Consultation on proposed changes to Slough Library Service

This consultation is open from Thursday 28th October to Thursday 20th January 2022.

1. Introduction

1.1 This consultation is about proposed changes to the statutory provision of library services in Slough. Elements of Slough Library services are delivered through The Curve, Britwell, Cippenham and Langley libraries with Children's Centres also playing an important role along with access to online services and library-based events and activities.

1.2 Slough Libraries are asking for residents' and stakeholders views on a range of considerations that we need to make sure are at the heart of how these services are delivered in future. We want your help in assessing these and finding out if there are other suggestions you can make to make sure our libraries are fit for the future. We are specifically interested in:

- Your views about the key issues we should consider when designing our future library service.
- Are some of these considerations more important to you than others?
- What other issues should we consider that we haven't included?
- If you use our library service, how do you use it and what do you use it for?
- If you do not use our library service, why is this and what could encourage you to use it in future?

1.3 There is a survey (survey and link will be live from 28th October) for residents and other stakeholders to complete and this will be the way we will collect your feedback.

2. Background

2.1 Slough libraries, and the services offered from them are at the heart of our community. The staff, volunteers, services, and programmes help and support residents through the different stages of their lives. Our staff are passionate about opening up opportunities for the people of Slough, through reading for pleasure, access to information and informal learning in safe, secure, and welcoming spaces, and supporting residents to enhance their digital skills.

2.2 Our library service is also dynamic and innovative. We know we can't stand still, and this is why we carried out a Needs Assessment to understand how we offer services today and how we can continue to deliver comprehensive

services in an accessible and affordable way in the future.

2.3   How our library service and library users responded to the changes introduced due to Covid-19 lockdowns is one factor that encouraged us to look at how and what we deliver in the future. Over the past two years, the council has also reviewed and refreshed its strategic vision and worked with key stakeholders to develop a borough-wide set of strategic goals in the 2040 vision. This work has led to services across the authority (including library services) being re-configured. Finally, in 2021 the council issued a Section 114 Notice in response to the financial challenges it faced. All services delivered by the council will be reviewed to ensure it can balance its budget in the future.

2.4   We have a legal duty under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act to make sure that the council provides a comprehensive and efficient library service. Guidance and case law has determined that if any changes are made to how our library service is delivered, we must follow a fair process, and this includes considering local needs and working with the public when devising a new way of delivering services. To do this we have carried out a Needs Assessment together with an Equality Impact Assessment. This consultation is how we will work with residents and other stakeholders to shape what a new service will look like and how it will deliver efficient and effective library services to local people.

2.5   We currently deliver library services from two buildings that host several other services (The Curve and Britwell Hub), two library-only buildings (Cippenham and Langley libraries) and three Children's Centres.

2.6   The recent Needs Assessment recommended that the council should consider how it will deliver these three strategic aims:

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

2.7   From these recommendations the council has suggested seven considerations have to be taken into account to allow us to continue to deliver a comprehensive library service that meets the needs of our community now and in the future in the most cost-effective way.

2.8   The seven key considerations that we need to make sure are at the heart of how these services are delivered in future are:

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: 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.
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.
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.
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.
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 online or in person.
7: Make sure that wherever possible and practical, services are provided virtually and online.

2.9 None of these considerations will be looked at on their own, but you may feel some are more important than others. In this consultation we will ask you to prioritise how important you think each thing is for us to consider, plus ask you if there are other principles we need to consider too.

3. How will this consultation be used to inform decision making?

3.1 We are asking you four sets of questions in the consultation, and all will help us make decisions on the future of library services in Slough.

Part 1: These questions will help us understand how and why you currently use the library service. There is also a specific question to help us understand why some people don't use our current library service.

Part 2: These questions will help us understand which library services you value most right now, and which do you think you will value in the future. We also ask about which times of day you would like to see library services open and when you would like to see library staff being available.

Part 3: Some of these questions will help us to understand which of the seven considerations you think are most important to the future of the library service. We have also included some possible ways of working in the future that would help us achieve all or some of the considerations. We are asking you to say

which of these future ways of working are most attractive to you (there may be more than one and we are happy for you to have more than one preferred option).

In parts 1, 2 and 3 we also ask you for any other suggestions that we didn't think of. Please suggest alternatives if you can think of ways to make sure library services remain comprehensive and affordable.

