



FALKIRK COUNCIL LIBRARIES  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-27

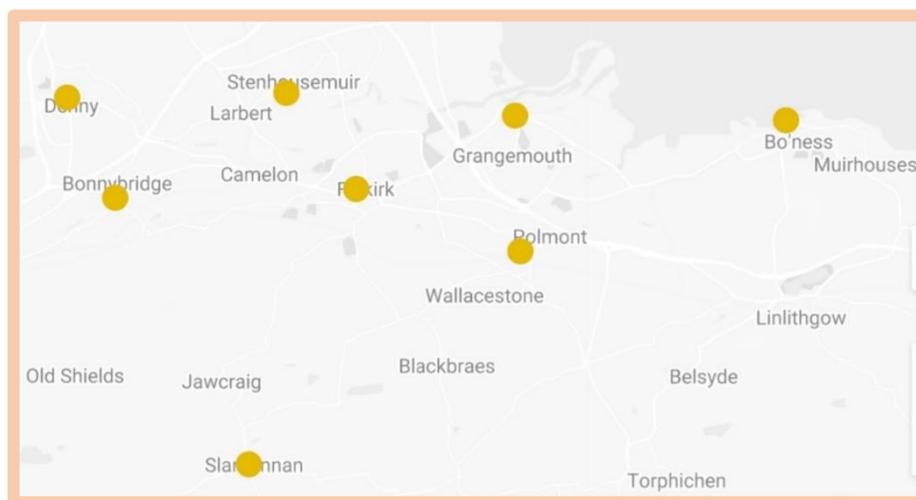
## Falkirk Council Libraries Strategic Plan 2023-27

The Strategic Plan for Falkirk Council Libraries 2023-27 has been developed following a comprehensive community engagement process and the proposals are accompanied by an organisational re-structure and revised opening hours model. The plan:

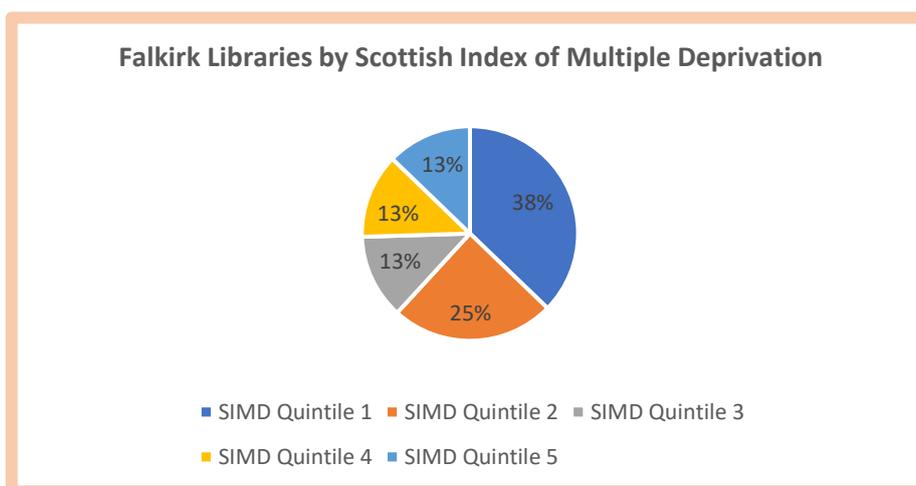
- Sets out the strategic direction for Falkirk Council Libraries for the next 5 years
- Shows how we work with communities and partners
- Outlines the priorities we are working to improve and how they align to local and national policies
- Details how we will monitor and measure our outcomes

### Background:

Falkirk Council Libraries have eight libraries serving just under 156,000 people. With 1.03 libraries per 20,000 population Falkirk sits below the national average of 2.04 libraries per 20,000 population, in fact having the lowest proportion of all the public library services in Scotland.



Our libraries are spread across the Council area reflecting a range of neighbourhoods and communities and providing a variety of locations: all our libraries work with a mix of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles. People often have a favourite community library, but many of our customers use multiple branches e.g. one branch may be closer to a work or school location, and one closer to home.



