

APPENDIX 3 – REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AGAINST OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS – ROTHERHAM LIBRARY STRATEGY 2021 – 2026

1. Objectives

Creative and Cultural Enrichment

Library usage across Rotherham continues to grow in areas that support creativity, culture, and community engagement. Libraries are evolving into vibrant cultural hubs, with increased participation in reading, activities, and digital services.

A diverse programme of events has been delivered across Rotherham libraries and community venues, including Fun Palaces, pop-up libraries, author visits, and creative workshops. Fun Palaces, part of a national programme, support creative health and volunteering by enabling communities to design and deliver their own cultural activities, helping build confidence and resilience through hands-on participation. With support from the National Lottery, the appointment of a Rotherham Fun Palace Ambassador has helped expand the initiative from three Fun Palaces in 2019 to 17 in 2025, now attracting around 800 attendees annually.

Events take place not only in libraries but also in spaces such as Rotherham Minster and Greasbrough Park, with activities led by local residents. These community-led groups continue year-round, fostering connection, skill-sharing, and a sense of ownership.

Libraries have also contributed to the Children's Capital of Culture (CCOC) initiative, co-creating events with schools and partners, and participating in borough-wide programmes like Roots Festival. Outdoor engagement has grown through reading gardens at Swinton, Mowbray Gardens, and Thurcroft, and creative events in parks and green spaces.

Collaborations with Heritage Services have enabled the delivery of pop-up exhibitions, innovative "mini museum" concepts, and reflective events such as the Hope Fields memory trees within libraries which was part of the wider Hope Fields Thrybergh Country Park project. Each library featured a white wooden tree, inviting visitors to write heartfelt messages in memory of loved ones lost during the pandemic.

Each ward has a Community Host Organisation who will support their ward's Heritage Producer. Libraries are working with CCOC to become the community hosts, working with the Heritage producer to connect with groups to deliver activities. Libraries support them with devising, planning and delivering their end-of-project outcomes.

Libraries work closely with Neighbourhood Co-ordinators to deliver joint events, including VE Day celebrations, Christmas light switch-ons, May Day events and circus-themed community events.

Targeted outreach has successfully engaged underrepresented groups including men, BAME communities, disabled residents, and young adults through partnerships with Voluntary Action Rotherham, YAWR, and events such as the Ferham Festival.

In addition, a Ukrainian community group has been established at the Central Library, further extending engagement efforts.

While these initiatives have made meaningful progress, it is acknowledged that more work is needed to ensure broader and sustained inclusion across all communities.

Creative partnerships, such as with Flux Rotherham, have supported inclusive, arts-based projects. Since 2022, libraries have joined Flux pop-ups across the borough, from large-scale events like WOW Festival and Roots Carnival to smaller, targeted activities. These have promoted library services, delivered themed storytimes, and showcased Makerspaces.

Libraries also collaborate with Parish Councils. For example:

- Wickersley Library co-delivers annual events like the Summer Reading Challenge celebration and Christmas fair, with over 200 attendees at the recent summer fair.
- Thurcroft Library, co-located with the Parish Hall since 2023 works with the Parish Council on events, including winter fairs and Christmas activities.

Increasing Reading and Literacy

Rotherham Libraries continue to inspire residents to read for pleasure through a vibrant annual programme of events and activities that support literacy and lifelong learning. As a key partner in the Rotherham Loves Reading campaign and the Take 10 initiative, libraries encourage residents to read for ten minutes a day to boost wellbeing and mental health. This is supported by free activities for children, book clubs, themed reading packs for early years, and tailored reading support—all backed by Public Health.

The Summer Reading Challenge has grown year-on-year, with 1,025 finishers this year and an annual celebration event. Other activities supporting reading have included story walks, author visits, and the expansion of reading groups across the borough, including new sessions in Rawmarsh, Greasbrough, and Wickersley, catering to all ages and interests.

Libraries have strengthened engagement with schools through increased class visits, pop-up libraries, and curriculum-linked resources. Focused support is provided for under-fives, early years, and children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), including ESOL reading sessions. Partnerships with schools, nurseries, and literacy charities have deepened, especially during the pandemic and recovery period.

