The vehicle will engage children and young adults with creativity and imagination and stimulate sight, hearing, touch, and smell, building confidence, social and literary skills.
- 2.4 The service will work in partnership with specialist services such as SEND and EQUIP as well as parents' groups, utilising their expertise and experience to develop the sensory service, including the layout and functions of the mobile library, specialist equipment as well as a bespoke book collection.

- 2.5 The vehicle will host an extensive library of sensory equipment to enable parents/ carers to test out sensory equipment specifically for their child on a 'try before you buy' basis. There will be a selection of specialist books, directed towards supporting parent/carers of neurodiverse children and a collection of books which will appeal to the children which can be borrowed.
- 2.6 As well as the basic experience of using the sensory equipment on the vehicle, the service will work with specialist stakeholders to develop a range of sessions which can be offered to meet the differing needs of children with neurodiverse challenges. These sessions will be built around stories and activities.
- 2.7 There is an opportunity to generate income through either hiring the vehicle at a nominal charge for fetes or letting the vehicle commercially for other activities and events.
- 2.8 If successful, the Library and Children's Service will work together to support the delivery of the programme. It is intended that the programme will be supported through volunteers. Any future maintenance cost will be supported through a reduction in the main mobile library fleet.

3. Background information

- 3.1 In April 2023, The Arts Council England (ACE) invited 'Expressions of Interest' for the third £10 million Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF). LIF welcomed applications from Library Authorities to bid for funding for innovative projects, which would extend the reach of traditional library services.
- 3.2 Warwickshire Libraries were successful in the initial submission and have consequently been invited to put in a full bid for the sensory mobile project. The conditions of the grant will expect the project to
- Invest in physical spaces, to increase libraries potential for transformation to make spaces more flexible, safer with a greater commercial potential which are more accessible and environmentally friendly.
 - Enable more community groups to use the space.
 - Increase numbers of users accessing collections and services
 - Connect libraries to communities and increase use by a greater diversity of users.
 - Support the future-proofing of modern libraries to meet evolving needs and patterns of use.
 - Improve user satisfaction and needs.
 - Improve perception of the value and role of libraries by customers, partners, and communities.
 - Increase access to library collections and community groups using library spaces.
 - Increase collaboration with a wider range of local partners.
 - Extend available hours.

- 3.3 If successful, the library service will create a steering group to deliver and oversee the project. The steering group will include specialists and senior managers from the library service, SEND and Children & Families Team, alongside Equip, SENSE and parents & carers.
- 3.4 Timescales
- July 2023 - Senior library staff attended application and guidance briefings.
 - August 2023 – Senior Library staff meet with the ACE representative to outline the project and ascertain viability.
 - January 2024 – Confirm Application to proceed (expression of interest already submitted)
 - March 2024 - Funding decisions to be shared with applicants.
- 3.5 Our plan for the project aims to:
- provide a sensory mobile library with an immersive sensory space, books & equipment for those with SEN/disabilities will travel to sites across Warwickshire, including priority places, building social & literary skills, and stimulating senses.
 - promote libraries as places for people to access those resources which are relevant to them.
 - create new and exciting opportunities for the children of Warwickshire to learn and develop their full potential.
- 3.6 The Discovery Den sensory mobile library will assist Warwickshire Library and Information Service to contribute to the Council's 'levelling up' agenda and support the Council's work with children and families across the county.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The proposal is to submit an application to ACE for up to £373,000 over a 3-year period. If granted the funding will support the purchase and implementation of the vehicle and assets required to operate the sensory mobile library. The Council will recruit a team of volunteer drivers for the vehicle and general running costs will be covered after year 3 by the planned reduction in Mobile Library Vehicles from 3 to 2. In Years 1-3 the funding from LIF will cover the costs.
- 4.2 The Council is required to provide a funding contribution of £48.5k as a condition of the grant. This funding is available from the Mobile Library Planning Gain allocation (Section 106 funding), with a contribution also coming from the National Portfolio Organisation (it is planned that the vehicle will attend NPO planned events).
- 4.3 The service will be required to keep accurate financial account of both income and expenditure and report regularly to the Art Council on the progress of the project, and processes are in place to meet this requirement.

5. Environmental implications

- 5.1 As the vehicle will be fully electric, there will be no emissions from the vehicle supporting the Council's Sustainable Futures strategy.
- 5.2 The vehicle will also have solar panels affixed to the roof of the vehicle enabling the vehicle to generate its own power whilst out on the road, thus reducing the amount of electricity required to operate the service.

Report Author

Ayub Khan
Head of Libraries, Heritage & Culture and
Registration

Executive Director

Rob Powell
Executive Director for Resources

Portfolio Holder

Councillor Yousef Dahmash
Portfolio Holder for Customer & Transformation

Urgent matter?

No

Confidential or exempt?

No

Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?

No

List of background papers

n/a

Members and officers consulted and informed

Portfolio Holder – Councillor Yousef Dahmash

Corporate Board

Legal – Nichola Vine, Head of Legal and Governance

Finance – Andrew Felton, Director of Finance (Deputy S151)

Equality – Delroy Madden, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team leader

Democratic Services – Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Councillors – Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Portfolio Holder for Customer & Transformation)

Local Member(s): n/a (county wide)