Combined visits to libraries (physical and virtual) increased in 2021-22 by 345% from the previous year. This is due to buildings re-opening, staff returning from furlough, restrictions on activities being relaxed and promotion of services resuming. This significant increase in visits has a proportionate impact on our cost per visit which will be reported in the Local Government Benchmark Framework report for 2022-23. Although the increase is not so dramatic due to a

normalisation of circumstances, our combined visits this year have continued to rise from 374,131 in 2021/22 to 626,796 in 2022/23 which reflects a 68% increase.

## Community engagement process - what did people say?

In implementing our strategic direction and developing a five-year plan for Libraries we had two aims: to refresh and restructure the Library Service to best meet the needs of our community and further, to make efficiencies as agreed in the Integrated Services Review.

We engaged with active members, non-members, community groups and other stakeholders to find out their views on library services and used a variety of methods including a survey, focus groups, online engagement sessions and in-person engagement sessions in libraries. The survey was available online on Falkirk Council's Citizen Space and on paper copy from all local libraries from 19th December 2022 - 17th February 2023 and was emailed directly to over 3000 active and lapsed library members. We promoted the community engagement programme heavily on social media, on the Libraries website and online catalogue and on posters in library branches.

Libraries are committed to involving all sections of the community in service development, especially those groups or individuals who might find it more difficult to participate, or travel to a library. During this process, we targeted specific organisations, offered to visit groups, and collected anonymous equalities data as part of the survey to help monitor the results of the engagement.

As well as capturing views and votes on proposed opening hours models, we wanted to identify the most popular activities and services currently provided by Libraries, as well as any gaps in provision.

2684 completed survey responses were received and just over 200 people attended the customer engagement sessions and focus groups.

The data we gathered helped us complete an Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessment to measure the impact of proposed changes on those individuals in our community who have protected characteristics, and where appropriate, what mitigations are appropriate. In developing our priorities, we paid particular attention to the Fairer Scotland Duty which places legal responsibility on public bodies in Scotland to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions.

We will publish the initial results of the survey and engagement sessions and once the five-year strategic plan is approved it will be available online and in hard copy in libraries.

Some of the community feedback which we will be investigating for feasibility or have integrated into our five-year plan is reflected below. The full results of the survey and engagement sessions are attached as appendices to this strategic report.

**"I go to the library with my children. We enjoy the whole experience of sitting reading books before we choose which ones to borrow. The children also spend a bit of time drawing or colouring in. Going to the library is a proper event!"**

**"We are so lucky to have libraries and think we should really use the space to encourage others in. Everything under one roof makes sense and will help financially too."**

**"Would definitely be interested in tool library/seed library or a community shed/workshop space."**

**"Mental health support, someone nice to talk to - a café would be a good idea - instead of waiting two years to get some help through NHS, GP or CAMHS. It doesn't need to be a professional, just someone who can listen. It can save people from harming themselves."**

### Falkirk Council Libraries Vision:

**The aim for our plan over the next five years is to position Libraries in a place where:**

We serve a community where we are connected and engaged with our citizens in an ongoing conversation.

People are empowered and inspired to learn, explore, and use Falkirk Council Library Service as a trusted source of information, entertainment, opportunity, and support.

### Falkirk Council Libraries Mission:

**We have committed to the following actions to help us achieve this position:**

- We have libraries which are warm, welcoming, community hubs providing a free safe space for everyone.
- Library staff work together with local people, schools, charities, and community groups to help us respond to needs and requests.
- Libraries provide equal access to information, books and resources, pcs, internet and WiFi, and a programme of activities and events.
- We support reading for pleasure, creativity, digital skills and access to technology, social inclusion, and mental health and wellbeing.

### Our strategic direction 2023-27:

The strategic direction for Falkirk Libraries 2023-27 set out below was developed by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders including library members, non-members, community groups and organisations, partners, third sector and charity groups, local church and faith groups and young people and school pupils.

The outcome of these engagements was considered alongside other relevant strategies including *The Falkirk Plan*, *Towards a Fairer Falkirk* and *Forward: Scotland's Strategy for Public Libraries*.

From these we identified a set of strategic priorities for Falkirk Council Libraries to achieve over the next five years. Our strategic priorities are arranged within six themes with specific outputs and measurable outcomes for each priority

## Strategic Priority 1. Empowered citizens:

Libraries have partnership working at the heart of the service and are integral to empowering citizens and communities.