Innovative initiatives such as BookTrust Storytime have engaged disadvantaged families and encouraged regular story sharing. A Home Educators' Book Group, launched during lockdown, now meets in person and continues to attract families not previously engaged with library services.

Rotherham's book borrowing performance remains below target at 5.7%. National data from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) shows a 24% rise in book issues per 1,000 people in 2022/23, indicating some post-pandemic recovery. However, only 8.8% of the UK population are active borrowers,

down from 18.1% in 2011/12, pointing to a long-term national decline in traditional library use. Rotherham's lower-than-average borrowing rate highlights a local challenge within this broader context.

In response, Rotherham Libraries are reviewing local literacy data to better understand how child and adult literacy levels may be influencing engagement. National research from the National Literacy Trust shows that low literacy is closely linked to reduced library engagement, particularly in areas facing economic disadvantage. For example, children in high-priority areas reported higher reading enjoyment when supported by targeted literacy programmes, even as national enjoyment levels declined.

Source: [The Impact of Our Work in Communities – National Literacy Trust](#)

This insight will inform targeted outreach and programming in the next strategy period, ensuring library services are responsive to local needs and aligned with broader efforts to improve literacy, wellbeing, and access to cultural resources.

Improved Digital Access and Literacy

Rotherham Libraries have made significant progress in enhancing digital access and inclusion. Investment in ICT infrastructure has delivered upgraded public access PCs, new self-service kiosks, and improved signage and printing facilities. Open+ technology at Mowbray Gardens and Brinsworth offer extended access during unstaffed hours, making library services more flexible and accessible.

Digital innovation is thriving, with code clubs, makerspaces, and staff-led inclusion sessions supporting older residents and those less confident with technology. Makerspaces at Wath and Kiveton Park offer hands-on experiences with 3D printing, pottery wheels, and VR headsets, supported by staff trained through the University of Sheffield and STEM Ambassadors. Hublet tablet devices, self-service tablets designed for public use, are being trialled at the Central Library, offering flexible access to digital resources and services.

Pop-up digital sessions have been delivered across the borough, including regular Makerspace activities at some sites. Free internet access, assisted digital support, and training delivered in partnership with local organisations have helped more residents get online and build digital confidence.

Rotherham is also tackling data poverty head-on. National Databank SIMs are available at 14 library sites, providing essential connectivity to communities in need. Since the launch in May 2023, the service has issued over 1234 SIMs, helping bridge the digital divide. Additionally, 50 tablets were distributed to vulnerable residents, including refugees, through funding from the Good Things Foundation. This project was part of Rotherham's place-based Digital Inclusion Programme.

Digital membership has grown significantly, with over 135,000 e-resources accessed and 3,823 new members joining during the pandemic. Libraries continue to offer eBooks, eMagazines, and eNewspapers, supported by targeted marketing to ensure residents can make the most of these resources.

Rotherham's digital offer compares favourably with other UK library authorities. According to the Good Things Foundation's 2023 Digital Inclusion in Libraries report, Rotherham was one of just twelve services selected for in-depth study due to its strong digital inclusion work. Rotherham stands out for its integrated approach combining infrastructure, outreach, and creative programming. This includes advanced technologies like VR, 3D printing, and tablet lending, alongside targeted support for those most at risk of digital exclusion.

This shows Rotherham's commitment to tackling digital inequality, promoting innovation, and ensuring that library services remain inclusive, modern, and responsive to community needs.

Helping Everyone Achieve Their Full Potential

Rotherham Libraries continue to support learning, skills development, and personal growth for residents of all ages. Regular study support, homework clubs, and coding workshops are delivered across multiple sites, helping children and young people build confidence and digital skills. The Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) at Riverside Library provides access to specialist databases and resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Partnerships with organisations such as the Source Skills Academy have enabled employability and confidence-building courses within libraries. Libraries also offer apprenticeships, volunteering roles, and work experience opportunities. A recent example includes a successful funding award to host a CCOC trainee to work alongside library staff and partners to consult with children and co-design creative projects delivered across library sites and pop-up events throughout the borough.

