

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Cabinet
DATE:	18 th October 2021
SUBJECT:	Library Services Consultation
CHIEF OFFICER:	Richard West
CONTACT OFFICER:	Liz Jones
WARD(S):	All
PORTFOLIO:	Cllr Hulme (Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills) Cllr Akram (Leisure, Culture & Communities)
KEY DECISION:	YES
EXEMPT:	NO
DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:	YES
APPENDICES:	<i>A – Library Service Needs Assessment & appendices</i> <i>B – Library Services Equality Impact Assessment</i> <i>C – Library Services Consultation paper</i> <i>D – Library Services Consultation questions</i>

1 Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the process that the council will undertake to carry out a review of the public library services offered to the public. The Council has to ensure that this service is fit for the future, is affordable and remains comprehensive and efficient.
- 1.2 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council is required to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Guidance and case law has determined that if any changes are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process, and this includes considering local needs and working with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the contents of the Library Services Needs Assessment 2021 set out in Appendix A and the recommendations contained within it be noted.
- (b) That the options for future Library Service delivery set out in paragraph 4 Appendix C be agreed.

- (c) That a public consultation on the future delivery of library services, as set out in Appendices C and D be agreed.
- (d) That Delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Customer and Communities, following consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills and the Lead Member for Leisure, Culture & Communities to undertake the consultation and prepare a final business case for the future delivery of library services.
- (e) That it be noted that a report will be brought back to Cabinet in Quarter 4 of 2021/22 recommending a proposal for the future delivery of library services.

2 Report

- 2.1 Library services are a statutory service delivered by local authorities under the legal duty described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This duty requires councils to deliver a "comprehensive and efficient" library service. Case law has determined that if any changes are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process, and this includes considering local needs and working with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.
- 2.2 Slough's library services help the Council meet a number of priority outcomes described in the "Five Year Plan".
 - 2.2.1 Priority 1: Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy, and successful
70% of items borrowed from our 4 main library buildings and online borrowing are for children and young people. We also have 3 satellite libraries in Children's Centres. Our library service introduces children to the joy of reading for pleasure, improves levels of literacy and encourages parents to engage positively with their children through shared reading experiences.
 - 2.2.2 Priority 2: Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs
Library services offer a range of services and activities that decrease loneliness and improves social networks for residents. These include stocking self-help publications, through informal socialising to specific reading-based activities to improve mental health.
 - 2.2.3 Priority 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work, and stay
Our library service offers access to public computers as well as staff acting as digital "ambassadors" supporting residents to enter and navigate around the digital landscape. This work together with volunteering opportunities in the service and activities to improve self-esteem and confidence supports work to help residents access and stay in work.
- 2.3 Over the past 5 years there have been changes to our library service (e.g., the opening of The Curve), changes to how residents use the library service (e.g., decline in visits to library building and an increase in online access) and changes to the council's finances which mean now is an appropriate time to review how the service is delivered to make sure it is fit for the future.
- 2.4 Needs Assessment: The Library and Hub service has undertaken a Needs Assessment (Appendix A) that considers Slough's demographics, current library

service usage and the national context to consider in relation to the delivery of library services. The Assessment makes three recommendations:

- Ensure that library services are affordable and deliver value for money
- Ensure library services are accessible and meet local needs
- Support and promote good use of technology including digitalisation of services where appropriate

2.5 Equality Impact Assessment: The Service also carried out a baseline Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (Appendix B) which considered the potential impact of some changes on specific groups with protected characteristics. This EIA will need to be reviewed and the suggested action plan re-written to take the results of the public consultation into account.

2.6 Consultation paper: Based on both the Needs Assessment and EIA a Library Service Consultation paper has been produced which suggests a number of key issues the council should consider when deciding how best to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service in the future. This is appended at Appendix C. The consultation also proposes 5 possible models for how a future library service could be delivered.

2.7 Key considerations: None of the proposed considerations will be looked at in isolation. In the public consultation we are asking respondents to prioritise how important each one is for the Council to consider (we also ask consultees to suggest any other principles that they think we should also consider when planning a future library service). The 7 considerations are:

2.7.1 Make sure the amount of money spent on buying new hard copy books is in line with the average amount spent by other councils which are most like Slough.

2.7.2 Make sure the amount of money spent on buying new eResources is in line with the average amount spent by other councils which are most like Slough.

2.7.3 Make sure that library buildings are used efficiently. This will include seeing if other services can be offered from library buildings with, or instead of the current library service.

2.7.4 Make sure that there is careful consideration of all opportunities to deliver library services from other locations in communities if this is efficient and effective.

2.7.5 Ensure that library services are open and available at times when they are most needed and understand that this may reduce the numbers of hours physical libraries are open each week.

2.7.6 Ensure that library staff are available to deliver services at times when they are most needed, and that this may reduce the numbers of hours library staff are available each week whether that is on-line or in person.