In common with many other public services, libraries are not going to return to the way they have always operated – we must be proactive in showing communities that libraries are safe, welcoming spaces with lots to offer. Libraries have to move away from a model of passive welcome to a more active programme of invitation and showcasing the services and activities we provide on a regular basis and why they are relevant to individuals and communities. One example of how we can do this is by our highly successful Libraries are for Everyone days.

### Core service

- 1.1 Libraries are places for conversation and debate
- 1.2 Libraries are hubs of community information

### Aims 2023-27

- 1.3 Develop an activities programming group with community members
- 1.4 Continue to investigate opportunities for service co-location
- 1.5 Investigate the feasibility of a co-working or hot-desking space to support start-ups and new ways of working.

### 2022/23 Progress on Strategic Priority 1. Empowered citizens:

- Libraries provided venues for Council community engagement sessions e.g. Community Choices, Strategic Property Review etc.
- Supported NHS Forth Valley outreach e.g. “It’s OK to Ask” Realistic Medicine project and Parent Club breastfeeding campaign.
- Desk space and welfare facilities provided for parking attendants at Falkirk Library.
- Hotdesking office space installed for Housing and Communities Hub staff and Bookings Team staff in Falkirk Library.
- Shared reception installed in Falkirk Library for Libraries, Housing and Communities Hub and Bookings Team.

## Case Study – Libraries are for Everyone

Our Libraries Are For Everyone events which aim to promote library services to local communities have attracted 2,313 people on just four Saturday afternoons at Larbert (705), Falkirk (500), Grangemouth (633) and Denny Libraries (475). Following the final relaxation of Covid-19 Health and Safety guidelines around group activities, Falkirk Council Libraries were keen to begin a programme of promotion and advocacy to encourage customers – existing and new – into buildings and using services.

Libraries are for Everyone Days act as a reminder and invitation to communities and individuals that the library is their space and has activities and services available and relevant to them.

Although the Libraries are for Everyone days are primarily fun days for the individuals and families attending, there are strategic aims underlying the programme. The main driver initially was to encourage physical visits to libraries back to a pre-pandemic level (and beyond). However, we also want to ensure we are reaching all sections of our community and that we are meeting their needs which will be constantly changing so evaluation is an integral part of these events. We collect both quantitative and qualitative feedback throughout the day from people attending: we ask what activities people enjoyed and whether they knew about them before. We are aware that it is often difficult in an age of information overload to promote the essential information to the people who need it in the most appropriate way. Importantly, we also ask communities what would be helpful, interesting, or entertaining to them that perhaps isn't being provided. We also ask for ideas for new partners and providers – especially local ones as we are keen to strengthen community networks and regenerate local economies

**Thank you so much. Something for everyone. Loved it . (More please)**

**Amazing. Love the VR. My son loves the coding. We're coming back A+++**

**Wonderful! Did the collage workshop, really enjoyed it. Also tried the meditation session. Again, fabulous. Thanks, Falkirk Library!**

**Great to see the library so full of fun and folk.**



## Strategic Priority 2. Equity and Inclusion:

Libraries are a lifeline for lots of people: we offer core services that are free at the point of access including a wide variety of books in multiple genres and formats for all ages. Libraries provide access to computers and internet, magazines, and newspapers online and full programme of activities and events. Our trained staff in every branch can help support digital skills, provide information and signpost to appropriate agencies and partners for further help. When money is tight these free core services can make all the difference.

Almost 69,000 households in Falkirk have access to superfast broadband (at least 30mbps download speed), however, there are areas where access is at a level of 20% or less of households. Additionally, we know that access isn't the whole story – the cost of technology and connectivity can be prohibitive, and lack of digital skills or confidence can be a barrier.

### Core service

- 2.1 Free access to books, audio books, wide range of information, maps and local history material, e-books and e-audio books, e-services, newspapers and magazines online, pcs, internet, and WiFi.
- 2.2 No financial penalties for borrowing items.
- 2.3 Library staff are all digital champions.

