Changes to Slough Library Services Consultation 2021

Needs Assessment

INDEX

Executive summary

This needs assessment has been undertaken to inform the future direction of library provision in Slough and the need to continue to provide a service that is compliant with statutory obligations, is focused on the needs of the community and relevant demographic groups and is delivered within the budget available. The needs assessment outlines the status of Library Service provision for Slough residents, highlighting how we are currently meeting our statutory duty. It also identifies where further improvements or changes are required to ensure the Library Service is relevant, sustainable, affordable, and fit for purpose now, and in the future.

This needs assessment, including any recommendations for change will be presented to Cabinet in October 2021.

There will then follow a public consultation on the assessment and the proposed changes. The results of this consultation will be presented back to Cabinet in February 2022.

Background

The residents of Slough are served by four main library buildings: The Curve cultural hub in the heart of Slough town centre; and three local community hubs in Britwell, Cippenham and Langley. In addition, there are library services offered in Chalvey Grove, Vicarage Way and Wexham children's centres. In line with the Council's localities model, buildings that have library services also have other services offered from them and other uses. There are no mobile library services offered.

Over 600,000 visits are made to Slough's four main library buildings a year, with residents borrowing just under 500,000 items online and hard copy, and 67,000 attending a group reading activity.

Reasons why a review is required

Over the past 5 years the library service in Slough has undergone several incremental changes. Staff structures have been altered, new teams introduced, and others deleted (see Appendix A). We have seen the opening of The Curve in the centre of the town, and we are currently expanding the Britwell Hub which includes a library service along with a brand-new medical centre (opening early 2022). Of course, the impact of Covid-19 on how we deliver library services has also given us a reason to pause and reflect on how we make sure we meet the needs of current and future library users for the coming 5 to 10 years.

Over the same time frame, Slough Borough Council has reviewed and updated it strategic aims and objectives (see here for information about Slough 2040 Vision). The council has embedded a locality model for all services, moving away from delivering services centrally from a service-specific building to a model of partnership working from a range of locations close to where the need is. Services in each area are being tailored to the needs of the community, we encourage communities to

seek out alternative sources of support (often from within the communities themselves) and to access advice and guidance from the council on-line wherever possible. The council is moving away from a model of directly delivering a broad range of services, to directly delivering focused services and enabling other services to be delivered by partners.

The overarching strategic aims for our new library service will reflect these wider aspirations. We need to ensure that in the future our library service is financially sustainable, based on a locality-based model, delivering a range of services in partnership with others and making full use of the available technology.

During 2021 it became clear that the council was facing extreme financial challenges that resulted in the issue of a Section 114 Notice. The notice was issued because the council did not have enough income and reserves to pay for its planned spending. All council departments are now looking at how they deliver services to the public to ensure that best value for money is being achieved.

Nationally, many local authorities have reviewed the library services that they offer. Other councils have reduced the number of library-only buildings, increased and improved working in partnership with the education sector and voluntary and community groups and made best use of technology. Slough will review and refresh its library service to reflect best practice from elsewhere.

These factors mean that we must make sure our library service is fit for purpose in a changing society by asking ourselves a range of questions including: -

How can we keep the best parts of the alternative ways of working that were adopted due to Covid?

What parts of our more traditional ways of working do we need to adapt and build on and how can we do this cost effectively?

How do we make sure our library service meets the needs of our residents including current library users and future or potential library users?

Making any changes

The library service is run and managed by the local authority. 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". Appendix B provides more details of this duty.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) has produced guidance for councils to refer to when deciding if the library service they offer complies with the law (further information and copies of the guidance can be found here). 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 equality and best value duties)

Local authorities should be able to demonstrate:

- There should be plans to consult with local communities alongside an assessment of their needs (including projections of need)
- Consideration of a range of options (including alternative financing, governance, or delivery models) to sustain library service provision in their area
- A rigorous analysis and assessment of the potential impact of their proposals. A council must be able to evidence the link between the design and delivery of its library service and identified local need.

In 2016 DCMS (via the Libraries Taskforce) published "Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021" (see here).

In "Libraries Deliver" the Library Taskforce describe libraries as vital community hubs. They bring people together and give them access to the services and support they need to help them live better. The report lays out an ambition for everyone to choose to:

- ✓ Use libraries because they see clear benefits from doing so.
- ✓ Understand what library services offer, and how they can make the most of what's available to them.
- ✓ Be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, then given confidence and quick and easy access to tools, skills, and information they need to improve their quality of life.
- ✓ Receive trusted guidance through the evolving information landscape and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world.

