Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	17th July 2023
Subject:	Library 2023/24 Operating Model Performance Report
Lead Member:	Councillor Muvvala (lead member for public protection, customer service, IT and Young Futures)
Chief Officer:	Richard West
Contact Officer:	Ketan Gandhi – AD Community & Public Protection
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	No
Exempt:	No
Decision Subject To Call In:	No
Appendices:	Appendix A: Performance report April and May 2023

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1   It was agreed at February 2023 Cabinet that a new Library Operating Model be implemented on 1 April 2023 as part of the Councils 2023-24 savings plans and that the performance of the model be reported back to Cabinet in July 2023.

1.2   This report demonstrates that implementation of the new Library Operating Model has been successful, and that the savings plan is on target to be achieved.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

  a) Welcome the successful implementation of the new Library Operating Model.

  b)   Note the performance of the new Library Operating Model which was implemented on 1 April 2023 as set out in Appendix A.

Commissioner Review

Commissioners have reviewed this report and have no specific comments to add.

2. Report

Introduction

2.1   Councils have a statutory duty to provide library services as described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This duty requires councils to deliver a "comprehensive and efficient" library service. There are no prescriptive definitions in the Act about what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient service. However, case law has determined that if any significant changes are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process to locally determine what a comprehensive and efficient library service looks like and what it delivers. This includes considering local needs and consulting with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.

2.2   A 12-week public consultation concluded on the 20 January 2022 and informed the March 2022 Cabinet agreement to the Library Service Plan 2022-27. The key findings of the library consultation were that:

- The library service is highly valued by library members.
- More than 80% of library transactions take place through self-service kiosks.
- 70% of all items issued (hard copy and e-resource) are from the children's library.
- Respondents like the idea of co-locating other Council services with the current library buildings.
- Young People value study space, where they can talk about issues, and access on-line materials.
- Our on-line service is growing but is not widely known about.
- People would value the opportunity to become volunteers in the library service.
- The library service should consider the diverse needs of the population, including use of the library at home service, the availability of materials for residents for whom English is not a first language and the options of outreach work.

2.3   The consultation results demonstrate the need to publicise online resources and improve volunteering opportunities, as well as ensuring that effective services are delivered in buildings.

2.4   The strategic aims in the Library Plan, agreed at March 2022 Cabinet, were informed by public consultation. The 2022-23 Library Operating Model was informed by this consultation. The 2023-24 Library Operating Model was also informed by the same public consultation and by operational experience in 2022-23 with the key areas as set out in the table below: -

2022 – 2027 Library Plan work areas	Impact of 2023-24 operating model
High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure. Performance measure #1 Performance measure #6	Library staff will be available at 3 library locations throughout each week (with a rota of staff availability on Saturdays) to provide high quality literacy support to residents. In-library events to promote a love of reading will be delivered and, where appropriate will be enhanced by the addition of volunteers to provide more 1-on-1 support to residents who require this.

Make sure the right library services are delivered in the right way in the right locations ensuring that the physical building spaces and events are fully accessible, supporting those with additional needs. Performance measure #1 Performance measure #2 Performance measure #4	Library services will be available at all 4 current library building locations. Library staff will be available in-person at consistent and planned times at 3 locations throughout the week. Britwell Hub library will be predominantly self-service with library staff available by phone if other SBC staff overseeing the library area are unable to support customers with library specific queries. All Library staff have had training in using basic Makaton to communicate with residents and the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will be used to identify other training needs associated with supporting residents with additional needs. This will include reviewing customer flow to identify "quiet times" at library buildings and advertise these so residents who find busy spaces challenging know when they may find it more comfortable to access the building.
Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development. Performance measure #3 Performance measure #6 Performance measure #7	The Library Service will continue to participate in the UK-wide literacy programme "Summer Reading Challenge" aimed at children and young people. This has been our premier engagement event for driving both library membership for young people but also to increase borrowing by this age group. Focussing on volunteer recruitment will allow the service to deliver a range of events like book clubs, poetry clubs etc. to encourage adults to use the library service. Further promotion of the on-line library resource will also encourage adults who are working when the library buildings are open to still borrow books and magazines etc.
Increased range and diversity of on-line resources and support for residents to use these virtual resources, making sure that no resident is excluded from accessing the on-line world. Performance measure #3 Performance measure#4	The publications budget will remain at £90k per annum allowing the Library Service to continue to purchase a range of physical books and on-line resources. Focussing on recruiting volunteers will also increase the capacity of the service to offer low-level and informal support for residents needing guidance and confidence to access the digital world.