### Aims 2023-27

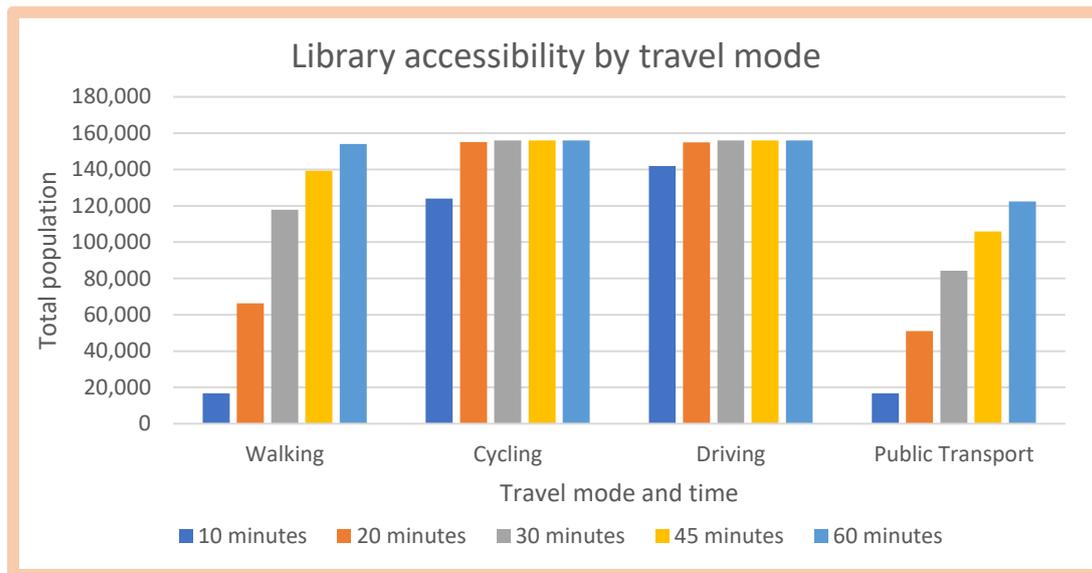
- 2.4 Implement Graduate Trainee Digital Librarian post.
- 2.5 Review and publish Libraries stock policy.
- 2.6 Investigate expansion of Home Library Service.
- 2.7 Increase digital skills support available from libraries.

### 2022/23 Progress on Strategic Priority 2. Equity and inclusion:

- Libraries were positioned as warm, safe spaces which provided access to charging stations for personal devices, free period products and food bank donation stations.
- Libraries provided computers for public use, secure internet, and WiFi all free at the point of access: the service remained critically placed to support communities and ensure that no-one was excluded or left behind.
- In 2022/23 Falkirk Council Libraries removed all financial penalties for overdue loans.
- Successful funding applications were made to Falkirk Community Planning Partnership to provide Food and Activity events in Summer 2022, February 2023 and Easter 2023.
- Support provided for Ukrainian refugees e.g. Bookbug sessions, books, resource lists, free access to pcs, internet, and WiFi.
- Falkirk Council Libraries committed to supporting all library staff in achieving digital champion status in 2023 with a planned programme of practical activities to embed staff skills and confidence. Free access to digital equipment and staff support for digital skills empowered individuals to become digitally confident and included. A spread of accessible, library venues with trained staff and a range of opening hours including evening and weekend times, enabled maximum access to services.
- Libraries worked in partnership with Fairer Falkirk Team signposting individuals who may not have digital access or skills to Libraries for support in accessing the Covid Economic Recovery Payment online. This combined approach has resulted in an uptake in the payment of over 87% and Libraries saw a significant increase in visitor numbers, new member registrations and issues compared with the same week in the previous year.

## Case Study – Home Library Service

In times of financial hardship, private and public transport may become unaffordable and driving or cycling may not be options for everyone: within our local area, 35,185 individuals (23%) identify themselves as living with a disability. We promote healthy living and sustainability and aim to contribute to the reduction of our carbon footprint. It's important that we consider how these factors affect the accessibility of libraries for individuals.