To achieve these ambitions the Libraries Taskforce identified seven outcomes that are critical to local individuals and communities and that library services should contribute to at a local level:

1. cultural and creative enrichment
2. increased reading and literacy
3. improved digital access and literacy
4. helping everyone achieve their full potential
5. healthier and happier lives

6. greater prosperity
7. stronger, more resilient communities

To deliver the aspirations, set out in the "Ambitions for Libraries" document, local councils are encouraged to address the following principles when reviewing and considering their library service:

- Ensure the legal requirements are met
- Understand local needs and let these shape service delivery
- Focus on public benefits and deliver a high-quality experience for the customer
- Take evidence-based decisions
- Support the delivery of consistent England-wide core library offers
- Promote innovation, enterprise and partnership working
- Make sure public funds are used effectively and efficiently.

Library services in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are also supported by the Arts Council and by "Libraries Connected".

Arts Council

The Arts Council role is to develop and advocate for libraries. They do not have any statutory responsibilities for libraries; however, they support and encourage library development under four key headings (see here)

1. Place the library as the hub of the community
2. Make the most of digital technology and creative media
3. Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
4. Deliver the right skills for those who work in libraries

Libraries Connected

Libraries Connected is the sector support organisation for libraries partly funded by Arts Council. The organisation works to promote the value of libraries, broker national partnership, share best practice and drive innovation throughout the sector.

Key to library support is the Universal Library Offers which are critical to a 21st century library service:

Information and Digital – ensure that local communities have access to quality information and digital services, to learn new skills and to feel safe online.

Reading - build a literate and confident society by developing, delivering, and promoting creative reading activities in libraries.

Health and Wellbeing - support the health and wellbeing of local people and communities through services that inform, engage, and connect.

Culture and Creativity - enable local communities to access and participate in a variety of quality and diverse arts and cultural experiences through local libraries.

Whenever a local council is planning and delivering services it must have regard to its wider legal obligations, including the Equality Act 2010 and specifically its public sector equality duty, its Best Value Duty, the Localism Act duties, and the Human Rights Act 1998. This means the council must consider how best to use its limited resources to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness and to consider how different people could be affected by the service and make sure that services are accessible to everyone and meets the needs of different people. A separate, detailed Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is available at Appendix C.

Who lives in Slough? (See Appendix D for details by ward)

Age and sex profile: 2011 Census tells us that approximately 150,000 people of all ages live in the borough of Slough. Our population is significantly younger than the England average (our median age is 34.4 years compared with 39.8 years in England). About 10% of our population is aged 65 and over compared to the England figure of approximately 19%. Just over half of our residents are male (50.7%) and just under are female (49.3%).

Ethnic diversity: Slough is one of the most diverse areas in the UK. No single culture or ethnic group is dominant but over 100 languages are spoken.

Disability: In the 2011 Census, 9,322 Slough residents between the ages of 16-64 reported living with a physical disability. Over 1,350 people were also reported to be living with a severe mental health problem. There are an estimated 2,590 people living with sight loss in Slough and 2,696 adults under the age of 65 live with a moderate to severe hearing impairments (more have a profound impairment). Hearing impairments in younger adults in Slough is expected to increase by 20% over the next ten years. Just over 4% of over 65s in Slough have been recorded by their GPs as living with dementia.

Employment: In 2020 the Office for National Statistics estimates that 75% of Slough adults are economically active, compared to 81.6% across the Southeast of UK (and compared to 79.1% across the whole UK). In 2019 the ONS estimates that 10.7% of households in Slough are "workless", a similar rate for the Southeast (10.2%) and lower than the UK average of 13.9% (see here for more information).

Education: In 2020 the Office for National Statistics estimates that just over 6% of working age adults in Slough have no formal qualifications, high when compared to other areas in the Southeast of the UK (4.9%). Local people have a lower rate of the higher level qualifications too (NVQ4 and above) at 41.5% compared to both the Southeast (45%) and whole UK (43%) (see here for more information).