Libraries are increasingly supporting adult skills and employability through targeted partnerships. In addition to work which was done with the Source Skills Academy, the service is now aligning with the Council's Pathways to Employment programme. This includes hosting job clubs, confidence-building workshops, and digital literacy sessions at Riverside, Dinnington, and Maltby libraries. These initiatives are particularly focused on supporting young people aged 16–25 and adults facing barriers to employment, helping them build essential skills and prepare for future opportunities.

To ensure high-quality support, library staff have undertaken e-learning to strengthen their knowledge of library resources and digital services. This includes completing Libraries Connected modules such as Key Digital Skills and Media and Information Literacy, enabling staff to better assist customers with online services and build digital confidence.

Healthier and Happier Lives

Rotherham Libraries continue to play a vital role in supporting public health and wellbeing across the borough, delivering a wide range of initiatives that promote healthier lifestyles, reduce isolation, and improve mental wellbeing.

Libraries have expanded their collections to include more resources on healthy living, mental health, and wellbeing. Autism-friendly spaces have been created at

Kiveton Park, Aston, Maltby and Rawmarsh, featuring sensory equipment to support children and families, working in partnership with the SEND team and Children Centres. Reading gardens at Swinton, Mowbray Gardens, and Thurstcroft offer calming outdoor spaces for reflection, relaxation, and community engagement.

A Mental Health Exhibition was held at Riverside's gallery space, curated by the Fun Palace Ambassador in partnership with Mind and Crossroads Care. The exhibition featured poetry, paintings, digital art, and 3D pieces created by individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges. It not only showcased the incredible talent within Rotherham but also helped reduce stigma and spark important conversations.

Libraries have hosted a variety of health-themed displays and wellbeing events while also providing warm, safe spaces during the cost-of-living crisis. During the pandemic, library staff supported the Covid testing centre at Riverside House and distributed home testing kits through the LFT Community Collect scheme.

Targeted outreach has helped address health inequalities. Working with partners such as Get Healthy Rotherham, libraries have delivered events focused on healthy eating, stress management, and physical activity.

A growing number of health and wellbeing groups have been introduced, including Menopause Cafés, Musically Minded and Shared Reading sessions.

Volunteering opportunities, friendship groups, and "Cuppa and a Chat" sessions have helped reduce loneliness, alongside inclusive reading groups for underrepresented communities.

Libraries continue to promote reading for pleasure as a powerful tool for mental wellbeing. In partnership with Public Health and NHS teams, libraries based in Joint Service Centres at Aston, Maltby, and Rawmarsh are reaching those who benefit most.

The Booklink and Home Library Service remain essential in supporting vulnerable and isolated residents. They also work with care homes and social care providers to deliver targeted programmes that reduce social isolation.

Senior Library Officers are represented on the Rotherham Creative Health Board, which aims to embed arts and culture into public health delivery. The focus is on improving wellbeing through creative interventions, such as poetry, music, and visual arts, particularly for people experiencing isolation, mental health challenges, or long-term conditions. Libraries are working with NHS neighbourhood teams to develop targeted Creative Health activities that are inclusive and accessible, especially for residents who may not engage with traditional health services.

Greater Prosperity

Work has now started on the new Central Library, part of the wider Rotherham Markets redevelopment, with opening planned for Autumn 2026. The new library will offer a modern, accessible space with a café, meeting rooms, gallery, and maker's space bringing together culture, learning, and community in the heart of the town

centre. This investment supports the Town Centre Masterplan and aims to boost wellbeing, footfall, and local pride.

Libraries have strengthened partnerships with employment services, working collaboratively with Job Centre Plus, RNN Group, Pathways, and Rotherham United Community Sports Trust (RUCST) to deliver job clubs, training sessions, and support for job seekers. ICT classes and assisted digital support continue to bridge the digital divide, equipping residents with essential skills for work and everyday life.

Stronger, More Resilient Communities

Over £1 million has been invested in refurbishing library buildings, with improvements to décor, furniture, signage, and digital screens. Most sites now feature drink facilities along with public toilets. An additional £540,000 has funded IT upgrades, including new public access PCs and self-service kiosks. Open + technology is now offered at Mowbray Gardens and is planned to go-live at Brinsworth in December this year.