For those individuals who struggle to get to a library due to disability, illness, recent operation, or caring responsibilities, the Home Library Service can deliver collections of books; customers can choose the format and genre and can either choose individual titles or can request a variety of titles picked by staff based on their specified favourite themes or topics. The Home Library Service also makes deliveries to the common rooms of residential care homes in the Falkirk area. In addition to providing books, our Home Library staff also provide digital skills support – installing library e-services on personal devices, providing guidance with Living Well assessments, delivering IT taster sessions at home etc. They act as befrienders and a listening ear when they are often the only visitor in a week and can deliver replacement hearing aid batteries and even prescriptions when necessary. The Home Library Service run reminiscence sessions and two reading groups (one online) with fully accessible materials as a significant percentage of the Home Library customers are registered blind or have a visual impairment.

## Strategic Priority 3. Community wellbeing:

Data shows a relatively low percentage of 0.83% of the total population of Falkirk are living with no central heating, but that still equates to 1,326 people. We know from customer feedback that many people are already unable to afford to put on the heating they have. Libraries have been providing warm, safe spaces for many years, but in recent months we have increased our support to help with the cost of living.

### Core service

- 3.1 Libraries are warm, welcoming, safe community spaces with trained staff and resources.
- 3.2 Libraries for Wellbeing is embedded in Falkirk Libraries.
- 3.3 Libraries support community groups and partner organisations with space, resources, and signposting.

### Aims 2023-27

- 3.4 Implement private and remote interview space in Bo'ness Library with Near Me and other videoconferencing software.
- 3.5 Investigate the feasibility of implementing a café space in one or more libraries.
- 3.6 Deliver staff training addressing anti-social behaviour.
- 3.7 Expand use of community spaces in libraries by community groups and partner organisations.

### 2022/23 Progress on Strategic Priority 3. Community wellbeing:

- Libraries promoted their community spaces as warm comfortable spaces to relax and provided free hot drinks, jigsaws, board games in addition to other services and resources.
- Community rooms in libraries booked and used by a wide range of community organisations and partners e.g. crochet groups, Barnardo's baby massage, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Councillor surgeries etc.
- Forget-Me-Not Café met weekly in Denny Library to support people living with dementia, their families, and friends.
- Falkirk Council Employment Training Unit held weekly outreach advice sessions in libraries.
- Partnership work started with NHS Forth Valley nutrition services to promote and distribute resources in libraries.
- Forth Environment Link adult learning gardening skills course delivered in Falkirk Library over 4 weeks.

## Case Study: Libraries for Wellbeing

Falkirk Libraries have been shortlisted twice in national awards in 2023 for their Libraries for Wellbeing project: SLIC Award for Project Excellence and EDGE2023 Award (Social Category). This project received £40,000 funding from the Scottish Government Covid Recovery Fund, administered by Scottish Library and Information Council.

We trained our staff members in mental health awareness so that they better understand the issues that some in our community face, provide better customer care, and are more confident in talking about mental health and in signposting people to specific resources to support their mental health.

### Staff feedback on Libraries for Wellbeing training:

- *"I got a lot of information that will help me deal with people at work and at home."*
- *"[I gained] more confidence in dealing with wellbeing and where to refer people to."*
- *"[Training was] very good as some staff did not have any experience with mental health issues..."*

### Participant feedback on Words for Wellbeing groups:

- *"During lockdown I saw nobody for many months because I live on my own. After my yearly review with the doctor I was told about this group. It has made a great difference to me just being with others, meeting new people, hearing other people's point of views, having a laugh helping to dispel loneliness." (G, person in their 70s)*
- *"I came to meet new people. I joined the library and staff told me about the group. I only just moved up here and I've got mental health issues and I'm autistic. I got away from domestic violence. I like coming to the group it helps keep me going. ... I don't talk much, but I like to listen and it's nice hearing other people's experiences." (A, person in their 40s)*
- *"I come to the group to get me out of the house and to interact with other people. I was told about the group from a mental health nurse at local doctor's surgery. [The group] encourages me to leave the house and [I] have met new, interesting people." (P, person in their 50s)*



The Libraries for Wellbeing project has changed the ethos of our Library Service to one where the wellbeing of our staff and communities is at the heart of our service. The Words for Wellbeing groups that are running in all 8 of our branches provide a supportive space for socially isolated people to chat about books and poetry and their feelings, and to make new friends. The groups have brought a new audience of library users and are now a core part of our library offer, with consideration being given to adding extra groups where there is most demand.

