

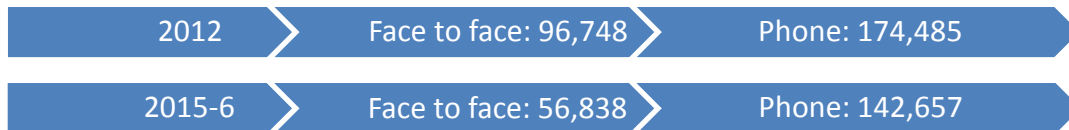
Appendix 1 - Profile of the Service and Options

1. An overview of Customer Services and the Library Service

Customer services and libraries in the market towns is supported by one front-line team, whilst in Hereford there is separate customer service centre and library reflecting the volumes and nature of enquiries. The service also operates the corporate contact centre and the venues will host a number of other services and community initiatives.

The services have seen considerable change in the last three years responding to customer trends, the increased use of digital access, and cost savings. Service remodelling has reduced the requirement for customers to contact the council in the first place and instigated self-serve. Service changes have included:

- Automated calls to manage queries and relevant services taking responsibility for their telephone contact
- Increased on-line payments and services
- Self-serve library kiosk at Hereford Library and each market town site
- Introduction of non-cash payments for the majority of transactions
- Job Centre+ at Ross Library
- Transfer of Leintwardine, Colwall and Weobley as community libraries
- Reduced opening hours at each of the centres
- 50% reduction in staffing
- Opening of combined community and service centre at Masters House in Ledbury
- Improved use of social media and the web to communicate
- Free wifi use at centres
- Kington Centre as a pilot of health and well being hub.



1.1 The Library Service

Despite the central library being closed there were over 500,845 visits to the libraries in the county in 2015-16. In Herefordshire over 23% of local residents are active library members (have had a library transaction within the last two years). In 2015 over 18% of people in the county had at least one item on loan.



The Schools Library Service provides books and project material to over 50 primary schools that purchase the service. The Delivered Library Service is also a targeted service that supplies books and talking books to people who are housebound and unable to access a library. The service delivers to around 160 individuals and 30 residential homes and is often described as a lifeline for people who are at risk of feeling isolated and lonely.

The County Library Service manages all the systems and stock services to support the frontline libraries. The service also operates the Reading Group scheme for nearly 70 groups, library services for children and young people, local studies, digitisation projects, bibliotherapy, work with special groups, refurbishment projects, funding bids, community outreach and partnership schemes, reader development campaigns, support and training for community libraries, and work with library Friends groups. The service also supports the rural book scheme based in community facilities such as community shops and parish halls.

1.2 Customer Services

Customer services provides the corporate phone contact and face to face contact in Hereford and the market towns. The tables below summarise the level of contact for 2015/6. In addition to the figures below there is an additional 10,261 emails the service deals with.

Phone contact is predominately received at Hereford customer service centre. Though switchboard and INFO calls are high volume, they are also quick response. Council Tax is both high volume and lengthy queries, with peak times (March / April) when the bills are sent to every premise in the county and in June when reminders are distributed. The contact centres work best through good interaction between services and compatible technologies. Average waiting time for calls to be answered varies between services and months, but general average of 3 minute for response.

Face to Face / payment transactions (Hereford)	
Council Tax	4,247
Council Tax Support	1,759
Business Rates	176
Housing Benefits	9,496
Planning	4,079
Reception	13,017
Homepoint	4,791
Housing Solutions	2,492
Total Face to Face	40,057
Payments	22,842

For face-to-face, reception services are high volume but with low transaction which directs people to web use, services or quick resolution (e.g. issuing a form). Council tax is high volume throughout the year as has an impact on all household, though high level of support at Hereford is for Housing Benefit queries.

For the market towns customer service the volume of queries is significantly less, with high volume of payments, general queries and benefit advice / support.