Part 4: We want to make sure that we have responses from right across our community, to do this we are asking some questions about you, including some equality questions. This part of the survey is not compulsory, but it helps us understand if some proposals disproportionately affect particular communities.

3.2 Decision makers (including senior managers, Cabinet members and all council members) will take the Needs Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment and results of this consultation into account when deciding on the future of the services.

3.3 The Council is not consulting on keeping the library service the same as it is now, as we have assessed that this does not meet our strategic aims. The option to remain the same does not save any money and is therefore not affordable nor does it provide value for money. The status quo also does not permit investment in future technology to enhance service delivery. Consultees will have the option to provide ideas for delivering savings and for delivering the library service in a different way.

4. Possible future ways of working in more detail

4.1 To make sure our seven considerations are at the heart of our future library service we have worked on some options for future models of working. You will be asked to prioritise which model (or models) you think are the most important one for us to consider in the survey.

A	**Reduce the money available to spend on buying publications (both hard copy and eResources)**
	Description The Needs Assessment found that the budget available to purchase publications (hard copy and eResources) in Slough is relatively high when compared to other library services. According to the most recent report by Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (Appendix E in Needs Assessment) Slough is in the highest quarter of all library services across the UK in terms of publications spending per 1,000 population (26th out of 125 services). The report groups councils together based on their

similar features – within Slough's comparator group of 13 authorities we are the second highest spending per 1,000 population.

In 2016 the Press Association estimated (based on FOI requests to every council in UK) that spending on library publications per resident ranged from 5p per head to £1.62 per head. Based on 2020/21 budgets and population estimates, Slough spent £1.47 per head and the median spend per head of population in the UK is 78p per head (Appendix G in Needs Assessment).

Impacts
Reducing the publications budget will reduce the number of hard copy and eResources available for users. This could mean that fewer, new "specialist" publications are purchased that are in non-English languages, large print, graphic novels etc.

Our most active borrowers are children and young people and hard copy books for this age group tend to suffer more wear and tear than books for adults, currently this means we can purchase multiple copies of publications and under this proposal we will have to limit these multiple purchases.

Currently we can buy multiple copies of publications (hard copy and eResources) that are likely to be popular with borrowers (e.g. best-sellers, new publications in popular series such as Hilary Mantel's "Thomas Cromwell trilogy"). This keeps waiting times for borrowers low. With a reduced budget we will need to limit purchases to single or two copies which will increase waiting times for some borrowers.

Our data shows us that purchasing eResources is in general more expensive than buying hard copy items (see Needs Assessment). However, our experience during Covid restrictions was that many customers were happy to move to an online only borrowing service.

Mitigations
We will use the data we have collected in the Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix C in Needs Assessment) to allow us to focus purchases of "specialist" publications on evidence of need. Our Equalities Impact Assessment action plan commits us to carrying out regular "light touch" equalities assessments each year to ensure that we are still responding appropriately to the needs of our users.

Because library publications are so important to the early life of children and young people, and because of the high usage publications get from this age group we will ensure an appropriate proportion of our budget each year is dedicated to purchase materials for this customer group.

We will develop a clear communications strategy to explain the reason for delays in waiting times for the most popular new purchases. This will include staff/volunteers offering recommendations for alternative materials and requests for book donations from residents.

Budget allocations to specific types of publications will be kept under review by library managers, in collaboration with other library services across the UK (especially those in our CIPFA comparison councils) to ensure we are learning from others how to spread the resource most effectively.

Key considerations met
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: 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.

B	**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 building alongside a reduced library (co-location).**
	Description and explanation The Needs Assessment recommends that the council considers a hybrid model of service delivery for both material resources and community events, using a blend of online and face-to-face provision. The Assessment also recommends a new approach to where these services are delivered from should be considered – traditionally our library services have been delivered predominantly from library buildings. Slough's experience of library services being used during Covid restrictions suggests that many customers are comfortable using online borrowing facilities. However, participation in activities reduced significantly if they were offered online. It is recognised in the Needs Assessment that the library service has a significant role to play in reducing social isolation and improving access to the new digital landscape. This option keeps all four main library buildings open to the public for at least some of the time during every week. Each physical library building/section will only be open for some days, or part days. Staff will only be available to provide social interactions, guidance, advice, and library-based activities for a limited time each week. This option will shrink the physical space available for library services at The Curve, Britwell, Cippenham and Langley. This will result in opportunities for other services/organisations to rent space in these buildings so the buildings become multi-functional hubs in each locality.