## Strategic Priority 4. Reading and learning:

Libraries support reading for pleasure and promote literacy. At all ages and stages, libraries support learning - from early years, family learning, school readiness, to attainment across the 5-18 years curriculum, Libraries enable and encourage lifelong learning and curiosity. We provide resources and support for individuals to return to learning throughout their lives.

### Core service

- 4.1 Continued promotion of and commitment to national Bookbug programme.
- 4.2 Promotion and delivery of annual Summer Reading Challenge.

### Aims 2023-27

- 4.3 Promote libraries as venues for lifelong learning and investigate adult education opportunities.
- 4.4 Develop homework club and support for study programme in partnership with education.
- 4.5 Investigate introducing Therapets supported reading sessions in libraries.
- 4.6 Investigate implementing 4-4-2 Reading Challenge partnership with Scottish Professional Football League.

### 2022/23 Progress on Strategic Priority 4. Reading and learning:

- Falkirk Libraries committed to under 5s early learning and school readiness by implementing the Scottish Government approved Every Child A Library Member (ECALM) delivery method. We are working in partnership with Registrars to collect information from parents/guardians when they register a child's birth. Children are enrolled as library members from birth and benefit from resources and services to help with reading, numeracy, play, speech development and bonding.
- Parents and guardians of new babies are supported by Bookbug which supports speech development, rhyme and phonics, numeracy, bonding, and the formation of reading as a lifelong habit. In 2022/23 Bookbug attendance rose significantly following the promotion of the return of sessions in a safe and clean environment, and as people began to feel more confident about returning to activities in public spaces: 4053 children and 3627 adults attended a Bookbug Session last year – a 414% increase on the attendance in 2021/22.
- Falkirk Council Libraries and Falkirk Council Library Resource Service jointly purchased a full-size Bookbug costume to enhance sessions and Bookbug visits libraries, nurseries, and playgroups across the area to enable all children to connect with books and reading for pleasure in a fun and exciting way.
- Libraries worked with CVS Falkirk and with Falkirk Council Housing Support to provide Bookbug sessions and information for Ukrainian refugees – we also hugely increased our stock of books in Ukrainian for parents and children.



- In 2022/23 Libraries ran 41 Code Club sessions for primary age children, with 31 children completing the introductory Scratch programming course.
- Libraries provide free access to WiFi, internet, and digital infrastructure, including a programme of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics-related (STEAM) activities to support digital learning.
- Falkirk Libraries switched in 2023 to the Council WiFi solution enabling all secondary school pupils with a school smart device to automatically log on to Library WiFi on entering their local library. This offers great opportunities to promote connected learning and supports community library-based homework clubs, self-study, creative investigation, and relaxation in a safe space with trained staff and a bank of hard copy and virtual resources on hand.

## Case Study: Summer Reading Challenge

The Summer Reading Challenge can make a huge difference to how children perform in school, especially following Covid lockdowns where attainment gaps increased in children from disadvantaged backgrounds and so many young people experienced mental health issues.

Encouragement from their school plays a huge role in children's participation in the Challenge. All schools receive a digital pack from us several weeks before finishing for the summer, but direct contact with pupils and staff can make a huge difference. Kinnaird Primary, who visited Larbert Library weekly from April 2022, had by far the highest participation rate for all schools in the area (127 pupils).

Nationally, library visits have dropped following the Covid-19 pandemic, so we had limited expectations for the enrolment figures for the Summer Reading Challenge in 2022. However, the number of children who participated in the Challenge in 2022 far exceeded our expectations. We saw 135% increase on 2021 enrolment with over 1000 children participating across Falkirk. Importantly, several libraries also saw an increase in the number of children completing the Challenge e.g. Falkirk Library increased the number of children finishing by 44%.

### Feedback from families participating in the Summer Reading Challenge:

- *"The Summer Reading Challenge really helped my child, they've never managed to finish a whole book before, and they managed to finish 3 this time."*
- *"It's a great way to spend time with my grandchildren."*
- *"It has been really helpful with Fraser's dyslexia and being able to get books for his needs. Thank you."*
- *"It has made me think and helped my imagination with storytelling and Lego building."*



## Strategic Priority 5. Culture and heritage:

Public libraries are vibrant local venues which provide varied opportunities to access culture and to celebrate local identity and heritage. We work in partnership with communities to create ideas and build capacity to take them forward. Libraries want to continue to develop as diverse, representative, and inclusive spaces.

