

Shropshire Library Service serves a population of 329,300 (Mid-2023 Population estimates, ONS). Shropshire operates a network of twenty-one static libraries, a prison library (Stoke Heath), digital and development services and three mobile libraries. Together these services provide access to libraries across the County.

The Library Needs Assessment is attached for your information. This document provides:

- A review of the context in which the library service operates in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of the population the libraries serve.
- Assessment of the catchment areas for each static library and the profile of the customers that live there.
- A review of usage statistics for the library service and monitor trends over time.
- An assessment of the ease of access to the library service and drive-time analysis.
- The cost of operating library services.
- A detailed profile of each library.

Statutory Duty – Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

Shropshire Council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all those who live, work or study in the area. It must do so in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available. What a comprehensive and efficient service means will differ between councils and will depend on the needs of each area. It is therefore the role of Councillors and officials at a local level to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their service. This must be done:

- in consultation with their communities
- through analysis of evidence around local needs
- in accordance with their statutory duties

Decisions made by councils about library services may be subject to legal challenge by way of judicial review.

Shropshire Council Library Budget

Shropshire Council's library service budget for 2025/26 is £3,524,020, it is the equivalent of £10.70 per head of population. This includes corporate support services and estate costs.

Shropshire Council's Medium term financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2029/30

As part of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Shropshire Council agreed to apply savings of £332,588 to Library Service budgets from April 2025. Currently these are allocated as:

- 2025/26 = £220,538
- 2026/27 = £112,050

Savings to date

- Financial year 2025/26

The Library Service has been making financial savings over several years, largely through efficiencies, streamlining processes, contract renegotiations, and increasing income. These savings are being achieved with minimal impact on service delivery. With the brilliant work from staff, the service is making good progress towards achieving the 2025/26 MTFS saving target of £220,538.

- Financial year 2026/27

April 2026 will present a significant challenge to maintain library services while still achieving the required savings of £112,050, along with any unachieved savings from 2025/26 and potential further MTFS savings requirements allocated from 2026/27 onwards.

Current next steps

In response to Shropshire Council's financial emergency and the savings target set out in the MTFS for the 2026/27 financial year; the library service is now forced to consider how it can continue to reduce its overall budget. As mentioned above unless additional income is secured, difficult decisions would need to be considered which could include:

- Reducing opening hours at the larger libraries.
- Reducing our mobile library service.
- Consultation on the potential closure of library branches.
- Combination of the above options.

Any of these options will be subject to appropriate public consultation and cabinet approval.