

Summary of conclusions and actions

1 Conclusions

The principal conclusions of the review are:

1. Libraries have a substantial reach in local communities. They have 615,000 visits a year and over 20% of the people of Slough regularly borrow from libraries and more using them for other purposes.
2. Libraries are especially effective in meeting the needs of hard to reach communities, including BME and the unemployed.
3. The cost of the service is high at £4.71 per visit.
4. Libraries contribute substantially to Slough's Sustainable Community strategy through bringing people together and creating opportunity for all, and especially in learning and skills.
5. The vision and value of libraries is not fully realised. It is critical that libraries communicate their value in terms of community outcomes and are at the centre of wider community strategies.
6. To be able to fulfil this role, the library service needs to be:
 - People driven, with people engaged in making decisions and shaping services
 - Celebrating and promoting diversity and Slough's unique culture
 - Working with and through partners and community organisations to deliver joint service offers to communities
 - Consistently seeking out and applying best practice
 - Innovative and creative in its approach
 - Results driven, focused on delivering key priorities
 - Continuously challenging itself to simplify and streamline processes that maximise investment in customer service
7. There are many excellent staff within the service and the challenge is to connect individual skills and initiative with a focus on what is right for the service, defined by what is right for Slough's community.
8. Overall, there is a clear lack of focus on delivery against priorities and a performance culture among the staff at all levels.
9. Leadership and cultural issues must be resolved first to enable change
10. There is no simple quick fix to achieve cultural change, but it requires clear priorities, clear roles linked to those priorities, and an openness to challenge and change.
11. This cultural shift from a service led to a community led service working in partnership is critical to ensuring that libraries remain relevant and vital assets capable of being a real force for change in communities.
12. While there are a number of good initiatives, there is no systematic and consistent quality of engagement with communities. Analysis of needs and opportunities is poor and the resulting lack of focus inhibits the quality of service delivery and improvement.
13. Opening hours and stock/resources quality are priorities for improvement
14. There is potential to improve access to services through introducing mini libraries as part of an integrated service offer in community hubs, making

- learning and other important services relevant and accessible to more people in places and at times convenient to them.
15. The mobile library public service costs over £100 per user. Housebound and other services can be provided effectively through extending existing volunteer schemes. Releasing mobile library funding could enable substantial service improvement through mini libraries at a lower cost.
 16. The proportion of expenditure on direct customer services should be increased.
 17. The cost of management and administration should be reduced. Processes can be simplified and streamlined to reduce costs and at the same time improve service delivery.
 18. While many changes and improvements can and must be made quickly, in order to make substantial changes that are embedded and generate continuous improvement, a transformational change is required.
 19. The service lacks capacity to lead and implement transformational change and is not in a position to acquire it on the scale required.
 20. That capacity may be achieved by aligning the service with one or more strategic partners in a new service model. This fits closely with the Council's development as a commissioning body and has the potential also to unlock opportunities for further service improvement and efficiency.
 21. Further testing of the local authority strategic partner model is recommended to test how far it can deliver added impetus to improvement of library services, improve outcomes for communities and customers and provide better value for money for Slough Borough Council and tax payers.

2 Actions and timetable for action

- 2.1 Priorities for action have been identified at the end of each main section of the report. These are shown below with indicative dates for implementation:

Better meeting community and customer expectations

1. Improve opening hours, including potentially Sunday opening (2010-12)
2. Improve quality of stock (2010-12)
3. Improve and update public access ICT with multimedia, integrating it in service provision (2010-12)
4. Identify and improve response to community needs, including new communities and older people (From 2010/11)
5. Improve customer care and service to improve satisfaction and ensure all users feel welcome (From 2010/11)
6. Ensure the public are actively engaged in shaping service development and influence decision making (2010-12)
7. Modernise and make more welcoming library interiors and exteriors – especially the Central Library (By 2012/13)
8. Improve promotion of services and help staff engage with and promote services (From 2010/11)
9. Improve the network of libraries, targeting areas of high need and low use, including potentially Baylis & Stoke, Chalvey, Colnbrook with Poyle and Haymill (By 2013)

Improving performance

10. Introduce research and performance management to clarify purpose, to meet needs, and to demonstrate success (2009/10)
11. Implement new performance reports starting September 2009, including quarterly reporting to the Community, Leisure & Environment Scrutiny Panel (2009/10)
12. Implement a staff development programme incorporating performance management (2009/10)
13. Implement robust and integrated target setting and planning for 2010/11 following the principles set out in the review report (2009/10)
14. Implement a 5 year planned research programme in order to understand and meet the needs of Slough's diverse population and take decision making to the user (2010/11)

Improving access to services

15. Invest in two additional mini libraries, replacing the mobile library and putting in place alternative arrangements for the housebound and other users (By 2013)
16. Promote online services actively and update the library website to make it easier to find resources (2010/11)
17. Proceed with the potential new library as part of the Britwell regeneration project (From 2009)
18. Invest in additional opening hours with a target of a total 290 hours (2010-2013)

Improving use of resources

19. Substantially reduce management and administrative costs (2009/10)
20. Work with suppliers and partners to achieve economies of scale (From 2009)
21. Re-invest part of any efficiency gains in opening hours and stock to meet customer and community needs (2010-2013)
22. Aim to spend at least 15% of the net library budget on stock (By 2012)
23. Implement all feasible additional income generation solutions (By 2011/12)

Improving efficiency in library operations

24. Invest to save to improve customer experience and deliver efficiency savings. These include operational changes, for early implementation, in advance of policy decisions that should be considered as part of the budget planning process (2009-2013)
25. Develop and implement an action plan to put in place and meet standards for quality of service (2010/11)
26. Replace the Library Management System (2010/11)
27. Implement technical improvements to stock management processes outlined in the invest to save proposal (2009-2010)

Strategic partnership and alternative models of service

28. Market test local authority strategic partnership as the preferred model to accelerate transformation and improvement of Slough's library service, inviting local authorities to express interest. This will require a service specification to be developed. The private sector strategic partnership model remains a viable option should the public sector model not succeed and may be tested in parallel (2009-2010)

- 2.2 Libraries should develop a plan to implement actions that are agreed by elected Members. Should it be decided to pursue the local authority strategic partner model, there is potential benefit in a short delay in decisions about restructuring while it is determined how quickly a partnership might be set up. If the partnership could be in place by mid 2010/11, there is considerable benefit in deferring re-organisation and making major organisational changes in one process. This would minimise cost and reduce disruption for all parties concerned.

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