### Core service

- 5.1 Wide variety of stock including various genres and formats to support diverse community of readers.
- 5.2 Annual programme of free events and activities.

### Aims 2023-27

- 5.3 Expand programme of activities and events:
  - to generate income.
  - to support local artists and include community events.
- 5.4 Expand programme of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) activities and events.
- 5.5 Develop a programme of exhibitions and displays to support national promotions, local heritage, cultural diversity etc.
- 5.6 Expand Memories Scotland sessions to include Football Memories Scotland sessions

## 2022/23 Progress on Strategic Priority 5. Culture and heritage:

- 1694 events have taken place between March 2022 and March 2023, seeing attendances of more than 26,571 individuals: 14,016 adults and 11,359 children. Our events and activities were promoted on our website and social media accounts, in libraries and most recently, on our library online catalogue.
- Falkirk Council Libraries celebrated various national cultural events e.g. Black History Month, Keep the Heid and Read, Holocaust Memorial Day, International Women's Day etc. with displays, exhibitions, and events.
- Libraries held an event called, 'The Colour of Falkirk's Money' as part of the Black History events in 2022. This illustrated talk given by Geoff Bailey, an archaeologist and local historian, was the culmination of years of research on the historical property ownership of some of Falkirk's well known historical buildings. Falkirk Libraries produced a short film on the subject which will be shown during our annual Local History festival in May 2023. This film was produced using greenscreen technology so that the many images and documents which were the subject of the research can be viewed by all.
- The programme of local events over the last year included a range of free events for children including story-times, treasure hunts, craft activities, Lego free play etc. as well as activities to accompany national celebrations or programmes such as World Book Day, Harry Potter Night, and our annual creative writing competition, Writing Rammy.
- Grangemouth Library is currently hosting Grangemouth 150: an annual programme of monthly local history talks supported by Falkirk Council Provost and held in Grangemouth Library to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Grangemouth.
- Libraries offer individuals the opportunity to meet and greet authors, and to hear the written word in the author's voice – it's an experience that feedback tells us is still something that draws adults and children alike and helps foster a love of and connection with books. We apply every year to Scottish Book Trust Live Literature scheme for funding to help bring a range of authors to Falkirk Libraries throughout the year. The most recent two visits in 2023 have been from two Scottish authors - Alan Dapre author of Porridge the Tartan Cat books for children, and William McIntyre author of the Best Defence legal thrillers.

## Case Study: Memories Scotland project

The Memories Scotland project is a national project funded by Scottish Government, administered by Scottish Library Information Council and delivered in partnership with the Scottish Football Museum. The librarian responsible for running Memories Scotland groups in 4 libraries across Falkirk and was asked by the project co-ordinator to speak at their Conference in February 2023 to try to encourage further participation across the sector.

*"I delivered a presentation on starting up groups, how to facilitate, troubleshooting and what to expect. As part of my presentation, I showed a small film that I made featuring feedback from a few of the reminiscence session attendees."*

The presentation received widespread acclaim and has now been filmed for upload to the Memories Scotland project website. The Memories Scotland project team have also asked Falkirk Libraries staff to deliver online training sessions for other practitioners via Microsoft Teams as examples of best practice.

From the outside these reminiscence sessions might look like chatting with tea and cake – and they do involve that! – but below is a quote from one of our librarians who leads the project in Falkirk Libraries:

*"I've been approached after [Memories Scotland] sessions in Bo'ness Library by people who have shared their early diagnoses of dementia. It's an earth-shattering thought that people are facing losing themselves – and offering people a safe space to be accepted and combat isolation in libraries is something I really enjoy."*



## Strategic Priority 6. Sustainable Development and future investment:

As the original resource-sharing public service, libraries are advocates for responsible consumption and we collaborate with partners wherever possible to contribute to sustainable delivery. Libraries are at the forefront of the sharing economy and can support creative industries by offering access to equipment which promotes sustainable practices. By providing access to skills, training, technology and collaborative workspaces, libraries can support economic recovery.