Impact

Closing library buildings part-time will reduce the availability of physical, traditional library buildings across the borough. These library buildings are well-used by active borrowers, people attending events and using public computers.

More than 80% of residents live within 1.5 miles of a current library building.

Current library users may not understand or know when the library buildings are open and when staff may be available. This could cause frustration that could result in a reduction in users across the service. This model would remove the ability to flexibly "drop-in" to a library building.

An important feature of the current physical use of library buildings is the ability for them to host school and nursery visits to introduce children to reading and literacy. These visits already need to be carefully planned around the school day, reducing the hours when the library building can host these sessions could impact on local young people.

Library-building based events will have to be carefully programmed (timings and staff/volunteer availability) to fit with the reduced hours that buildings are open, and staff are available.

Reducing the space used by library services may not create enough space to attract alternative uses (or the space may not be suitable or be too expensive for some community groups to use).

Mitigations

The public consultation exercise is specifically asking respondents to tell us when they would prefer library buildings to be open and staffed. We will use this feedback to tailor opening times to the local needs.

The Equality Impact Assessment action plan commits the library service to seek feedback from library users more often and in a more systematic way to allow us to keep opening and staffing times under review.

As part of the council's locality working model, opportunities for delivering library services from other settings in the borough will be explored. This could mean library services being delivered in locations more convenient to some residents.

An expansion of volunteering opportunities will allow activities and events to be delivered by the library service either exclusively by volunteers or by staff supported by volunteers.

Self-service methods of service access will be available at The Curve and Britwell Hub whenever the buildings are open as these do not require library staff input. This would include borrowing, returning, and renewing books, using public computers, Wi-Fi, and printing/photocopying.

The council will explore how to use technology effectively to allow full access to library services and even library buildings even when no staff are on site (e.g., Open + technology).

Relationships and links with the council's adult learning and skills service will be developed further to ensure that as an authority we are using every opportunity to help residents make full use of digital technology.

In-depth discussions with partner agencies and council services will be undertaken to understand their requirements to support co-location. New Locality Plans will highlight particular issues faced by communities and services will be approached that can address issues in a bespoke way for each locality.

Key considerations met

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.

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.

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.

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 online or in person.

7: Make sure that wherever possible and practical, services are provided virtually and online.

C	**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.**
	Description and explanation The Needs Assessment recommends that the council considers a hybrid model of service delivery for both material resources and community events, using a blend of online and face-to-face provision. The Assessment also recommends a new approach to where these services are delivered from should be considered – traditionally our library services have been delivered predominantly from library buildings. Slough's experience of library services being used during Covid restrictions suggests that many customers are comfortable using online borrowing facilities. However, participation in activities reduced significantly if they were offered online. It is recognised in the Needs Assessment that the library service has a significant role to play in reducing social isolation and improving access to the new digital landscape. Langley and Cippenham account for almost 25% of all computer hours booked by residents. This option keeps all four main library buildings open to the public for at least some of the time during every week. The opening hours at The Curve and Britwell Hub remain unchanged because the buildings are used by several services. Langley and Cippenham library buildings will only be open for some days, or part days. Library staff will only be available to provide social interactions, guidance, advice, and library-based activities for a limited time each week at all four main locations. Other community locations will be sought to deliver library services from. These other sites will complement the library service offered from the main library buildings as the current satellite libraries at Children's Centres already do.

Impact

Closing Cippenham and Langley library buildings part-time will reduce the availability of physical, traditional library buildings in both the south-west of the borough (Cippenham) and the south-east of the borough (Langley and Colnbrook & Poyle area). These library buildings are well-used with 20% of our active borrowers using Langley library and 15% using Cippenham. Between them they account for just under a quarter of all computer hours booked (23.5%).

Reducing the times that library staff are available across all four main library buildings may create frustration in library users if they do not understand or know when the library buildings are open and when staff may be available. This could cause frustration that could result in a reduction in users across the service. This model would remove the ability to flexibly "drop-in" to a library building and be able to interact with a member of library staff.

An important feature of the current physical use of library buildings is the ability for them to host school and nursery visits to introduce children to reading and literacy. These visits already need to be carefully planned around the school day, reducing the hours when the library building can host these sessions could impact on local young people.

Library-building based events will have to be carefully programmed (timings and staff/volunteer availability) to fit with the reduced hours that buildings are open, and staff are available.