A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services. Performance measure #5 Performance measure #6	The service will continue to deliver a Summer Reading Challenge each year specifically aimed at school-age children. Staff working with volunteers will also be able to continue to host events such as "Rhyme Time", storytelling, book clubs etc. The new model includes a focus on securing additional external funds (sponsorships and grants) to support the delivery of literacy-based events.
Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users. Performance measure #5	Operational challenges in 2022 meant that the recruitment of volunteers did not take place. The 2023/24 service delivery model includes a staff post with a clear remit to work with partners to recruit, retain and engage with volunteers. Clear volunteer role descriptions have been developed for each of the service areas that would benefit from and be of interest to volunteers (Library at Home service, library events and library digital support).
Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence. Performance measure #2 Performance measure #3	The proposed model maintains various software licences which allow the service to efficiently collect data about footfall in each library, borrowing activity and use of IT equipment.
Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources. Performance measure #6	In addition to quantitative data collected electronically, the new model will also allow the service to implement a regular series of light-touch customer engagement activities to help the service flex in response to customer demand. The proposed model also strengthens the relationship between the library service and other services delivered from these buildings so anonymised customer feedback can be shared.
We provide and spend a publications budget in line with councils in our most similar group and review our building opening times to ensure value for money. Performance measure #3	The publications budget will remain at £90k per annum which maintains Slough's position as being in-line with the spend per head of population of councils in our most similar group.

2.5   In February 2023 Cabinet requested updates about performance specifically against planned opening hours and the blend of footfall across the opening hours agreed for the 2023-24 Library Operating Model. In March 2023 discussions with the then Lead Member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills resulted in the following suite of performance indicators being agreed:

Ref	Title	Description	Performance
#1	Compliance with opening times	Number of days any library could not operate to the published days & times.	100% compliance. All libraries were open for the advertised times.
#2	Number of people visiting libraries	Electronic footfall counts from all 4 buildings with a library. All libraries either host other events or share the location with other services. This data is not able to count only those residents who come to browse or use the library resources.	Target is 402,700 Library opening hours have reduced by 36% compared to 2019/20. During 2019/20 total visitors to libraries was 629,222. The new target is this pre-Covid visitor number reduced by 36%.
#3	Library book issues	Library books issued • Total numbers of books issued • Number of books issued via self-service kiosks & online • Number of books issued from Children's Library • Number of electronic items issued online	Target total book issues = 232,598 Target self-serve and online issues = 208,633 Target number of books from Children's Library = 170,472 Target number of electronic items issued online = 113,664 Library opening hours have reduced by 36% compared to 2019/20. These targets (except electronic items) are based on the achievements in 2019/20 reduced by 36%. Because electronic items borrowed online is not affected by building opening times the target remains the same as the actual 2019/20 figure.
#4	Use of Library pages on SBC website	Number of views of each page and number of unique views of each page. Snapshot data comparing one month in 2023 with the same month in 2022.	Target to increase unique page views by 25% compared to 2022
#5	Library volunteers	Total number of volunteers. Total number of volunteer hours per month.	Increase total number of volunteers and volunteer hours by 20% compared to 2019/20.

			Target number of volunteers 2023/24 = 68. Target number of hours volunteered in 2019/20 = 1,200.
#6	Events held at libraries	Total number of events and categories of events. Cost per participant to deliver Summer Reading Challenge	Reduce Summer Reading Challenge cost per participant compared to 2019 cost of £3.82 per child.
#7	Library membership	Total new members each month	Annual new membership target = 4,878 Monthly new membership target = 406 Currently, library membership has to be completed in-person. As with other targets related to library opening hours this target is based on 2019/20 data reduced by 36%.

Options considered

Consideration was given to providing more limited reporting to Cabinet or not providing a formal update. However, the then Lead Member was keen to have a formal update on a regular basis to give a more rounded picture of Library Service performance.

Officers will work with the new Lead Member on reviewing the performance suite as well as the wider library plan during 2023/24.