### Core service

- 6.1 Free access to books, e-books, e-audio books, e-newspapers, and e-magazines.
- 6.2 Free period products available in all libraries.
- 6.3 Hearing aid battery replacement programme in all libraries.
- 6.4 Access to free e-services in Libraries e.g. Ancestry Online, Access to Research

### Aims 2023-27

- 6.5 Expand food bank donation provision in libraries.
- 6.6 Introduce sustainable swap programmes in libraries.
- 6.7 Develop a Library of Things lending scheme.
- 6.8 Exploit use of green spaces/work with plants, seeds.
- 6.9 Investigate the feasibility of a Make and Mend space.

## 2022/23 Progress on Strategic Priority 6. Sustainable development and future investment:

- Falkirk Council Libraries joined Scottish Consortium of Public Libraries and migrated Library Management System to Civica Spydus:
  - Enables Falkirk Libraries to align with Scottish Government One Card initiative.
  - Consortium approach to procurement and Scottish Government Softcat contract provide best value.
  - Cloud-based system – no space required on Council servers.
  - Shared national catalogue records provide a reduction in bibliographic data costs per consortium member.
  - Shared community of practice provides collegiate and technical support, plus leverage with supplier.
- Libraries acted as foodbank donation stations.
- Withdrawn library books put into library branch book sale at nominal cost to recycle resources.
- Ongoing installation of external lift to Bo'ness Library as part of Bo'ness Community Council's successful Town Centre regeneration funding bid. The lift which will be accessed from the outside of the library building by a secure keypad, will provide accessible entry to the two community rooms on the first floor of the library, currently accessed by stairs. The secure keypad entry will enable use of the community rooms independently from the library out-with library opening hours.
- Plans were developed and funding agreed for an accessible public toilet to be installed in Grangemouth Library. A contractor has now been appointed and work will begin in summer 2023. This was the only library not to have an accessible toilet available for customers.
- Libraries stock control processing by suppliers stopped and stock alert barriers marked for removal. This provides a saving in raw materials as well as cost. The removal of physical barriers enables accessibility and is in line with the ethos of libraries.

## Case Study: Libraries IT review and upgrade:

In 2022 Libraries staff and public access pcs were still running Windows 7 operating system. This had become a critical issue due to potential cybersecurity and compliance problems. In addition, library software and connecting systems began to fail to operate with the older version of Windows.

Working closely with colleagues in IT, Digital Communities provided funding to replace the Libraries pc estate. Libraries recognised that as funding was limited, this was an opportunity to review the provision of public access pcs and internet. Statistics of use and observation have shown that since re-opening following Covid-19, library customers want to maintain more distance between pcs and the number of pc sessions has not yet recovered to pre-Covid levels.

Public access pc use has been impacted by the Scottish Government's Connected Scotland programme which made available a proportion of laptops and tablets (with connectivity) to individuals who met health and caring criteria during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is hoped that by creating space and promoting free Libraries WiFi we can encourage some of those individuals to use their own devices in Libraries, especially where they may need digital skills support.

We completed a data-informed exercise which reduced the number of public access pcs across the Libraries estate by approximately 30%.

The library staff pcs will also be upgraded in the new technology rollout. The new hardware will run far more efficiently, and we have chosen to replace the hard drives with micro-processors: the cost benefit is minimal, but the green credentials are far improved.

As part of the IT upgrade, all library staff accounts will be migrated to Office 365. This will enable the service to make far wider use of Microsoft Teams for videoconferencing and communication, reducing travel to meetings, providing channels for document sharing, project management etc.

## Conclusion:

This plan sets out the strategic priorities for Falkirk Libraries over the next five years. It details the core services that we are committed to continuing to deliver and well as ambitious aims for what we will deliver going forward. The framework in Appendix 1 shows how these priorities link into the Falkirk Plan, the outcomes they will achieve and how we will monitor our progress.

These priorities were developed, following extensive engagement, to deliver against what communities told us they wanted from us. Appendix 2 shows the detailed results of this community engagement.

This will ensure that our libraries continue to be the centre of our communities promoting reading for pleasure and enabling access to culture and creative activity for everyone. It will maximise the impact they have on tackling inequalities, empowering communities, supporting health and wellbeing, and encouraging economic development.