Mitigations

The public consultation exercise is specifically asking respondents to tell us when they would prefer library buildings to be open and staffed. We will use this feedback to tailor opening times to the local needs.

The Equality Impact Assessment action plan commits the library service to seek feedback from library users more often and in a more systematic way to allow us to keep opening and staffing times under review.

As part of the council's locality working model, opportunities for delivering library services from other settings in the borough will be explored. This could mean library services being delivered in locations more convenient to some residents.

An expansion of volunteering opportunities will allow activities and events to be delivered by the library service either exclusively by volunteers or by staff supported by volunteers.

Self-service methods of service access will be available at The Curve and Britwell Hub whenever the buildings are open as these do not require library staff input. This would include borrowing, returning, and renewing books, using public computers, Wi-Fi, and printing/photocopying.

The council will explore how to use technology effectively to allow full access to library services and even library buildings even when no staff are on site (e.g., Open + technology).

Relationships and links with the council's adult learning and skills service will be developed further to ensure that as an authority we are using every opportunity to help residents make full use of digital technology.

Key considerations met

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.

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.

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 online or in person.

7: Make sure that wherever possible and practical, services are provided virtually and online.

D	**Close both Langley and Cippenham library buildings but maintain the staffing and opening hours at The Curve library and at Britwell library.**
	Description and explanation
	The Needs Assessment recommends that the council considers a hybrid model of service delivery for both material resources and community events, using a blend of online and face-to-face provision. The Assessment also recommends a new approach to where these services are delivered from should be considered – traditionally our library services have been delivered predominantly from library buildings.
	An innovative hybrid delivery model could reduce the need for traditional library buildings. In Slough the library buildings in Langley and Cippenham are "stand alone" library buildings with only a small customer service function being offered alongside the library function. Our other libraries are delivered out of multi-functional buildings with several services working from each one. If closing library buildings is the preferred option, it is easier to focus on the buildings not used by other services.
	Closing Cippenham and Langley libraries whilst offering a hybrid model of service delivery would suggest that the opening hours and the hours when library staff are available to help customers at The Curve and Britwell should remain unchanged. This would give the greatest opportunity for customers to continue to use face-to-face library services.
	Closing Cippenham and Langley libraries may offer an opportunity to the council to sell or lease one or both buildings to generate income for the authority.

Impact

Closing two libraries will reduce the availability of physical, traditional library buildings in both the south-west of the borough (Cippenham) and the south-east of the borough (Langley and Colnbrook & Poyle area). These libraries are well-used with 20% of our active borrowers using Langley library and 15% using Cippenham. Between them they account for just under a quarter of all computer hours booked (23.5%).

Nearly 32,500 residents live within 1.5 miles of Langley library building and just under 19,500 live within 1.5 miles of Cippenham library building.

The distance from Langley library to Britwell library is 6.4 miles and takes approximately 20 minutes to drive and 40 minutes on a bus. The distance between Langley library to The Curve is 2.2 miles and takes about 15 minutes to drive and 20 minutes on a bus. This is a significant increase in journey times to a physical library building.

The distance from Cippenham library to Britwell library is 2.3 miles and takes approximately 8 minutes to drive; there is not a direct bus route between the two locations. The distance from Cippenham library to The Curve is 3.3 miles and takes approximately 18 minutes to drive and 20 minutes on a bus. This is a significant increase in journey times to a physical library building.

The distance from Colnbrook & Poyle (Colnbrook village hall) to Langley library is 2.3 miles and takes approximately 10 minutes to drive and 20 minutes by bus. If Langley library closed the distance from Colnbrook & Poyle to The Curve (much closer than Britwell) is 4 miles and takes about 20 minutes to drive and almost 30 minutes on a bus. This is a significant increase in journey times to a physical library building for residents in this ward who already need to travel in a car/bus to access their nearest library in the borough.

An important feature of the current physical use of libraries is the ability to host school and nursery visits to introduce children to reading and literacy. These visits already need to be carefully planned around the school day, asking schools to arrange for young people to travel long distances/times will reduce the likelihood of some schools and nurseries making use of this opportunity.

Mitigations

The remaining library buildings at The Curve and at Britwell are well served by public transport so will be accessible to residents from other areas

(Britwell is served by 5 bus routes covering the borough north of the A4 here and Slough town centre served by 24 separate routes coving most of the borough here). Library staff, public computers and reading/literacy based face-to-face activities would still be available at both The Curve and Britwell.

