

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

IMPACT OF THE CURVE ON LIBRARY SERVICES

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report is to inform and highlight to the scrutiny committee the continuing positive impact on library services since moving to the Curve in September 2016. The Impact of The Curve on library services has been a positive one resulting in significant added value. The new building, the town centre location, the space, the co location with other services and the excitement generated by the Curve itself has enabled an improved and enhanced library offer to customers and the community.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- The Panel is requested to note the report and the improved library service offer since The Curve opened in 2016

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

Libraries change lives for the better. They not only provide access to books and other literature but also help people to help themselves and improve their opportunities, bring people together, and provide practical support and guidance. As a locally accountable service, the library at the Curve is well placed to respond to local needs and issues.

The Library has a critical role in helping people realise their potential and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Curve library is a vital community hub, bringing people together and giving them access to the services and support they need to help them live better.

3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

The report highlights the links in supporting 3 of the priorities in the JSNA

1. Protecting vulnerable children
2. Increasing life expectancy by focusing on inequalities
3. Improving mental health and wellbeing

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

The Libraries and Culture service offer at the Curve contributes directly to Outcomes 1, 2 and 3

1. Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful
2. Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs
3. Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay

4. **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications to this report.

(b) Risk Management

There are no risk management implications to this report.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

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

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The compilation of this report has not required an Equalities Impact Assessment.

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 There is a very clear narrative and strong evidence on how moving the library service from the old library to the Curve has had nothing but a positive impact. The following information outlines the key highlights.

5.2 The move from the old library to the Curve was the catalyst for bringing back the service from an outsourced contract (Essex Council) to becoming an in-house service which is integral to delivering a broader and more holistic offer to our residents.

5.3 Usage of the library service at the curve has increased from 241,350 at the old library to 356,052 visits in 2017/18 an increase of 47.5%

- Active borrowers in 2015/16 were 10,734
- Active borrowers in 17/18 were 11,886, an increase of 11% since opening.

- 5.4 The Summer Reading Challenge, which is a national scheme for children and young people which helps prevent children's reading dipping in summer holidays and helps to support learning in a fun and creative way, has seen an increase from 1226 participants joining the scheme and 456 completing it at the old library to now 1777 joining (2128 in 2017) and 1077 completing.
- 5.5 The lay out and ambience of the curve has resulted in usage of certain areas becoming much more fit for purpose e.g. The second floor quieter space with desks and power points is ideal for studying and during exam times is packed with young people. The Ground floor allows for creative performances such as 'Empoword' delivering fantastic spoken word / poetry performances, whilst the children's area has created an environment allowing fun activities & creativity as well as being user friendly for parents with buggies etc.
- 5.6 Library service opening hours in The Curve have increased by 12% an annual increase of 331.5 hrs. This growth is against a background of decreasing opening hours and closures in other library across the region and nationally.
- 5.7 The move to the curve has led to the service moving from a stand alone library service to a Libraries & Culture Service. It has also enabled co-location with a range of services including Adult Education and Skills and the Registrars.
- 5.8 The redesigned Libraries and Culture service brings together library services, culture and arts delivery under one service, with an enhanced and wider arts and cultural offer, removing barriers to involvement in cultural activity and offering an increased range of free or low cost events for the communities in Slough to participate in. Participation in a cultural event from a young age shows that it has a lasting impact on people's lives.
- 5.9 The prominence of the curve building has been a key factor in developing partnerships with LEGO, Schools, Job Clubs and has also led to initiatives like 'Library After Dark' a joint project with Slough Children's Services Trust'.
- 5.10 The reputation of the library at the Curve is significantly better and it is now seen as a modern service which has also attracted interest from other library authorities and national bodies. These include visits from the National Libraries Taskforce, the Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, Arts Council, and the National Society of Chief Librarians (Libraries Connected). There was a national launch of a toolkit for babies and parents baby bump <https://ascel.org.uk/bump-booster> helping parents to give their child an early start by singing and talking to their bump. <https://ascel.org.uk/bump-booster>
- 5.11 Whilst there are many groups that have benefitted from the move to the Curve, it has seen a significant and positive impact for young people. The new building and the spaces have attracted young people to want to spend time in the Curve and they also see it as a place where they can now secure support for other services such as securing employment, education or training.

