

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet **DATE:** 19<sup>th</sup> September 2011

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Andrew Stevens  
**(For all enquiries)** Assistant Director, Culture and Skills  
Community and Well Being  
(07531) 875507

**WARD(S):** ALL

**PORTFOLIO:** Community and Leisure – Shafiq Chaudhry

### **PART I** **KEY DECISION**

#### **LIBRARIES STRATEGY**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report updates Members on significant developments since 22 September 2009, when the five year libraries strategy was approved by Cabinet. It reviews key issues for the future development of the service and proposes priorities for the next stage of implementation of the strategy.

##### **2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Cabinet is requested to:

- a) Note service improvements achieved since 2009.
- b) Agree priorities for the next stage of implementation of the libraries strategy set out in section 6.4 of this report.

##### **3 Community Strategy Priorities**

- **Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion**
- **Adding years to Life and Life to years**
- **Being Safe, Feeling Safe**
- **Prosperity for All**

Access to information and learning opportunities will contribute to the well-being of individuals and the community and employment. This will help realise the Sustainable Community vision and strategy for Slough.

## 4 **Other Implications**

### 4.1 **Financial**

As a result of the council's invest to save strategy agreed in 2009, the cost of libraries to local residents has been reduced by 25% in 2 years. The cost per visit in 2009 was £4.71. This year it is projected to be £3.62.

4.2 A report commissioned by Slough Borough Council from LG Futures in 2011 identified that in 2009/10 the cost of libraries was £22.26 per resident per year. Using updated budget figures for 2010/11, that figure was reduced by 14% to £19.55 per resident and in 2011/12 is projected to have reduced a further 10% to £17.53 per resident.

4.3 This improvement has been achieved by reducing administrative costs, modernising practices at the same time as increasing investment in opening hours and opening three new satellite libraries while many authorities are closing libraries and reducing opening hours.

4.4 Section 6.4 of this report identifies a further 5% efficiency saving that can be achieved through the contract with Essex County Council, further reducing administrative costs without any adverse impact on customer services.

4.5 The service is currently forecasting to spend its 2011/12 budget allocation. Last year expenditure was lightly below the allocated budget.

### 4.6 **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There are no immediate Human Rights Act or other legal implications arising from this report

### 4.7 **Equalities Impact Assessment**

An Equalities Impact Assessment is undertaken for significant service changes. There are no changes proposed in this report requiring a formal assessment at this stage.

### 4.8 **Workforce**

There are no workforce implications for staff of Slough Borough Council arising from this report.

## 5 **Libraries strategic review, 2009**

### 5.1 **Scope and purpose of the 2009 libraries strategy**

In April 2009 a strategic review of Slough's public library service was initiated with the express aim of setting out a clear direction for the service for the next 5 years and beyond. The review included comparison with similar authorities and detailed assessment from external experts from a leading library service with a track record for efficiency and excellence in customer outcomes. The review considered all available options and potential models to re-design services and proposed a plan for a 5 year improvement programme to transform the service.

### 5.2 **Key issues**

The review started with a vision for libraries that should be vibrant places, reaching out to communities, places where everyone can feel welcome and comfortable and have a strong sense of local identity and ownership. Its

ambition was that local people would benefit from libraries acting as enablers of joined up services that can change and adapt quickly to meet changing needs. It was recognised that this was essentially a vision for community services, that would be delivered with and through libraries and their partners.

5.3 Libraries link with schools and children’s services, adult learning providers and community organisations and are a host to many, helping local people achieve more and be active members of their community. The vision was based on the experience of investment in Langley and Cippenham libraries, where more flexible services and multi functional libraries were becoming community centres where local people could meet, find information, access My Council and learn together.

5.4 In 2009 the library service was assessed as being satisfactory. Opening hours were among the worst in the country, visits were average, and the cost per visit was very high at £4.71. High costs were partly because the service was too small to achieve any economies of scale and partly because it had complex and proportionately costly management overheads.