Phone transactions (Hereford)	
Care Act	30
Council Tax	41,454
ECA (exceptional circumstances award)	890
FIS (family information service)	254
INFO	19,518
Planning	8,026
Switchboard	58,987
Waste Bulky	2,829
Waste General	10,610
Market town calls	59
	142,657

Customer Service Centres	Face to Face enquiries	Payments	Benefits and council tax queries %
Leominster	6,764	4,721	39
Ross-on-Wye	5,529	2,378	39
Ledbury	2,422	2,683	20
Kington	478	1,823	15
Bromyard	1,588	1,609	15
totals	16,781	13,214	

1.3 Hereford Library

Hereford Library is currently closed due to finding asbestos in the building when preparation for improvement works took place to accommodate WISH (Wellbeing Information and Signposting for Herefordshire). To compensate, additional hours have been allocated to Belmont library and a temporary library provided at Hereford Town Hall. Cabinet in May 2016 agreed to invest in reoccupying the Library at Broad Street with Hereford Library Users Group working on a long term development plan for the site.

Hereford Library is the key centre for reference material, and will in usual circumstances see the highest use, reflective of the higher population in Hereford and that people will come to the library from different parts of the county as part of a wider visit to the city. There are 5.95 FTE Library Assistants and one FTE supervisor who provide the staffing for both Hereford and Belmont. Hereford will have two self-service kiosks when reopened.

Opening hours	Visitors 2012/3	Visitors 2014/5	Visitors 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	PC hours per year	Visits per hour	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
37	227,240	184,434	96,692	101,493	7,824	50	237,725	1.29*

*based on usual year of 2014/15

1.4 Belmont Library

The library at Belmont is based at the community centre owned and operated by the South Wye Community Association, on the southern edge of Hereford City in the Belmont Rural ward. It serves a catchment from the immediate area, as well as people from Hereford City and those coming into Hereford from the Abergavenny Road. The local authority pays a rent to occupy the space and sustaining the service has been supported by grants from Hereford City Council and Belmont Rural Parish Council. The association is keen to provide a range of other services to people using the site. Staffing is provided by the local authority overseen by the supervisor in Hereford. Due to the current closure of Hereford Library, Belmont is offering increased opening hours of 38 per week. The usual number of hours would be 22.5. Belmont has one self-service kiosk that accounts for approximately 20% of stock issues.

Opening hours	Visitors 2012/3	Visitors 2014/5	Visitors 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	PC hours per year	Visits per hour	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
38	50,916	22,527	34,697	45,877	1,031	22	29,239	1.30*

*based on usual year of 2014/15

1.5 Market Town Centres

All of the market town sites are a combined library and customer service centre. The staff are trained in Making Every Contact Count (MECC) and will deal with a range of queries and referrals. Since 2013 the staffing at the centre has reduced and there has been a corresponding reduction in opening hours combined with people being able to access services on-line. WISH have a “pop-up” service and healthy lifestyles will use the centres as key community facilities, considered “safe” and neutral venues.

There are 5 FTE each at Ross and Leominster, 3.5 FTEs in Ledbury, and 1 FTE for Bromyard. There are 2 supervisors – one for the north (Leominster and Bromyard) and one for the south (Ledbury, Ross and supporting the community library in Colwall). There is one self-service kiosk in each of the market town sites.

1.6 Ross Library and Customer Service Centre

A combined customer service and library function at one site along with Job-Centre+ that pays a contribution in rent.

Opening hours	Library visits 2012/3	Library visits 2014/5	Library visits 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	Visits per hour	PC hrs per year	Customer services face to face	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
35.5	115,219	116,789	103,683	97,997	56	6,991	5,529	185,748	1.79

1.7 Leominster Library and Customer Service Centre

A combined customer service and library function at one site.

Opening hours	Library visits 2012/3	Library Visits 2014/5	Library Visits 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	Visits per hour	PC hrs per year	Customer services face to face	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
35.5	105,283	109,082	102,211	109,912	55	8,424	6,764	219,737	2.14

1.8 Ledbury Library and Customer Service Centre

A combined customer service and library function at one site, along with a range of other local authority and community functions. The library was relocated with customer services in 2015 as a major refurbishment and investment in the Masters House. The visitor numbers (which is counted for the library area) has increased considerably since the new building was opened which has won a number of awards with Herefordshire Council as the client (including RIBA best building for the West Midlands). The number of loans has increased but not as significantly as visitors. The staff in Ledbury provide the “front of house” duties for the building with the integrated site designed to create efficiencies reflected in the low cost per head.

Opening hours	Library visits 2012/3	Library visits 2014/5	Library visits 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	Visits per hour	PC hrs per year	Customer Services face to face	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
32.5	72,583	48,308	110,450	57,545	65	3,126	2,422	58,120	0.53

1.9 Bromyard Centre

The library and customer service centre is in a shared facility with Halo who provide a range of leisure activities. The library relocated within the site earlier in the year and this has supported a reduction in facility charges. The number of visitors reflects the proportion of users of the site to the library service.