2.7.7 Make sure that wherever possible and practical, services are provided virtually and on-line.

2.8 Models of delivery: Taking the seven considerations into account the Consultation paper suggests 5 models for future service delivery. Within the paper each model is described together with its possible impact and mitigations that could be implemented

to reduce the negative impacts. The public consultation asks consultees to tell us their preferred three models. The models are:

- 2.8.1 Reduce the money available to spend on buying publications (both hard copy and eResources).
 - 2.8.2 Keep all the main library buildings open but reduce the opening and staffed hours at Langley and Cippenham and reduce the staffed hours at The Curve and Britwell libraries.
 - 2.8.3 Close both Langley and Cippenham library buildings but maintain the staffing and opening hours at The Curve library and at Britwell library.
 - 2.8.4 Keep all library buildings but reduce the hours they are open, the hours they are staffed, and the space dedicated to the library. Attract other users to rent space in the library building alongside the reduced library (co-location).
 - 2.8.5 Move all library services out of the current main library buildings and re-locate services to be delivered from a range of other locations (and on-line) across the borough.
- 2.9 Consultation process: There will be a public consultation for 12-weeks about these proposals. All respondents will be asked to complete an on-line survey either on their own IT equipment or using the publicly available IT at libraries. There will be a number of virtual and face-to-face consultation events held by the Library and Hubs team for residents to attend. Information and guidance will also be available at the libraries from library staff, including a hard copy of all documents for consultees to read in the library. In addition, there will be a number of stakeholder events (on-line and face-to-face) to encourage participation from partners ranging from schools and nurseries to community and special interest groups and other council services.
- 2.10 The results of the consultation will be brought back to Cabinet in early 2022 for consideration and a decision about what changes will be implemented to ensure our library service remains comprehensive, efficient, and affordable.

2.11 Options considered

2.11.1 The needs assessment sets out a number of options and considerations for future delivery of library services. At this stage there is no preferred option, however the Council is not specifically consulting on keeping the library services as the service needs to meet the statutory duty for a “comprehensive and efficient library service”. The Council’s financial situation is such that it needs to make savings to its revenue budgets and the duty to have an efficient service requires the Council to review its library service to ensure it is financially sustainable.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 If no changes are made to how our library services are delivered there is a significant financial risk to the council as the current service is not affordable.

3.1.2 The report to Cabinet feeding back from the consultation will include detailed information about the financial implications of future service delivery recommendations.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 Library services are provided under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, section 10 of which places a duty on the library authority to provide a: “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. Further detail is provided in the Act as follows:

library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and
(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it.

3.2.2 Case law has interpreted what a “comprehensive and efficient” library service may mean in practice. This includes confirming that it does not mean that every resident lives close to a library, instead meaning that the service is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service should make best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, whilst recognising the constraints on council resources. Any decision about the library service should be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws on evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the area. The availability of resources is highly relevant to the question of what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service and where reductions are required due to a financial crisis, whether on a local or national level, this should be considered in any review of library services.

3.2.3 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) has published guidance, which should be considered and followed. The guidance makes clear that a comprehensive and efficient library service will differ between councils and will depend on the needs of each area. It is the role of councillors and local officials to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their services, but this must be done:

- In consultation with their communities
- Through analysis of evidence around local needs
- In accordance with their statutory duties (these being wider than the specific duty set out above and including wider statutory duties, including duties under the Equality Act and best value duties)

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 If no changes are made to how our library services are delivered there is a significant financial risk to the council as the current service is not affordable.

3.3.2 If a fair and transparent decision-making process (including a public consultation) is not followed there is a significant legal risk to the council which could lead to a “minded to”

letter being issued by the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport. Ultimately this could lead to the council needing to defend Judicial Review proceedings.

3.3.3 The review of future library service delivery is included on the Directorate Risk Register (Customer and Community).

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 Carrying out a review of library services and a consultation on future delivery does not have any direct environmental implications.

3.4.2 The Needs Assessment does consider the distance residents live from existing library building and how accessible these buildings are by public transport. The report to Cabinet feeding back from the consultation will include more detailed information about the environmental implications of future service delivery recommendations.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 A detailed Equality Impact Assessment considering possible changes to the delivery of library services is attached. This EIA will be refreshed and reviewed in light of the feedback received as part of the public consultation.

3.6 Workforce implications

3.7.1 Carrying out a review of library services and a consultation on future delivery does not have any direct workforce implications.

3.7.2 The report to Cabinet feeding back from the consultation will include more detailed information about workforce implications of future service delivery recommendations.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 Carrying out a review of library services and a consultation on future delivery does not have any direct property implications.

3.8.2 The report to Cabinet feeding back from the consultation will include more detailed information about property implications of future service delivery recommendations.

4. Background Papers

None