COVID-19

SAFER LIBRARIES

Helping public places to reopen safely
Libraries are places that help to support and sustain the public life of our communities. This Covid-19 Safer Spaces guide is to support staff to understand how to adapt their library to enable safe reopening and operation.

Developed by architects IF_DO, in partnership with Libraries Connected and CILIP, this free-to-use guide sets out clear stages for how to safely reopen libraries across the UK. Visual diagrams illustrate the spatial adaptations required for services to begin to resume, and also offers ideas on how to create a welcoming environment for customers and the wider community.

As an architecture practice, IF_DO is focussed on the design of social infrastructure—places that help to improve lives for people and foster stronger and more resilient communities. These places will be critical to the social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Covid-19 Safer Spaces project has been developed to provide expert guidance on how they can be safely adapted.

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The overview diagram below illustrates the core elements for the initial opening of libraries across the UK. The key details the graphical components used throughout the guide.
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

01  
**Ensuring staff are safe and feel empowered at work.** Encourage staff to return to work before the library is open to the public. This will allow them to become familiar with new protocols, and provide the opportunity to develop more safe ways of working.

02  
**Providing well ventilated spaces for staff and customers.** Filters on HVAC systems should be checked and replaced where necessary, and upgrade to a higher-rated filter where possible (consult with an HVAC professional for specific guidance). Windows should be kept open where possible, and if necessary, free-standing air-filtration units can be used.

03  
**Creating a clear and safe return and borrowing strategy.** The reopening of book borrowing is an essential service provided by the library, so a clear return and borrowing strategy, using signage and quarantine protocols, will ensure both staff and customers are safe.

04  
**Opening up the library by removing soft seating.** The removal of soft seating will not only discourage long dwell times in the library, but create more open space for other service to take place, such as quick choice shelving, wifi work spaces, and community displays.

05  
**Sustaining a welcoming environment.** Window displays and a community art wall are two ways to create and sustain a welcoming environment for the community. The use of colour and clear signage will help communicate to the public the current and future services available to them.

06  
**Extending library services off-site and into larger spaces.** Staff should be encouraged to reach out to their local area and extend services off-site and into larger, more open facilities. Collective activities could take place in parks, as services form inside the library can be shared in open space.
ELEMENTS
Staff & Work Rooms

To ensure staff feel safe and supported, it is encouraged they return to work before the library is opened for public use - allowing them to become familiar with the new protocols, and provide opportunity to feedback with any comments. Staff shifts should be considered, as well as revised opening times to manage demand. Clear book quarantine areas, and a rota system, should to be established to manage the safe control of stock. Please see general facilities section for small and large office arrangements.

- Books to be stored outside of workrooms and quarantined for 72 hours between use
- Move desks apart to allow at least 2m distance between staff
- Mirror seating spaces to reduce the number of staff sitting next to one another
- Mark a clear 2m zone around all IT equipment
- Free-standing air filtration units can help to improve air quality and reduce the risk of infection
- Ensure routes through staff areas maintain safe distances
Reception Areas
To minimise contact between staff and customers, the use of self-service machines is encouraged. Where libraries have reception desks and pods, Perspex screens should be installed. Desks are to be located close to the library entrance, and staff should be stationed here, rather than walk the library floor. Staff to wear and use any PPE deemed necessary.

LARGE RECEPTION DESK

Ensure standing space for two customers are at a safe distance

Use single reception stations where possible

MARK A CLEAR STANDING SPACE FOR CUSTOMERS

Back to back working at 2m distance

SINGLE RECEPTION STATION
Initial return of library stock

Where possible, the return of library stock should take place securely outside of the library, and be protected from the elements. Where this is not possible, an internal return system of bins or trolleys are to be clearly labelled for customer use. A clear walking route should be marked on the floor to ensure safe flow of customers through the space.

Use an external collection bin if possible, or a collection bag as an alternative.

Ensure a clear one way system is marked on the floor.

Separate entrance and exit if possible.

Returns Outside

Returns Inside
Safe Machines

Self-service machines will help limit interaction between library staff and customers. To ensure the machines are used in a safe way, a clear hand sanitising station should be located next to the machines for customers to use before and after. A cleaning regime should be introduced for the screens.