Multiple deprivation: Index of Multiple Deprivation combines seven types of deprivation into a single measure (see here for more information). This allows us to compare areas with each other across a range of needs and vulnerabilities. Slough has neighbourhoods where there is severe deprivation ranking in the lowest 20% in England. These include areas in Chalvey, Britwell, Elliman and Colnbrook & Poyle wards (see here for details). The least deprived wards are Langley St Mary's and Cippenham Green. In general Slough has a higher percentage of children living in poverty compared to the England average and 24% of its older people are living in income deprivation. Poverty, social isolation, and ill-health indicators are all higher than the England average (see here for more information).

Across England, about ¼ of households have no access to a private car so rely on other forms of transport to move about. In Slough the rate of households without a car is below this England average and sits at just over 23%.

Current library service in Slough

Currently there are 7 buildings with library services within them. Our main, central library building is at The Curve and our other three main library buildings are at Britwell Hub, Langley library and Cippenham library. Our four main library buildings equate to one library building per 37,385 people. This is a lower number of libraries per population compared to the ratio in areas considered most like Slough (see Appendix E for Slough public libraries report from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA] including information about most similar groups).

The three other buildings where library services are delivered are at Chalvey Grove, Vicarage Way and Wexham Children's Centres. These buildings are subject to a children's centre review. See the map below for locations of buildings where library services are currently delivered from.
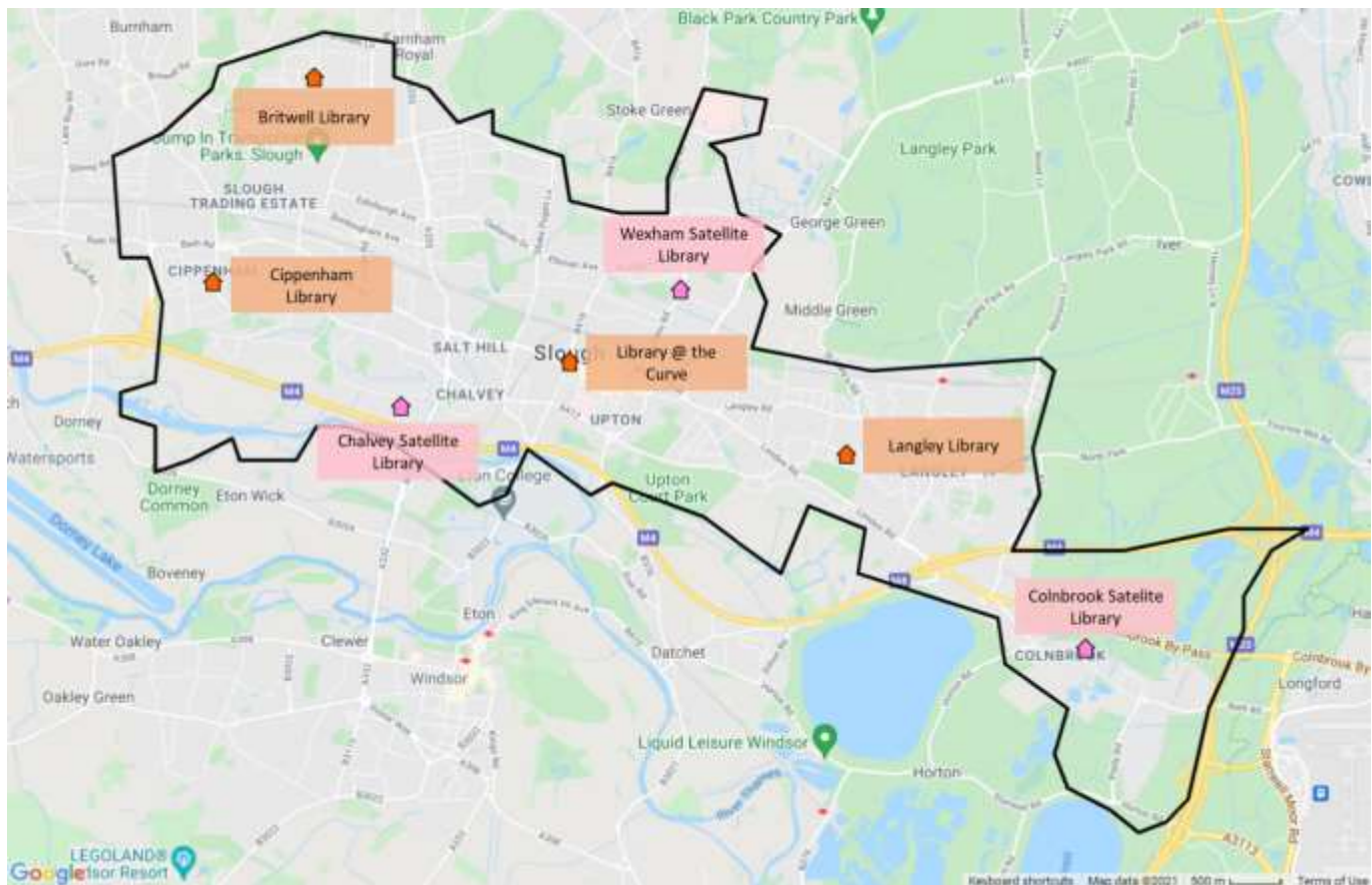
The library service in Slough offers free access to:

- Physical books for all ages and reading abilities. There are publications suitable for babies, young children, teens, and adults. Books are available in English and foreign languages and for those with sensory disabilities.

- Specialist "Bookstart" packs for babies and toddlers (see here for more details)
- Home Library service (see here for more details)
- Downloadable eBooks and eAudio books for children and adults.
- Online versions of newspapers, magazines, local history and learning resources.
- The internet and Wi-Fi connections through public computers and using personal devices.
- Activities and events for children, families and adults including music and rhyme times, story sessions, the national Summer Reading Challenge Reading Friends scheme, BBC Novels that Shaped the World and virtual reality experiences both in-person and online.
- Dedicated study space at The Curve.

Our library services also offer volunteering opportunities, spaces for community use, relaxed seating areas to encourage informal socialising and/or quiet reading, visit to schools and nurseries and staff able to guide people through the modern digital landscape.

The Curve library is open 59 hours a week over 6 days (not open on Sundays or Public Holidays).
Britwell library is open 48 hours a week over 6 days (not open on Sundays or Public Holidays).
Cippenham library is open 48 hours a week over 6 days (not open on Sundays or Public Holidays).
Langley library is open 48 hours a week over 6 days (not open on Sundays or Public Holidays).
See Appendix

The table below shows the number of residents living within 1.5 miles of each of our library buildings (2019 population estimates). The children's centres with library services are shaded blue.

	Residents aged 0 – 15	Residents aged 16 – 64	Residents aged 65+	Total number of residents living within 1.5 miles of the library*
The Curve	9,241	23,100	3,009	35,350
Britwell	7,066	15,477	2,406	24,949
Langley	8,390	20,309	3,796	32,495
Cippenham	5,159	12,403	1,900	19,462
Chalvey Grove	4,074	8,963	1,386	14,423
Wexham	4,687	11,215	1,846	17,748
Vicarage Way	2,917	7,806	1,112	11,835

*Residents often live within more than one catchment area, so totals add up to more than population

This means that over 80% of Slough's residents currently live within 1.5 miles of a library building, although some of the buildings offer services targeted specifically at young children and families.

Publication's budget
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).

Data from 2018 CIPFA report (Appendix E) suggests Slough libraries spend £1,293 on publications per 1,000 population and this is significantly higher than the councils in the comparator group (average of £982 per 1,000 population). This level of spending puts Slough at 26th highest out of a total of 125 library services across the UK (UK average spend is £1,042 per 1,000 population).

Supporting outcomes for residents
The table below outlines how Slough's current library offer supports the 7 outcomes described by the Libraries Taskforce.

Taskforce outcome	Slough libraries offer	Customer outcome
Cultural and creative enrichment	Art exhibitions & activities for children, young people & adults (example: Alexander Sadlo exhibition and National Poetry Day activities) Music events & activities for children, young people & adults (example: Story & Rhyme Time and Little Listeners classical music performance) Local author showcases providing a platform for writers to share their work with an audience and network with each other. Author & poet talks and events (example: Slough Summer Reading Challenge Ambassadors – Berkshire writers delivered events to inspire children and provided motivational videos and quotes encouraging them to join the challenge) The library service is an Arts Award Supporter, Artsmark Partner, and member of Slough Cultural Education Partnership Animation workshops Theatre workshops and performances Local history information and resources.	Increased participation in local community activities. Increased exposure to social networks and increased interaction with social networks. Decreased loneliness and isolation. Improved motivation and confidence to take up social, employment, training, or skills-based opportunities. Opportunities for residents to share skills with the community More likely to volunteer. Providing support for partners to deliver cultural experiences for young people Supporting the local creative sector to thrive Inspiration and encouragement for young people to take up creative careers.