5.5 These elements together comprised a 5 year strategy which can be summarised as follows:

1. Improve customer experience (self service and more staff on the floor)
2. Increase access through investment in opening hours (increased over 100%)
3. Improve usage through the development of libraries as multi community hubs (museum, online learning, shared premises at Chalvey, Wexham, Colnbrook)
4. Increase capacity and reduce management costs (more opening hours and lower staff costs)
5. Improve performance management (more systematic understanding of community needs and prioritising services including community profiles)
6. Modernise processes to improve efficiency (simpler stock management, self service etc that means more can be invested in customer benefits)

5.6 In order to improve the service and sustain that improvement the strategy emphasised the need to resolve leadership, cultural and capacity issues first before any other changes could deliver real benefit to the community. The catalyst for this would be a strategic partnership with another provider who could bring established expertise and economies of scale and leadership capability to drive the service forward and substantially improve performance and value for money. This resulted in the contract with Essex County Council which was in place for January 2011.

5.7 **Progress since 2009**

Progress since 2009 is summarised in the following table, with more detailed commentary on specific issues marked \* below.

Modernise processes to improve efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced IT costs with new computer system 2010</li> <li>• Automated stock management system implemented 2010</li> <li>• Improved discounts for stock purchase through Essex contracts save £10,000 a year 2011</li> </ul>
Improve customer experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self service issues/returns implemented 2010</li> <li>• Increased visibility of staff with floor walking at all</li> </ul>

	<p>libraries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive staff training to improve customer services (*5.11ff)</li> <li>• Essex's 24 hour enquiries service Answers Direct implemented 2011</li> <li>• Access for users to more online resources 2011</li> <li>• Increased public engagement, with more volunteers - including five times more summer reading scheme volunteers in 2011</li> <li>• More bookshop style displays</li> <li>• More welcoming entrance at Central Library 2010</li> <li>• Home Library service maintained at 2009 levels in 2010 and improved service planned for October 2011 (* 5.7ff)</li> </ul>
Investment in opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening hours improved from 153.5 a week to 327.5 (113% increase) 2009 to 2011</li> <li>• Mobile library closed to enable satellite libraries investment 2010</li> </ul>
Develop libraries as multi functional community hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satellite library opened Chalvey July 2011 with Colnbrook and Wexham planned for autumn 2011 (* 5.10ff)</li> <li>• Investigating joint staffing arrangements with My Council at Britwell; My Council sessions planned at Colnbrook</li> <li>• Museum moved into Central Library, opening autumn 2011</li> </ul>
Increase capacity and reduce management costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library net costs reduced 15% 2009 to 2011</li> <li>• Cost per visit reduced from £4.71 in 2008/9 to £3.62 in 2010/11 (24%)</li> <li>• Strategic partnership with Essex - Library Services (Slough) - from January 2011</li> <li>• Administration and management costs reduced by £270,000 2009-2011 (* 5.12ff)</li> <li>• Improved support for events using Essex materials 2011</li> </ul>
Improve performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book issues increased 1% 2010/11 (* 5.14ff)</li> <li>• Visits declined 4% 2010/11 (* 5.14ff)</li> <li>• Cippenham visits up 23% following extension</li> <li>• Community profiles established and improved targeting of activity to community needs 2011</li> </ul>

### 5.8 Home library service

Following closure of the Mobile service in June 2010 the home library service has been delivered by Groundwork Thames Valley. From 1 October 2011 this service will be integrated into the mainstream library service. Volunteers will work from local libraries to deliver to local housebound residents; linking customers to their local library.

5.9 Customers will receive an improved service with a better book choice and a wider range of services including information and reader development. The service is currently recruiting volunteers and to increase users in 2012. From April 2012 the service will be promoted with a planned expansion of the service

which will see an increased number of housebound users reached and the service extending to care homes. Volunteers will be supported and sustained through a combination of central and local library staff, building on the model used successfully for many years but involving more staff to make it more robust.

**5.10 Multi functional libraries**

Developments with community hubs at Chalvey, Colbrook and Wexham were considered at the Cabinet meeting in July 2011. In addition, work is well advanced in delivering a new library at Britwell at the centre of a community hub with My Council, adult learning, community hall, meeting rooms, and the family contact service. This model was first begun in Langley and Cippenham where the libraries are venues and catalysts for community activities. Appendix A is an illustrative list of the range of programmes in libraries.