A reduction in use over the last year.

Opening hours	Library visits 2012/3	Library visits 2014/5	Library visits 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	Visits per hour	PC hrs per year	Customer services face to face	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
24	50,916	18,669	12,448	17,560	9	1,459	1,588	46,854	3.76

1.10 Kington Centre

In March 2014 Cabinet agreed to the pilot of a Well-Being Centre at the Kington Centre, which has been operational since May 2015, and has funding via Public Health until March 2017. Funding is not available beyond that date.

PC use is high in comparison to other centres for its size, though visitor numbers have decreased despite introduction of the well-being centre.

Opening hours	Library visits 2012/3	Library visits 2014/5	Library visits 2015/6	Loans 2015/6	Visits per hour	PC hrs per year	Customer services face to face	Cost per year £	Cost per head £
18	36,227	22,085	20,769	17,037	22	3,302	478	18,569	0.89
With Public Health funding								118,569	5.71

1.11 Community Libraries

A network of community libraries operate across the county. They are all financed and operated differently by the community, with the county library service providing support, advice and training for volunteers; financially supporting the public access PCs; manage the book stock; and run campaigns at the sites such as the summer reading challenge. In Colwall the parish council raised the precept for the cost of a paid member of staff from customer services to cover some of the opening hours working in conjunction with volunteers.

Library	Hours open per week	Visits per year	Loans per year	Items reserved per year	No. of public computers	Computer sessions per year	Computer hours per year
Colwall	15.5	11,138	13,241	1,482	5	1,324	1,194
Leintwardine	9.5	2,769	5,183	563	1	77	49
Weobley	6	2,491	4,454	482	3	152	355
Peterchurch	10	1,890	3,108	429	0	n/a	n/a

2. Options for Customer Services and Libraries

There are four options for meeting the savings plan for Customer Services and Libraries:

- Savings programme
- Centralised model
- Retained libraries and central service
- Enhanced service

2.1 Savings Programme (option 1)

This option is based on instigating a savings programme though retaining the current pattern of library and customer services in the different sites and related functions including support for community libraries, schools library service and delivered library service.

		Savings £000
Op1.a	Community libraries at Belmont and Bromyard – for the library to be retained at Belmont to become a community library though the local authority continues to support with book stock, core staffing, training of volunteers, public access PCs and wifi. In Bromyard for the library to be run in partnership with Halo, with a SLA to oversee staffing of the library.	27
Op1.b	Renegotiation of the Book Fund – the book fund supports the quality of stock available impacting on use. £30k has been re-negotiated as a reduction for the same stock level through a regional consortium.	30
Op1.c	Changes to Delivered Library Services / Schools Library Services – this will look at reorganising via staffing and charging care homes for visits.	50
Op1.d	Savings from county library function – reductions including staffing levels and efficiencies in the operation of the services e.g. end of loan payments for vehicles; withdrawal of postal reminders of over-due notice.	80
Op1.e	Council Tax – transfer of service for the back office to take responsibility for their calls, creating flexibility within the team to support peak demand shared across the benefit service.	53
Op1.f	Reduction in staff at Franklin House – equivalent for 2 FTEs to compensate for intended increased use of the internet to access customer services.	50
Op1.g	Kington Library – provide reinvestment to sustain the library service. The space available to hire / use by established well being groups / services that wish to continue.	-30
Op1.h	Charging, income and withdrawals - to increase a range of charging across the service, withdrawal of newspapers, and periodicals. Local fundraising (via town councils or friends groups) would have the option of reinstating some of this expenditure.	20
Op1.i	Relocation of Hereford Customer Services – savings to the service for the relocation to Blueschool House.	90
	Total	370

Risks:

- Reduction in county library service having an impact on the level of support given to community libraries and specific reading campaigns
- Council Tax being able to address the level of demand based on 2 FTE
- Community capacity to take-on operation of Belmont Library.

2.2 Centralised Service (option 2)

This option is based on the proposition outlined in the budget consultation of 2015, with all customer service and library functions operational from Hereford. The phone line would also remain, though most contact would be provided via the web. Organisations would be able to operate the libraries as community facilities covering costs with some support from the county library service.