Increased reading and literacy	General & specialist book collections.	Improved literacy skills for children, young people and adults.
	Library at Home service.	Increased enjoyment of reading for children, young people, and adults.
	Targeted literacy programmes.	
	Adult literacy support.	Improved confidence in reading.
	Reading groups for all ages & abilities	Instil a love of words, reading and literacy for babies and young children.
	Bookstart gifting scheme	
	Story and rhyme time sessions.	
	Reading and literacy events (example: Summer Reading Challenge and Reading Friends)	Promotes and supports development of children's speech and language
	Library tours and presentations for adult learners	Expanded range of parent/child bonding skills by using reading aloud.
	Reading recommendations (online and in person) and displays	Staff modelling good practice with sharing books and providing advice and recommendations to encourage and enable families to select appropriate books
	Accessible stock in a range of formats (example: digital, audio, multi-sensory, graphic novels, Pictures to Share)	
	Diverse and inclusive stock collections.	
	Hosting class visits to support the school curriculum.	Children supported ad inspired to explore books and make choices.

Improved digital access and literacy	Delivery of Adult Learning courses from libraries.	Increased confidence in using digital platforms.
	Staff act as Digital Champions to guide residents in how to access and use digital platforms.	Increased comfort using SBC website instead of calling Contact Centre or officers directly.
	Free use of computers and access to Wi-Fi.	Increased confidence to look for work which requires digital literacy.
	Interactive whiteboards at The Curve	Improved ability to look for work on-line.
	Children's Coding club	Enabling independent access to services.
	Access to Hopster early learning app	
	On-line library service offering eBooks, eAudio and eNewspapers/magazines.	
	Showcasing digital technologies (example: virtual reality, augmented reality, and 3D printing)	
	Self-service kiosks and online access to library accounts	
	Free access to online learning and research resources	
	Use of social media to connect and engage with our audience and raise awareness of our services	
	"Magic Table" specialist equipment providing enriching and stimulating activities for people with disabilities and people with dementia.	

Helping everyone achieve their full potential	Offering reading & literacy support.	Increased participation in local community activities.
	Signposting to health & wellbeing services/providers.	Increased exposure to social networks and increased interaction with social networks.
	Learning, skills & employability services offered from library buildings.	Decreased loneliness and isolation.
	Free access to computers and Wi-Fi to open digital landscape for residents.	Improved motivation and confidence to take up social, employment, training, or skills-based opportunities.
	Quiet study spaces.	More likely to volunteer.
	Volunteering opportunities.	Improved motivation to study, carry out self-directed learning and research.
	Providing advice and resources to learning partners	

Healthier and happier lives	Offer safe & welcoming community spaces available without booking and free at point of use. Specialist book formats. Self-help book collections. Home Library service. Social activities and groups. Health promotion activities. Dementia and Autism friendly libraries. Some library staff trained to communicate using Makaton. Quiet study spaces available. Volunteering opportunities. Staff Making Every Contact Count trained and provide accurate and appropriate signposting Opportunities to get physically active (example: seated exercise, seated yoga and story dancers)	Increased participation in local community activities. Increased exposure to social networks and increased interaction with social networks. Decreased loneliness and isolation. Improved motivation and confidence to take up social, employment, training, or skills-based opportunities. More likely to volunteer. Improved motivation to study, carry out self-directed learning and research. Residents better informed and enabled to make healthy lifestyle choices Reading increases wellbeing, promotes relaxation, improves confidence and self-esteem, and reduces cognitive decline Story times contribute to positive maternal mental health and wellbeing by providing structure, belonging and routine, reducing stress and increasing confidence and developing social and support networks.
Greater prosperity	Adult learning and skills courses delivered from libraries. Staff act as Digital Champions to guide residents in how to access and use digital platforms. Range of social and wellbeing activities. Free use of computers and access to Wi-Fi. Study spaces. Volunteering opportunities.	Increased motivation to learn and/or look for work. Increased motivation and opportunity to study/carry out research. Increased confidence and motivation and decreased isolation and loneliness increasing likelihood of securing employment. Increased confidence in accessing digital platforms to look for work/training and more likely to apply for jobs requiring digital literacy.