- 5.12 The creation of the Libraries and Culture Service has resulted in us being able to offer more events tailored to their interests, and provide a space for young people to showcase their talents including Beat Routes a music and art club, Ghetto Geek author event, comics workshop, 3d printing and debate mate involving secondary schools. Empoword have performed in the public spaces, XtraArt have exhibited in the Gallery and Youth Parliament often hold their meetings in the Curve.
- 5.13 There has been an increase in the numbers of young people wanting to be involved in volunteering opportunities at The Curve. This year we had 104 young people apply to volunteer during the Summer Reading Challenge compared to 52 last year and 24 the year before.
- 5.14 We have had 179 volunteers who have worked towards their Duke of Edinburgh Award aiming to achieve Bronze, Silver and Gold awards this is compared with a maximum of 25 in 2015/16. Many of these young people act as advocates highlighting library services and volunteer year after year. Some have gone on to be employed as Weekend Assistants in the library.
- 5.15 The Curve has a wide coverage of Wi Fi points with good speeds resulting in easy to access WiFi for customers in any area of the building. This extensive coverage and quality has resulted in a 49% increase in Unique users using WiFi at the Curve compared to previously
- 2015/16 - 13,574 unique users
 - 2017/18 20,270 unique users
- 5.16 In addition to the regular activities now on offer there is also a quarterly programme of events and activities for adults and children to get involved in, with over 25 in each quarter. These have included the Curve celebrates programme for the first year of opening, the first Black History month programme this year, a play about dementia, a performance about mental health, interactive author, craft and poetry and creative writing workshops.
- 5.17 Attending a cultural event or a regular activity as a child or adult helps to improve mental health, confidence and skills, and can reduce loneliness. The weekly seated exercise activity helps adults with their mobility and also helps them get to know other people in a relaxed setting and helps their wellbeing and mood.
- 5.18 The Curve has had a positive impact on the community libraries with an enhanced offer at each site. There has been a broader range of one-off events on offer since the Curve opened, and each of the 3 community libraries now has weekly Duplo and LEGO with the sessions linked to stories and school topics and enhancing learning through play. Cippenham also has a Lego session for adults too.
- 5.19 When a show/event is booked for the Curve, often there are extra performances at one or more of the branches which might not be feasible as stand-alone events, and offer greater choice for library users in the community libraries. Examples of these are Connie's Colander performance; a quiz night for World Book Night, both adult events offering more choice for users and both events received positive verbal feedback. Author events including Horrible Science, Guy Bass and Ross Montgomery have also increased choice and audiences.

5.20 The reorganisation of the Libraries Service in to a Libraries and Culture Service will have been fully implemented by November 2018 with all vacancies having been filled by then. The reorganisation has created an opportunity to strengthen both the operational and management teams. In the next few weeks we will see the arrival of a new Operational manager and a Children's Young People and Outreach Manager, These and other changes leaves the service well placed to deliver meaningful and impact led outcomes for our residents, especially in relation to:

- Supporting the creation of stronger and more resilient communities,
- Helping our residents to achieve their full potential,
- Increased reading and literacy
- Improved digital access
- Supporting healthier and happier lives
- Creating greater prosperity
- And given the location of the Curve, the library is integral to enriching culture and creativity in the town centre.

Customer Feedback

5.21 The library at the curve has gone down exceptionally well with our customers and we regularly receive very positive feedback, the following are just an example:

“A great library in a lovely new modern building”

“it was amazing to see how 3d printing works; very clear and simple way of introducing kids to science”

“We have put pictures of our visit onto Facebook:

We have informed prep teachers and have recommended that they should visit, so you will be expecting our Year 1 and 2 classes visiting in the very near future.”

Highlights October – December 2018

5.22 The following events are planned for this autumn:

- Black History Month
- Beauty and The Beast panto
- Now Light the candles exhibition
- From Pop Art to Abstract exhibition
- Sundowning a play about love loneliness and guilt
- Great Austerity Debate
- Stories from Africa with Freshwater theatre
- LEGO build the change
- Big Draw along with Nick Sharratt
- Performing Arts workshop with Ameer Choudrie
- Developing an autism friendly area with autism lead including a sensory wall, collections of books and a Magic table to support dementia and autism

6. Comments of Other Committees

This report has not been discussed by any other committees of Slough Borough Council

7. **Conclusion**

The Curve has had a great impact on the library service enhancing the service offer enabling us to engage with new audiences and partners increasing usage and by being at the heart of this multi purpose centre enabling us to develop a service with much greater flexibility with greater appeal and relevancy.

8. **Appendices**

None

9. **Background Papers**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021>

<http://www.slough.gov.uk/libraries/>

Responses below in survey from SRC volunteers to their experiences of volunteering

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-9F8N2Q66L/>

<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/launch-growing-well-toolkit-help-combat-childhood-obesity>

(This was launched on the 6 September at the Public Libraries Health Group meeting with representatives from BookTrust, National Literacy Trust and the Child Poverty Action Group.)