5.11 The museum has moved to the Central Library and will be open for business from September 2011. A launch is planned for 12 October which is being jointly organised with the library service. This is in readiness for the move to the Curve.

**5.12 Staff roles**

Library services were restructured at the end of March 2011, with staff appointed in post from 1st April. This had been identified as a priority in 2009 and would have been required to bring Slough libraries in line with current practice with or without the strategic partnership. The impact on staff was mitigated by a substantial number of vacant posts being held and some voluntary redundancy.

5.13 Further recruitment has taken place recently to appoint to vacant posts in Slough Central library to support the front line delivery of the service. The restructure has resulted in fewer managers and a more streamlined structure with clearer roles and responsibilities with the focus much more on frontline delivery. There are fewer specialist function posts, but this is offset by an increase in the number of staff with the skills to work in a number of specialist areas such as reference, children's or local studies. These new roles, and the increased emphasis on customer service, have been supported by substantial investment in staff training and development in 2010 and 2011.

**5.14 Issues and visits**

Investment in Cippenham, Britwell and Langley is producing good results as more people access a wider range of services, ranging from coffee mornings to play sessions to ICT classes. The fact that issues are increasing while visits are declining suggests that stock quality improvements and better display and promotion of stock is working and once people are in a library they are finding more that they want to borrow. This trend also reflects national evidence that during an economic downturn more people use libraries to borrow instead of buying books and to help prepare them for employment.

5.15 The benefits of a more flexible model of library provision that uses libraries as shared community spaces or hubs is beginning to be realised in community libraries and at Chalvey. The fall in total visits is due to the Central Library, where a longstanding decline is continuing in the first quarter of 2011/12. This in part reflects a national decline in visits but largely reflects lack of investment and the tired nature of services at the library. The trend is not significantly affected by the Thames Valley University moving from Slough.

## 5.16 **Libraries contract performance**

Improvements in 2011 through the contract with Essex to date include:

- Improved home library service for housebound users (from October 2011)
- 24 hours enquiries service currently available to staff and to the public in the autumn giving access to more information resources than ever before
- 5% (£10,000 pa) lower price of stock purchases through the Essex contract
- Increased range of online resources, enabling people for example to practice & study at home for the 'Life in the UK' citizenship test & driving theory test as well as more online materials through library subscriptions including Polish News Bulletin, the Guardian, Economist, India Times
- Improved stock display, marketing materials, including leaflets, posters
- Improved materials for events and activities, especially children's holiday activities
- Increased staff training in customer services
- Full achievement of savings target
- Opening of Chalvey satellite library with Colnbrook and Wexham in progress
- Over 50% take up of self-service by users

5.17 In addition, there has been an increase in partnership working, which is beginning to deliver a range of targeted events. These include working with Adult learning staff on providing classes for visually impaired customers and working with the museum, Wexham Court primary school and a community organisation to submit a Lottery bid for a joint project. Joint work has also been developed with the police on road safety and community surgeries.

## 6 **Development issues**

### 6.1 **Is the direction set in 2009 still relevant**

Many of the transformational changes proposed in the 2009 review have been implemented and are showing evidence they are producing benefits. The strategic partnership, satellite libraries and the invest to save strategy are close to completion. Others, including the Curve and the new Britwell library as part of a community hub are in progress but not yet completed.

6.2 The direction set for libraries in 2009 to move from a traditional book based model only and to add a greater flexibility through putting libraries at the heart of multi functional community hubs is still highly relevant. This approach is contributing to increased use at community libraries and is reducing costs, adding up to better value for money for the community and the Council.

6.3 Libraries have the flexibility to retain their core book based functions (and improved issues suggest this is still extremely important to users) and when required to shift the balance from books to ICT based resources, including e-books as demand changes. They are also able to make links with learning and culture more easily, reflecting how users don't use services in isolation from one another but want to be able to make their own connections to find the help and support they want.