Stronger, more resilient communities	Range of reading & literacy support (formal and informal).	Increased participation in local community activities.
	Free health and wellbeing reading resources.	Increased exposure to social networks and increased interaction with social networks.
	Staff offering signposting to range of local services.	Decreased loneliness and isolation.
	Staff are digital champions encouraging users to be digitally literate.	Improved motivation and confidence to take up social, employment, training, or skills-based opportunities.
	Welcoming and supportive staff and safe, welcoming, accessible and comfortable spaces where people can feel connected to their community.	More likely to volunteer.
		Improved motivation to study, carry out self-directed learning and research.
	Libraries promote community events (example: Great Get Together and Fun Day)	Reading builds empathy – a vital social and emotional skill that increases tolerance and understanding of others.

Who currently uses Slough libraries?

To understand how the libraries are currently being used, we have looked at data we have about:

- The number of items borrowed at each library[1]
- The number of people visiting each library building[2]
- The number of active borrowers[3]
- The number of hours public computers are used[4]
- The numbers of people attending activities and events[5]

Across the UK how libraries are used has changed over the past decade. There has been a steady downward trend in borrowing physical books, and in people visiting a library for a variety of reasons including accessing the internet, attending an activity, meetings, and socialising with other people, and using a range of e-resources (Appendix E). Slough's library usage pattern follows these general trends. However,

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[1] Number of physical books and eResources borrowed and/or renewed via a library membership card. E-Resources include eBooks, eAudio, eNewspapers/magazines.

[2] Number of people visiting statutory library location for any reason, captured by electronic counters at entrance/exit doors.

[3] A library member who has visited and borrowed/renewed at least once in a 12-month period.

[4] Number of hours public computers are booked to use.

[5] Number of adults and children attending a specific event organised by library staff.

when we compare ourselves to other library services in the 12 most similar authorities (Appendix E), Slough has the third highest number of visits and books borrowed.

The opening of The Curve in 2016 increased the number of visits to our "central library" compared to the library it replaced (located less than 50 meters away but in a 1960s building). The Curve attracts 44% of overall library visits and 54% of all active borrowers take items from here (see Appendix I).

Items borrowed from each library

In Slough (2019/20) just under 500,000 physical books were borrowed/renewed from all our libraries and 70% of these were from our specialised children's sections of libraries. In addition, over 100,000 eBooks and eNewspapers/magazines were borrowed. In 2018/19 (most recent CIPFA data) we were in the top 3 of our 12 most similar councils for items borrowed.

However, the total number of items available for people to borrow across all our libraries is 150,902 and this puts us 8th in our most similar group. The average book stock levels across the group are 1,127 per 1,000 population and Slough's level is 1,012.

Slough is ranked 4th highest in terms of total number of books purchased for the service and is second for the number of children's books purchased. In 2017 just over 16% of the publications budget was spent on digital materials. This rose to 26% in 19/20 (£164,690 spent on physical books and £60,500 on digital resources). In 2020/21, with libraries in lockdown, spending on digital materials in Slough rose to 51% of the overall publications budget (£110,274 spent on physical books and £117,983 on digital resources).

Our internal finance systems demonstrate that the average cost for libraries of purchasing a physical book is £8 compared to an average eBook cost of £28. Bulk purchasing discounts for libraries are only currently available for hard copy items and not for eBooks.

A recent report from Libraries Connected highlights (pg. 5 Appendix J) the impact on publications budgets of the cost of digital borrowing. In July 2021 they estimated that the costs of digital borrowing added at least 25% to the cost of lending for libraries. Digital content can be an option to supplement physical resources but are too expensive to fully replace hard-copy publications.

The impact of Covid-19 was dramatic in relation to items being borrowed from Slough libraries. From March 2020 to June 2021 all our libraries were either completely closed or only open on a limited basis. In 2020/21 the number of eResources borrowed/renewed rose from 100,000 items in the previous year to almost 300,000 items. Over the same period the number of physical items issued or

renewed (online, or in person) dropped from 500,000 to 54,350. This demonstrates that many of our customers were able to shift from using physical libraries to using on-line services.

Before and during lockdown, The Curve remained the busiest for item lending/renewing accounting for 41% of all items issued. Langley accounts for 24% of all items lent, Cippenham accounts for 21% and Britwell only 14%.

Most items (70%) borrowed across all 4 main library buildings are those for babies, children, and young people (100% of satellite library issues are for children and young people).

Number of people visiting each library building

Over 2019/20 the number of people visiting our main libraries increased by 9% compared to the previous year (to a total of 629,922 visits). However, in 2017/18 the total number of visits per year was significantly higher at 705,461.