Libraries are becoming increasingly integrated into their communities:

- Kiveton Park Library was redesigned and co-located with Youth Services, creating a flexible, multi-purpose space that includes a community kitchen. Early Help services now use the building when the library is closed, delivering groups such as “Age 0 to Walkers” and baby weigh-ins, as well as booking the meeting room during the week and running half-term and summer activities.
- Thurcroft Library relocated to the Gordon Bennett Memorial Hall, increasing footfall and strengthening partnerships with the Parish Council and local groups.
- Swinton Library moved into the former customer service centre as part of the town centre redevelopment. This new, improved redevelopment offers a café within the vicinity, meeting spaces, and greater public visibility.
- The new Brinsworth Library is a strong example of how libraries are evolving to become more embedded within their local communities. Officially opened to the public on 2nd March 2020, the library was constructed with funding from Section 106 contributions, matched by RMBC capital investment. From April 2021, the library transitioned to a community-managed model, led by a Parish Council Library Supervisor and supported by a team of local volunteers. RMBC continues to provide core resources including books, IT equipment, training, and ongoing support. This Library has seen a 10% increase in footfall, reflecting strong community engagement and the success of the partnership model.

All 15 libraries continue to support community group activity, democratic engagement, and partnership delivery. Staff work closely with Neighbourhood Co-ordinators to align services with ward priorities and strengthen local relationships.

Adopting a ‘Libraries First’ approach, Rotherham Libraries have become true community hubs. Residents can now access a range of advice services, youth services, public health initiatives, employment support, assisted digital support for those who are unable to self-serve and creative activities. Pop-up advice sessions,

community meetings, and co-located services, such as Early Help at Kiveton Park, have further embedded libraries into the fabric of local life.

Targeted outreach has successfully engaged non-users and underrepresented groups, including residents with protected characteristics. Libraries continue to collaborate with Citizens Advice to provide welfare and money advice, deliver health and wellbeing programmes like “Get Healthy Rotherham,” host job clubs, and partner with cultural organisations, museums, and artists to enrich the borough’s cultural life.

2. Performance Targets

The 2021–2026 Library Strategy established a set of measurable targets to ensure progress could be tracked and evaluated throughout the five-year period. These targets were designed to reflect the service’s priorities and demonstrate the value and impact of libraries across Rotherham.

Library services in Rotherham were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with face-to-face provision suspended and staff redeployed to support essential community functions. The most affected site was Riverside Library, which closed in March 2020 and remained unavailable for public use until Monday 19th July 2021. During this time, the building was repurposed as a foodbank and a Lateral Flow Testing Centre, limiting access to core library services. Staff were also allocated to support these operations, contributing to reduced performance across key engagement metrics.

The baseline year for performance measurement was 2018/19, as reported in the strategy. The following summary outlines progress against targets as of the end of 2024/25, in line with the “Monitoring Our Impact” framework.

Increase the Number of People Who Borrow Books by 10%

Target: Increase the number of active borrowers (including physical books and ebooks, e-audiobooks and e-magazines) by 10% from the 2021/22 baseline of 20,653, aiming for 22,718 by the end of 2025/26.

Performance 2024/25:

- Active Borrowers: 16658
- Progress: The service is not on track to meet its target.
- Shortfall: A deficit of 6060 borrowers compared to the target.

Key Challenge:

The underperformance is primarily driven by the Central Library, which continues to struggle with user recovery following extended closure and disruption.

- Active Borrowers: 15,792
- Progress: The service is not on track to meet its target.
- Shortfall: A deficit of 6,926 borrowers compared to the target.

Key Challenge:

The underperformance is primarily driven by the Central Library, which continues to struggle with user recovery following extended closure and disruption.

Benchmarking & Context:

- Rotherham Active Borrower Rate (2024/25): 5.7%
- National Average: 8.8%
- Neighbouring Authorities:
 - Barnsley: 10.3%
 - Doncaster: 5.9%

While national borrower rates have declined over the past decade, Rotherham's comparatively lower engagement levels highlight the need for targeted intervention. The opening of the new Central Library presents a timely and exciting opportunity to re-engage the community, strengthen outreach, and improve performance through focused and innovative strategies

Increase the number of library visitors by 10%

Target: Increase total library visitor numbers by 10% from the baseline of 616,387, aiming for 678,026 by the end of 2025/26.