		Savings £000
Op2.a	Libraries in Ross, Leominster, Kington, Ledbury, Belmont, Bromyard available to become community libraries with all customer services withdrawn from these centres. For those that do become community libraries central support could be provided regarding book stock and PC access.	550
Op2.b	Withdrawal of Delivered Services serving people who are housebound.	110
Op2.c	Reduction of central support – elements retained to support community libraries and schools library service.	60
Op2.d	Retain staffing level of Hereford Customer Services to deal with increase in calls, but transfer responsibility for Council Tax calls to the back office.	50
	Total	770

Risks:

- Negative impact on the health and well-being of people not being able to access service in market towns
- Demand for central customer services increases putting pressure on the call response time and face to face queries
- Risk of further isolation of the people who receive the delivered library service
- Likely judicial review as considered below the service level to be considered “a comprehensive and efficient library service” in accordance with the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.

2.3 Retained libraries and central service (option 3)

This option would be to retain the library functions in market towns and Hereford, customer services in Hereford and support for community libraries. Customer services to be withdrawn from market towns considering the low level of face to face transactions in comparison. The customer service queries are generally based on housing benefits advice and payments – payments to be supported by a paypoint scheme and opportunity to pay on-line including at each of the centres. Introduction of “Better off Model” as an on-line tool for benefits and employment, support for vulnerable and elderly clients needing help, and appointments for at least the next 12 months to aid changes to the delivery model.

		Savings £000
Op3.a	Libraries in Ross, Leominster, Ledbury maintained with the withdrawal of customer services (2 FTE from both Ross and Leominster; 1 FTE from Bromyard; and 0.5 FTE from Ledbury)	140
Op3.b	Items listed above in option 1.	370
	Total	510

Risks:

- Residents being able to access essential customer services where they are not digitally connected or cannot travel to Hereford if face to face contact is required.
- Risk as outlined in 2.1 paragraph.

2.4 Enhanced Service (option 4)

This option considers different services that could be delivered from customer service centres and libraries. This is happening more at national level within the remaining library infrastructure, and is not an uncommon feature within Herefordshire with the combined library and customer function, existing co-location with Halo, staff already trained in Making Every Contact Count (MECC), and WISH / healthy lifestyles providing services from libraries. This could be based on the early help concept to reduce the need for people to access high cost intervention services.

Libraries in Ross, Leominster, Ledbury and Kington reflective on demographic need include a “well being / early help” element, and customer services by appointment. Staff retrained to give advice and support in the following areas:

- Childcare and free places
- Debt advice and areas of support for finance
- Signposts to community well-being schemes
- Use of the venue for well-being, events and courses and classes
- Quick health checks, including blood pressure, weight and heart checks
- IT training and advocacy, and web navigation
- Volunteering opportunities

		Savings £000
2.4a	Reduction in staffing in market towns by 2FTEs based on customer services element, reduce to appointment only. The saving outline does not indicate the savings that could be achieved by other services as a result of early help.	50
2.4b	Items listed above in option 1.	370
	Total	420

Risks:

- Requirement to meet the medium term financial strategy needing to find savings across the council.
- Risk as outlined in 2.1 paragraph.

3. Longer Term Options

Customer services and libraries are going through considerable changes across the country due to changing trends, technology, needs of communities combined with priority of local government to support the safeguarding of adults and children.

The model for customer services is generally consistent across local government proactive to instigate reduced need to contact the council, a focus on people who need essential contact and all other contact transferred to on-line.

Libraries on the other hand are being delivered under varying models including consideration of who runs them and how they are run, including outsourcing and commissioned services. Very few, if any, countywide libraries operate without subsidy. However, sharing sites and costs reduces the funding required (e.g. the cost per head of running Ross is reduced due to income from DWP).

On the basis of these points there are three key areas of longer term options.

Hereford Library – Hereford Library Users Group and relevant stakeholders to progress long term future for Hereford Library through a fundraising campaign to improve the site.

Leominster Library – a shared staffing and relocation option with Halo as a build-on to the leisure centre. This would have the benefit of an integrated community venue. Or option of sharing the site with another service that would contribute to costs.

Outsourced service – to test market on outsourcing the management of the library service, including any health and leisure partner.

Library and customer services plan - depending on the outcome of the cabinet report produce a library and customer service plan based on agreed objectives.