Our data does not allow us to break down why people visit our libraries or how many individual visitors we had (i.e., we are unable to identify repeat visitors). Cross referencing with data from people attending activities, we know that 67,000 of the 629,922 visits were made to attend an event or activity. Total visits to The Curve will also include people who are visiting the Registrar service, attending a non-library event including exhibitions and productions at The Venue.

The CIPFA comparisons show that in 2018/19 Slough had 4,000 library visits per 1,000 residents which ranks us 3rd in our comparator group. The average across our most similar councils was 3,326 library visits per 1,000 residents. The cost per visit for Slough libraries in 19/20 was low at £2.18 compared to the average across the similar group of council libraries of £3.08.

Some of our library users are unable to access our physical library buildings or our on-line offer (due to age and/or infirmity). To cater for this specific group of users we offer a Home Library Service. Volunteers take library services to residents in their homes where they can borrow, return, and renew items. However, the rate of housebound library users (those who access the library via the Home Library Service) is low in Slough (0.1 per 1,000 population, the second lowest in our CIPFA group) compared to our similar areas. The average for our group is 0.9 per 1,000 and is over 2.5 per 1,000 residents in Reading.

We recognise that this is an area of service delivery that can be improved and expanded to benefit the library service but also to spread the benefits of volunteering to residents.

Number of active borrowers

An "active borrower" is defined as a library member who has borrowed or renewed from a library at least once in a 12-month period. The number of active borrowers in Slough has followed the national trend and declined steadily over the past three years from 20,457 in 2017/18 to 17,347 in 2019/20[6]. However, compared to our CIPFA peers, Slough performs relatively well and is ranked 6th in this group for active borrowers. Just over half (53%) of the active borrowers in Slough are aged under 18 (this detail is not captured by CIPFA so no comparisons can be made).

54% of active borrowers were from The Curve, 20% were from Langley, 15% from Cippenham and 11% from Britwell.

The table below shows the percentage spread of active borrowers from each library from each ward. The wards highlighted in red are those where a main library is situated. For each library the top 3 wards for active borrowers are highlighted in green.

	The Curve library	Britwell library	Cippenham library	Langley library
WARD				
Baylis and Stoke	8.3%	4.3%	1.6%	0.4%
Britwell and Northborough	3.6%	52.4%	5.3%	0.5%
Central	14%	1.4%	0.8%	5.4%
Chalvey	14.4%	1.4%	6.5%	1.0%
Cippenham Green	3.3%	1.7%	45.0%	0.6%
Cippenham Meadows	6.9%	1.3%	20.5%	0.8%
Colnbrook with Poyle	1.9%	0.5%	0.0%	7.7%
Elliman	10.4%	1.8%	0.9%	1.1%
Farnham	7.2%	17.5%	2.7%	0.7%
Foxborough	1.3%	0.0%	0.2%	7.8%
Haymill and Lynch Hill	2.7%	15.2%	14.1%	0.5%
Langley Kedermister	4.2%	0.6%	0.5%	33.8%
Langley St Mary's	3.7%	0.0%	0.4%	24.2%
Upton	9.7%	0.9%	0.5%	14.4%
Wexham Lea	9.1%	1.7%	1.0%	1.3%

The second table (below) highlights the age profile of active borrowers for each library.

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[6] This is the number of users who have borrowed at least once in the 12-month period as shown by transactions against individual membership cards.

	2018/19				2019/20			
	The Curve	Britwell library	Cippenham library	Langley library	The Curve	Britwell library	Cippenham library	Langley library
0-10	2,159 21.4%	1,114 31.7%	925 37%	673 36%	2,395 26%	1,395 40%	1,062 42%	803 43%
11-13	1,383 13%	637 18%	377 15%	349 18.6%	1,188 13%	611 17%	355 14%	333 18%
14-17	1,074 10.6%	403 11.5%	226 9%	225 12%	819 9%	277 8%	179 7%	174 9.5%
18-59	5,028 49.9%	1,247 35.6%	865 35%	584 31%	4,309 47%	1,117 32%	779 31%	489 26.4%
60+	426 4.2%	103 3%	104 4%	45 2.4%	442 5%	113 3%	125 5%	51 3%
Total	10,070	3,504	2,497	1,876	9,153	3,513	2,500	1,850

The number of active borrowers using our 3 community libraries has remained static. However, there has been an almost 10% reduction in the number of active borrowers making use of The Curve. This may be an effect of Covid lockdowns on the town centre; active borrowers using The Curve may have been using the location because of passing-by when they are making use of other town centre facilities.