Performance 2024/25:

- Total Visits: 395,297
 - Community Libraries: 348,961
 - Central Library: 46,296

Community Libraries are on track, showing strong performance with a 24% increase in footfall between 2022/23 and 2024/25. This growth is largely driven by the capital investment programme, which has enhanced facilities and engagement across local sites.

In contrast, the Central Library is significantly underperforming, with visits down 74% from its baseline of 176,996. This decline is primarily due to:

- A 17-month closure during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A slower return of key customer groups.

As a result, the Central Library is not on target to contribute effectively toward the overall visitor goal. However, the planned relocation is expected to drive a substantial recovery in footfall and help realign performance.

Increase reading for pleasure among young people (ages 0–25) by 25%

Target met: Engagement with young people reading for pleasure has reached the target.

The target was to increase engagement by 25% from a baseline of 3,248. By the end of 2024/25, engagement had risen to 8,367, representing a 156% increase. This

significant growth reflects the success of targeted programmes, outreach initiatives, and improved access to reading opportunities across the borough.

□ Increase the number and range of activities and groups by 10%

Target met: The service aimed to increase the number and diversity of activities and groups by 10% from the baseline of 1,609, targeting 1,770 by the end of 2025/26.

Current Performance (2024/25):

Activities and Groups Delivered: 2,786
Increase from Baseline: +73.2%

The target has been significantly exceeded, with a 73.2% increase in the number and range of activities and groups compared to the baseline. This reflects strong community engagement, effective outreach, and the success of programming across library services. The growth demonstrates the service's ability to respond to local needs and interests, and positions Rotherham's libraries as vibrant, inclusive spaces for learning, creativity, and connection.

□ Increase the number of people using IT facilities by 10%

Target met: The service aimed to increase IT facility usage by 10% from the baseline of 76,489, targeting 84,138 by the end of 2025/26.

Performance 2024/25:

- Usage: 91,097
- Increase from Baseline: +19%

The target has been successfully exceeded, with a 19% increase in IT facility usage compared to the baseline. This reflects strong engagement with digital services and the effectiveness of library sites in meeting the evolving needs of users. The growth highlights the value of accessible technology in supporting learning, job-seeking, and digital inclusion across Rotherham's communities.

□ Increase self-service take up such as online renewals and online requests by 20%

Target: Increase self-service transactions (e.g. self-service, Wi-Fi printing, online renewals and online requests) by 20% from the baseline of 261,219, aiming for 313,463 by the end of 2025/26.

Performance 2024/25:

Usage: 332,458

Increase from Baseline: 27.27%

The target has been achieved, and this improvement is attributed to the implementation of new technologies, such as Wi-Fi printing, which have enhanced accessibility and convenience for users.

● Increase the Number of Volunteering Hours by 50%

Target: Increase volunteering hours by 50% from the 2021/22 baseline of 3,207, aiming for 4,811 by the end of 2025/26.

Performance 2024/25:

- Volunteering Hours: 2,221
- Change from Baseline: -30.75%

Volunteering hours have declined by 30.75% compared to the baseline, indicating that the service is not currently on track to meet its target. A significant contributing factor is the loss of volunteer capacity following the COVID-19 pandemic, with many individuals not returning to their roles. This has had a lasting impact on service delivery and community involvement.

To address this, a refreshed recruitment campaign will be delivered along with stronger recognition and support for volunteers.

□ Maintain customer satisfaction above 95%

Target met: Customer satisfaction levels have exceeded 95%, with an overall customer satisfaction of 98.66% for 2024/25.

□ Trial technology which will allow customers to access libraries without staff being present in order to increase opening hour

Target on track: The Open+ system has been successfully implemented at Mowbray Gardens Library, enabling customers to access the library independently during extended hours. The rollout at Brinsworth Library is progressing well and remains on track for completion by December 2025

□ Be able to evidence the impact and value that libraries bring to communities through case studies and testimonials

Target met: A series of case studies have been provided throughout the Library Strategy, clearly demonstrating the impact libraries have on individuals and communities. These examples highlight real-life outcomes across areas such as literacy, wellbeing, digital inclusion, and community cohesion.