The library service will continue to offer online borrowing for all residents.

A range of library services could be delivered from other locations in the south-east and south-west of the borough, making use of opportunities at other buildings such as leisure centres, Children's Centres (where appropriate) schools, health settings etc (although there may be a cost to doing this in some locations).

The library service is committed to reviewing how it recruits, uses and retains volunteers meaning that the Home Library Service in these areas could be increased and/or volunteers could support staff to provide reading/literacy-based activities in alternative locations on a permanent or ad hoc basis (although there may be a cost to doing this).

Key considerations met

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.

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.

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.

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 online or in person.

7: Make sure that wherever possible and practical, services are provided virtually and online.

E	**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 online) across the borough.**
	Description and explanation
	The council's financial position is such that we may need to consider closing our dedicated library buildings (Langley and Cippenham) so we can sell them or repurpose the buildings to include other services to the exclusion of a library. In this option we would also remove library services from Britwell Hub and The Curve. Library services (in-person book lending, events and activities, access to public computers/IT, advice from staff and informal socialising) will be delivered from a range of other locations across the borough. This physical delivery of services will be delivered alongside online services to allow the council to deliver a hybrid library service.

Impact

In addition to the impacts already noted in options B, C and D the transfer of lending, events, and other services from The Curve to other locations in Slough town centre could have an impact on the accessibility and availability of library services around the borough.

Specific impacts would be determined in any options appraisal undertaken when deciding on which alternative locations are being considered. However, any move away from delivering services from our four main library buildings will have an impact on:

- Availability of study space (currently only offered from The Curve building)
- Access to free public computers and IT (most public computers are available at The Curve)
- Access to the Slough Museum local history information pods at The Curve
- Interrelationship between library service and cultural events currently held at The Venue (performance space within The Curve building).

Any alternative locations may incur costs to the council to rent space/business rates/pay for storage of books and equipment etc.

Mitigations

Any alternative locations would be assessed for suitability and value for money and must have their own Equality Impact Assessment completed.

Slough is a small-town centre well served by car parks and bus routes in addition to the mainline train station, so any other town centre locations used will remain accessible from across the borough.

The Locality Model now embedded in Slough Borough Council's new operating model is strengthening relationships with partner organisations in the public and private sector and building on relationships with partners in the Third/voluntary sector. Options for alternative locations will be explored through these routes to identify places where residents are already comfortable using as possible sites to deliver services from.

	Key considerations met
	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.
	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.
	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.
	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 online or in person.
	7: Make sure that wherever possible and practical, services are provided virtually and online.

5. How to respond to this consultation and give your feedback

5.1 We are opening this consultation to all Slough residents, and library users from outside the borough. We welcome responses both from those who use the library service and those who currently do not.

5.2 We would like to hear your views on the options we have proposed and to hear any alternative options that we haven't considered.

5.3 You can respond to this consultation document through the following methods:

Completing the survey

This is available online (survey and link will be live from 28th October) or by emailing libraryconsultation@slough.gov.uk

You can complete the survey up to **Thursday 20 January 2022**.

Complete this survey for yourself, or on behalf of your children, or those you care for and share your views on the options proposed.

Paper copies of the survey will also be available from libraries and from other locations across the borough. Please see our Library Consultation webpage for more information.

For children and young people under the age of 13, the survey must be completed by a parent/carer.

If have any queries or issues, contact libraryconsultation@slough.gov.uk or ask at your local library.

If you need a copy of the consultation pack /survey in easy read accessible format, please visit our Library Consultation webpage or email libraryconsultation@slough.gov.uk

Attend a drop-in session
As well as completing the survey online you can attend a drop-in session at one of our libraries. These will provide a more informal way for you to feedback your views and complete the online survey.

The timetable for drop-in sessions can be found on the Library Consultation webpage.

Attend an online consultation event
We will also be holding two online consultation events for residents and specific groups. To attend one of the resident's events you will need to book in advance.

If you are interested in attending one of these events, or would like to find out more, please email libraryconsultation@slough.gov.uk or book via Eventbrite Consultation Event.

There will be a series of separate information sessions with partner organisations

5.4   If you cannot access the Internet at home or need help to complete the survey you can visit your local library for access to public computers and staff support to complete the online survey. Paper copies of this form will be available at all libraries and hubs.

5.5   The full Information pack, needs assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment can be found on the Library Consultation webpage.