

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Neighbourhoods and  
Community Services  
Scrutiny Panel

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**WARD(S):** ALL

### **PART I**

#### **LIBRARIES PROGRESS REPORT**

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

- 1.1 This report updates Members on significant developments since September 2009, when the five year libraries strategy was approved by Cabinet. It also reports on the performance of the service after the first year of the five year contract with Essex County Council and examines the future direction of the service.
- 1.2 Staff from the library service will be available at the Scrutiny Panel meeting to help answer questions about performance and future developments for the service.

##### **2 Recommendations**

The Panel is requested to:

- a) note service improvements achieved since 2009; and
- b) advise on priorities for the next stage of implementation of the Libraries Strategy set out in Section 9 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 improve employment prospects. 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 two years. The cost per visit in 2009 was £4.71. By 2010/11 this improved to £3.62.

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.

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

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

### **4.3 Equalities Impact Assessment**

An Equalities Impact Assessment is undertaken for significant service changes.

### **4.4 Workforce**

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

## **5 Libraries Strategy 2009 To Date**

5.1 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 five years and beyond.

5.2 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.

5.3 A five year strategy was put in place, which included the following:

1. Improve customer experience
2. Increase opening hours
3. Improve access through the development of libraries as multi community hubs
4. Increase capacity and reduce management costs
5. Improve performance management
6. Modernise processes to improve efficiency

5.4 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 would bring established expertise 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.

## 5.5 Progress since 2009

Progress since 2009 is summarised in the following table:

Modernise processes to improve efficiency	<p>2010:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced IT costs with new computer system</li> <li>Automated stock management system implemented</li> </ul> <p>2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved discounts for stock purchase through Essex contracts save £10,000 a year</li> </ul>
Improve customer experience	<p>2010:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self service issues/returns implemented</li> <li>More welcoming entrance at Central Library</li> </ul> <p>2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased visibility of staff with floor walking at all libraries</li> <li>Extensive staff training to improve customer services</li> <li>Essex's 24 hour enquiries service Answers Direct implemented</li> <li>Access for users to more online resources</li> <li>Increased public engagement, with more volunteers - including five times more summer reading scheme volunteers</li> <li>More bookshop style displays</li> </ul>
Investment in opening hours	<p>2010:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening hours improved from 153.5 a week to 184.5 since 2009</li> <li>Mobile library closed to enable satellite libraries investment</li> </ul> <p>2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening hours improved to 321 a week (109% increase between 2009 to 2011)</li> </ul>
Develop libraries as multi functional community hubs	<p>2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satellite libraries opened in Chalvey, Colnbrook and Wexham</li> <li>Investigating joint staffing arrangements with My Council at Britwell; My Council sessions planned at Colnbrook</li> <li>Closer working between My Council &amp; library staff at Langley Library</li> <li>Museum opened at Central Library (October)</li> </ul>
Increase capacity and reduce management costs	<p>2011:</p> <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> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administration and management costs reduced by £270,000 2009 to 2011</li> <li>• Improved support for events using Essex materials</li> </ul>
Improve performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book issues declined 2% in 2011/12 when compared with same period in 2010/11(to November 2011)</li> <li>• Visits declined 28% in 2011/12 when compared with same period in 2010/11(to November 2011)</li> <li>• Cippenham visits up 18% in 2011/12</li> <li>• Community profiles established and improved targeting of activity to community needs</li> </ul>

## **6 Performance in 2011/12**

- 6.1 Visits to libraries overall have reduced by 28% in 2011/12 compared with the same period last year. But this masks good performance, which is bucking the national trend, at Cippenham and Britwell libraries where significantly more people are using a wider range of services, ranging from coffee mornings to play sessions to ICT classes.
- 6.2 The main fall in visits, 36%, is at Slough Library. This largely reflects lack of investment and the tired nature of services at the library, as well as a major impact from the road works which have made it difficult to get to the library.
- 6.3 Book issues are performing well with only a 2 percent reduction in 2011/12 compared with the same period in the previous year. 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.
- 6.4 Holiday activities for children have been well attended. More staff have been trained in working with children and activities are being more widely advertised, for example staff attending school assemblies to promote the Summer Reading Challenge. More children than ever took part in this year's Circus Skills Summer Reading Challenge.

## **7 Development issues 2011/12**

### **7.1 Delivery of the home library service**

From 1 October 2011 the home library service has been integrated into the mainstream library service. Volunteers are working from local libraries to deliver to local housebound residents; linking customers to their local library.

The service is currently recruiting additional volunteers which will enable it to reach more users in 2012. Customers will receive an improved service with a better book choice and a wider range of services including information. From April 2012 the service will be promoted to increase the number of housebound users reached and offer a service to care homes. Volunteers will be supported by staff at all libraries, building on the model used successfully for many years.

## 7.2 Multi functional libraries

Satellite library services have opened in 2011 in Chalvey, Colnbrook and at the Wexham Road Children's Centre. 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 for wider community activities. An illustrative list of library activities is included as Appendix A.

- 7.3 The Scrutiny Panel meeting will include an opportunity to have a tour of the new community centre at Chalvey, which includes a satellite library. The second part of the meeting will include a presentation and discussion on lessons from the Chalvey hub, future developments in Chalvey and indicative proposals for Britwell.

## 7.4 Staff roles

Since the service was restructured in the summer, further recruitment has taken place to appoint to vacant posts in Slough Central Library. The restructure has resulted in fewer managers and a more streamlined structure with clearer roles and responsibilities, and 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.

## 8 Contract performance

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

- Improved home library service for housebound users (from October 2011)
- 24 hour 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 and posters
- Improved materials for events and activities, especially children's
- Increased staff training in customer services
- Full achievement of savings target
- Opening of Chalvey, Colnbrook and Wexham satellite libraries
- Over 65% take up of self-service by users

- 8.2 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.

- 8.3 While there have been improvements to libraries, performance in terms of visits and issues has shown there are serious challenges ahead. Members may wish to explore what the service is doing to improve visits and its plans for future development in the context of the priorities set out in section 9 of this report.

## **9 Future Direction**

### **9.1 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.

- 9.2 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, and adding up to better value for money for the community and the Council.

- 9.3 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.

### **9.4 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:

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Activities</b>
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 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 including 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>

9.5 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.

9.6 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.

## **10 Comments of Other Committees**

10.1 Cabinet approved the proposed priorities for the next period of the libraries strategy, on the 19 September 201.

## **11 Conclusion**

11.1 The report highlights achievements since the Libraries Review in 2009. It identifies that substantial progress has been made in making changes to how libraries operate, increasing their capacity, and potential to improve and be integrated with other community based services.

11.2 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.

## **Appendices attached**

A Illustrative list of library activities



## **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