### 6.4 **Key issues for the next 3 years of the strategy**

While implementation of the strategy is well underway, the following are proposed priorities for the next stage of its implementation:

Priority	Targets	Activities
Increase visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 year increase 5% in visits by the end of the first year the Curve is implemented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved marketing and promotion</li> <li>• Maintain focus on stock quality</li> <li>• Implement Curve</li> <li>• Increase partnerships – museum, IT training, community groups, classes</li> </ul>
Improve opening hours at Britwell and Central Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 day opening for the Curve</li> <li>• Britwell library and My Council opening hours aligned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities to re-invest efficiencies in late night and Sunday opening at Curve</li> <li>• Invest in extending Britwell opening hours in new site</li> </ul>
Implement new libraries as part of community hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 new libraries fully integrated in community hubs by 2012/13</li> <li>• Libraries an effective access point for all first stop council and community enquiries by 2014</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Colnbrook, and Wexham 2011/12</li> <li>• Open new Britwell 2012/13</li> <li>• Increased community engagement and promotion of services at all library sites and hubs to increase use</li> <li>• Develop Curve offer as a central cultural and community hub</li> </ul>
Continue to reduce costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost per visit below £3.00</li> <li>• 5% cost reduction 2012/13</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline processes inc. stock purchasing and supplier processing</li> </ul>
Improve core ICT services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliability increased and flexibility for user demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration and standardisation of systems</li> <li>• Make sure systems deliver full functionality</li> </ul>

6.5 Many priorities for the next three years are focused on building on the structural and organisational changes and investments made since 2009 and delivering full value and benefit to residents across the borough. . The central element of this, and the one that will make the biggest impact on integrating libraries with other community services, is implementing the Curve. This will improve the customer offer and increase use of libraries to deliver the multi faceted community offer set out in the 2009 strategy,

6.6 The Central Library accounts for around 75% of all library visits and 50% of issues in Slough and is in continuing decline due to the condition of the building and its presentation being so out of tune with public expectations. Modern central libraries in other major towns, including High Wycombe, Norwich and Bournemouth are continuing to show the value of the convenience and depth and range of service that is only possible in a larger library. Centres such as the

Whitechapel Idea Store in Tower Hamlets or Winchester Discovery Centre show the added value and sustainability of a multi functional service of which a library is part.

## **7 Comments of Other Committees**

- 7.1 This report has been shared with the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel on 15 September 2011.

## **8 Conclusion**

- 8.1 The report highlights achievements since the libraries review in 2009. It identifies substantial progress has been made in making changes to how libraries operate and increasing their capacity and potential to improve and be integrated with other community based services.
- 8.2 Priorities for the next stage of the strategy include implementation of the Curve and driving forward modernisation of processes and improvements to customer services that will together see the vision set out in 2009 being realised.
- 8.3 The Cabinet is requested to resolve the priorities set out in section 6.4 of this report.

## **Appendices attached**

- A Illustrative list of library activities

## **Background papers**

Building a sustainable community: a strategic review of Slough's public library service, 2009.

## **Appendix A**

### **Illustrative list of library services**

#### **Reading and information**

Book Clubs and reading groups for adults and older people  
Book Crazy children's reading group  
Teenagers reading group  
Summer reading challenge  
24 hour online reference and enquiries service

#### **Employment and skills**

Job clubs  
Saturday Sofa Club (smoking cessation)  
Managing your health & accessing work sessions  
Healthy eating classes  
Computers for beginners classes  
ESOL classes  
IT, English, maths and customer services training (TLE training at Central Library)  
Supernova classes for visually impaired learners

#### **Community and democracy**

My Council at Cippenham and Langley. Britwell and Colnbrook later in 2011/12  
Volunteer information coffee mornings  
Police Community Support Officer surgeries  
Councillor ward surgeries  
Music events and concerts  
Family history and local history events  
Partnership with museum, now based at Slough library  
Black history month

#### **Children's and family learning**

Reading and learning and class visits with schools  
Story & rhyme time  
Family learning sessions  
Music time, play & art sessions  
Dad's music & story time  
Multicultural story times (Arabic, Hindi, Panjabi, Urdu)  
Craft sessions and creative play  
Holiday events  
Family learning festival