Queuing Outside

For small libraries with a single entrance, consider a one in - one out policy to manage the number of people within the space. Please see general facilities section for circulation conditions.
Click & Collect

An initial collection system of click & collect allows customers to choose specific books online and collect at the library. Books are to be packaged securely in a dedicated area in the library. A collection date and time should be given to the customer to manage flow throughout the day.

Grab & Go

Broader reading opportunities can be facilitated through a Grab & Go system. A selection of books can be chosen by the librarian upon request (telephone or online) of a specific genre or author. Again, a collection slot should be given to the customer to manage flow.

Collection Points

Option 1 - Self-Service:
Customers locate their order on dedicated shelves with A-Z customer surnames, and check out the order using self-services machines.

Option 2 - Reception Point:
Staff control the shelves and check out the order before handing the books over to the customer. Staff to wear and use any PPE deemed necessary.
Working Safely

The safe use of IT equipment is to be carefully managed through timed appointments. Each work station should be cleaned between use, either by library staff or by the customer, using a cleaning point as detailed on page 13. The cleaning point is to be located next to IT work stations with clear signage.

LINEAR DESK CONDITION

Move desks apart to maximise distances and mirror IT terminals to reduce customers sitting next to one another.

Screen between desks if less than 2m.

Mark a clear 2m zone around all shared equipment.

ROUND IT POD CONDITION

Four IT terminals in close proximity.

Two IT terminals at a safe distance with a screen between.
Wifi Spaces

To limit the use of shared IT equipment, wifi desk spaces can be created within open areas in the library. Customers can book time slots to access the internet connected through their personal laptop. The compact standing work stations take up less room, and provide a greater service to customers.

Cleaning Point

Cleaning points are to be located near IT equipment for customers to use before and after their allocated time slot. Clear signage on the walls and floor will help the customers identify the station and use it in a safe way.
**IT Distribution**

The first IT desk spaces to be opened for public use should be located near the library entrance. This approach controls the number of people in the space, yet provides visibility to show that the library is open for use. The second stage is to allow access to IT facilities across the library. These spaces are often distributed throughout the library, and should remain in existing locations. IT terminals that are in close proximity should be closed to enable social distancing.

**ENTRANCE / LOBBY CONDITION**

- Direction arrows to control customers walking past IT stations
- IT stations near entrances limits the number of people within the library

**THROUGHOUT THE LIBRARY**

- Desk spaces closed if in close proximity
- Retain existing distribution throughout the library, provided there are safe distances between users
**Preparation & Space**

Quick choice offers customers access to limited stock for borrowing. Soft seating should be removed from lobby spaces with the space allowing for mobile shelving. Access to this small library can be controlled by timeslots, and books can be borrowed using self-service machines. Books handled by customers but not borrowed should be quarantined for 72 hours.

Lobby spaces often filled with soft furniture

Book shelves often located in close proximity to seating

Soft seating to be removed as it encourages dwelling within the library

Once removed, a quick choice library can be created

Create a one-way system through spaced out book shelves to manage flow & number of people

Ensure a clearly located quarantine trolley is provided for any handled books that have not been borrowed
**GENERAL FACILITIES**

**ENTRANCES**

- Leave entrance door open with clear signage for sanitising point immediately inside.
- One person inside the lobby at all times with clear signage for sanitising point.
- Clearly signed separate queues for different facilities.
- Queuing outside in the public realm.

**Single Door without Lobby**

- Clear signage for sanitising point inside entrance.
- Keep doors open & have clear signage for sanitising point immediately inside.
- Consider one way system / use revolving door for entrances and another for exit where possible.

**Automatic Door with Lobby**

- Clear signage for entrance queue & for what services.

**Revolving Door one-way Route**

**Shared Entrance & Atrium**
One way system on staircases where possible

Use mirrors to increase visibility around corners to avoid crossing

Clear signage to services on each level & provide standing space outside of stairwell

Use mirrors to increase visibility around corners to avoid crossing

Ensure safe distance is maintained at entrances of lift and staircase

Standing space outside of lift lobby & clear signage stating use of lift for essential use only

Use of lifts for essential use only

If corridors width less than 2m, consider one-way system

GENERAL FACILITIES

CIRCULATION

Single Staircase

Lift & Stair Core

Lift & Lobby

Corridors
GENERAL FACILITIES

TOILETS

Single Person / Disabled

- High-contact surfaces to be disinfected regularly
- Disinfectant to be provided in order for users to sanitise surfaces after use
- If possible, high-contact surfaces such as soap dispensers, taps and hand-dryers to be fitted with hands-free sensors