Background

2.6   The Council must continue to deliver significant levels of savings over the next few years, as well as disposing of surplus assets to reduce its borrowing levels. We have started work on a comprehensive estates strategy which will explore the condition, costs, and uses of all Council operational buildings. As part of this work, we will shape a long-term plan for the delivery of services including libraries. Whilst this work is progressing best use will be made of the available buildings and the library service will operate from The Curve, Langley Library, Cippenham Library and the Britwell Hub subject to long term decision on these buildings' utilisation.

2.7   Under our Asset Disposal Strategy, the Council needs to rationalise its buildings and look to use them for multiple uses. This may reduce the amount of floor space to be dedicated to library areas and increase the number of officers from other services who can support the opening, closing and day-to-day operation of the building, however no decision has been made about this at this time.

2.8   Library services are a statutory service delivered by local authorities under the duty described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This duty requires councils to deliver a "comprehensive and efficient" library service. There are no prescriptive definitions in the Act about what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient service. However, case law has determined that if any significant changes

are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process to locally determine what a comprehensive and efficient library service looks like and what it delivers. This includes considering local needs and consulting with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.

2.9   At the February 2023 Cabinet meeting it was agreed to introduce a new library operating model with reduced opening hours and reduced numbers of staff employed in the service.

2.10   The performance measures agreed give an overall picture of how the new model is operating and are attached as **Appendix A**.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1   Financial implications

3.1.1   Successful delivery of the 2023-24 Library Operating Model will ensure that the libraries element of the Councils 2023-24 savings plans is achieved. This is on target.

3.1.2   The available budget for 2022/23 for Library services was £958k. This was made up of staffing costs of £834k and non-staffing costs of £124k. The library staff budget needed to run the predominantly self-service Library service in 2023/24 is £558k (supported by occasional use of staff from other services to intervene/provide oversight at zero cost to the library service) + non staffing costs of £124k = £682k. This gives a saving compared to 2022/23 budget of £276k.

3.1.3   The savings will be made by not recruiting to vacant library officer posts. There will be no redundancies.

3.1.4   The library service is not dependent on specific buildings. No building management financial savings or asset sale receipts have been assumed in these proposals. However, it should be noted that if any current building including a library area is permanently closed this would bring building-based savings including repairs, maintenance, business rates, insurance, utility costs and facilities officer's time. Indicative building management costs are set out in the table below: -

Location	Repairs & Maint.	Facilities Costs & Mgt Fee	Business Rates	IT Asset Costs	Heat, Light & Power	Total
Langley Library	£24,422	£8,884	£26,112	£11,977	£14,729	**£86,124**
The Curve	£167,792	£86,801	£386,560	£44,241	£261,690	**£947,084**
Britwell Hub	£43,190	£59,026	£66,560	£12,157	£37,704	**£218,638**
Cippenham Library	£22,155	£9,138	£15,843	£11,977	£14,219	**£73,332**

Note - if a library area is discontinued, then the building costs remain unless the building is closed/sold. Costs to keep a building secure would be incurred should services be removed before a building is sold.

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 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)

3.2.4   When making public law decisions, the Council should take account of all relevant information, including the statutory framework, the financial position of the Council, the consultation results from 2021/22, and the equality impact of the decision. When proposing to change and to reduce services it is not uncommon for the majority of respondents to disagree with the proposal. Cabinet should take these views into account but must make a decision that is reasonable taking account and balancing of all relevant information.

3.3   Risk management implications

3.3.1 This report makes no recommendations for Cabinet to consider and there are no additional risk implications.

3.4   Environmental implications

3.4.1 This report makes no recommendations for Cabinet to consider and there are no additional environmental implications.

3.5   Equality implications

3.5.1 The library service carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in September 2021 as part of a Needs Assessment. This EIA included an action plan to ensure that any equality implications were mitigated and managed. The EIA was updated considering the public consultation for the March 2022 Cabinet Paper and was further updated for the Cabinet Paper presented in February 2023.

3.5.2 A review of the EIA will take place in April 2024 after a year of the new library service model being in operation.

3.6   Procurement implications

       Not applicable.

3.7   Workforce implications

3.7.1 Not applicable

3.8   Property implications

3.8.1 Not applicable.

4. **Background Papers**

       None