Multiple Cubicles

- Alternating cubicles taken out of use to limit the number of users at one time
- Windows opened to ensure ventilation
- Sanitiser stations to be provided
- Where less than 2m apart, alternating sinks, hand dryers and urinals should be taken out of use to allow for required social distancing

Sanitiser stations to be provided
**General Facilities**

**Office**

**Before**

**Small/Medium Office**
- Desk spaces in close proximity
- Seating spaces for meeting or lunch breaks

**Medium/Large Office**
- Face to face working at full capacity
- Desk spaces in close proximity

**After**

**Small/Medium Office**
- Open windows for ventilation
- Mark a clear walking route
- Ensure minimum 2m between desks or install screens between desks where this is not possible

**Medium/Large Office**
- Free movement around office space
- Open windows for ventilation
- Mark a clear walking route
- Stagger staff working patterns to minimise numbers
- Ensure no face to face working takes place by staggering seating spaces
**Staff Kitchen**

Limited to essential use with limited capacity determined by size of room.

**Before**

- Existing arrangement of furniture does not comply with social distance guidance

**After**

- Disposable paper towels to replace tea-towels
- Sanitizer stations to be mounted in key areas
- Windows opened to ensure ventilation
- High-contact surfaces to be disinfected regularly
- Furniture reduced to ensure social distance guidance upheld
Community Art Wall

To ensure a welcome environment is created and sustained throughout the reopening of the library, a community art wall could be created with the local people. This board can be displayed in the lobby area of the library, creating a colourful street presence, and encourage those in the local area to contribute.

**STEP 1**

A collection box can be located next to book return area in the lobby of the library.

Collection box to be clearly labelled and quarantined for 72 hours.

**STEP 2**

The art wall evolves through time and can viewing from the street for the whole community to enjoy.
Window Displays

A colourful, welcoming street presence can increase people using the services available at the library, and help prevent loneliness within the community. Windows should be used to display books, as well as community art projects, and clear information on the services currently being provided.

Limit displays to the lower section of the window to allow views into and out of the library.

Position low book stacks close to windows.

Displace key information in windows such as online services.

Clear welcoming signage to show the library is open.

Opportunity for the community to contribute to an art piece.
Outside Space & Activities

The library need not be confined to its walls. There are opportunities elsewhere that can begin to adapt to provide services for the library, such as larger buildings, community halls, shops and sports centres. Staff should be encouraged to reach out to the local area and extend their services off site. Group numbers must not exceed current government guidelines of up to six people from different households.

Children’s rhyme time happening in a small part of the library

Relocated rhyme time in a larger, more open space
CASE STUDIES
CASE STUDY

SMALL–MEDIUM

Example of a Retail Unit Library

BEFORE

The children’s library at the back of the library has soft seating

AFTER

This small retail unit library has large windows for displays, and a clear single point of entry. A sanitising station is located directly inside the entrance, and clear signage direct customers to the services available. Books can be returned on the shelves in the windows, and collections are made from the shelf parallel to the reception desk. Books are checked out using the self-service machines. Soft furniture has been removed and stacks moved back to create an open lobby. It is only this front section of the library that is open.

Book shelves are moveable, allowing the space to adapt

Self-service Window displays Sanitising Returns IT desk

Collection Section closed Single appointment only Soft seating removed

Staff Office Meeting room Reception
CASE STUDY

MEDIUM-LARGE

Sheerness Gateway
38-42 High St, Kent

BEFORE

Image from outside shows the shared entrance space to access library facilities and gateway services

AFTER

This large gateway library has a number of services, each sharing a main entrance. The two sliding entrance doors have been used to create a clear entrance and exit flow into the library, with a sanitising station within the lobby. Book collections are made at the reception desk. The soft furniture section has been removed and replaced with a quick choice library, where the customers check-out using the self-service machine by the exit.
This document has been developed with and should be read alongside the Libraries Connected Library service recovery toolkit, and all relevant Government guidance. Please note that knowledge of Covid-19 and best practice guidelines in response to it are evolving, and that this document may be updated to reflect ongoing learning.

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