Use of public computers

Across the 4 main libraries we offer 62 public computers. These are free to use for residents and can be booked for 2-hour sessions (the average session length is 1 hour). All the computers have access to the Internet and Microsoft Office programmes (all upgraded to Windows 10 in 2020). Only library members can book computer sessions.

The Curve has 37 public computers available across the three floors of the building.
Langley library has 10 public computers.
Britwell library has 9 public computers.
Cippenham library has 6 public computers.

In 2018/19 63,896 hours were booked and of those 71% were at the Curve, 11% at Langley, 8.5% at Cippenham and 9.5% at Britwell. Over 66,000 computer hours were booked in 2019/20. Of these 67% were booked at The Curve,13.5% at Langley, 10% at Cippenham and 10% at Britwell.

Library members can print documents at all 4 libraries for a small fee (30 pence for A4black and white). Income from printing in 2018/19 was £19,636 which was 42% of the total library income for that year. In 2019/20 the print income was £22,577 which was 45% of the total income received for all libraries for that year. The Curve in 2018/19 made up 58% of that print income, this dropped to 48% in 2019/20.

Free, unlimited Wi-Fi is also available at all libraries. This allows visitors to use their own equipment in the locations and print from their own devices.

The CIPFA comparison with our most similar councils shows that the number of publicly available computers (called electronic workstations by CIPFA) per 100,000 residents is about average for the group in Slough. We have 56.3 computers per 100,000 residents and the group average is 60 per 100,000.

Number attending events and activities

Approximately 67,000 visits to our main library buildings in 2019/20 were primarily to attend an event or activity. These events included:

- Regular, weekly Story and Rhyme sessions for babies and young children
- Lego clubs (at The Curve)
- Summer Reading Challenge activities
- Introduction to "Bookstart" packs and activities
- Author talks
- Poetry evenings
- Reading groups/Book Clubs
- Get Creative and Fun Palace events for children and young people
- Seated exercise programmes
- Choir evenings

Anecdotal feedback from participants describes how these events have helped to reduce feeling of isolation and loneliness. Users comment about how their mental and physical health and wellbeing has been improved by coming to library-based events (Appendix H).

During 2019/20 67,609 adults and children attended library events and activities. Of these, 39% were events at The Curve, 21% were at Cippenham Library, 18% were at Langley and 13% at Britwell.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, Slough library service moved these activities and events on-line. In general, take up of these on-line resources was low compared to face-to-face activities of previous years. An example of the impact of moving events to on-line only was the national Summer Reading Challenge:

- In 2019 (pre Covid) 3,604 children in Slough took part in the challenge offered from all 4 main library buildings.
- In 2020 (during Covid lockdown) only 200 children in Slough took part in the on-line only challenge
- In 2021 (Covid lockdown restrictions lifting) 1,980 Slough children participated in the face-to-face challenge offered from the 4 main libraries.

Supporting our communities through face-to-face events will remain an important part of our service delivery. A challenge we will rise to is developing a programme of library service engagement within our localities model which may mean taking these programmes out of libraries and into other community settings.

Volunteering at Slough libraries

Slough libraries offer opportunities for volunteering. Volunteers help paid staff deliver services and individual volunteers gain useful skills and health and wellbeing benefits (see [here](#)).

Currently (2021), Slough libraries have 21 volunteers; 17 are general volunteers and 4 specialise is offering a [Home Library Service](#). Our general volunteers offer meeting and greeting at library buildings and offer support at events. In addition to this cohort, we also have several seasonal volunteers who offer their time at specific times of the year. Usually this is school-aged young people completing their Duke of Edinburgh challenge.

Recruiting and retaining volunteers has proved challenging in the past. The Library Service used to have a Volunteer Officer role, but this was removed as part of a council-wide transformation programme in April 2021. The challenge to attract volunteers is not restricted to Slough. Information about our most similar councils reported by CIPFA show that approximately 6% of total hours worked in Slough libraries were worked by volunteers. The average for our group is only 5.6% putting us slightly higher than average.

Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed in the needs assessment the following recommendations are being made.

Ensure that library services are affordable and deliver value for money

According to CIPFA, Slough libraries spend on materials is £1,293 per 1,000 population and this is significantly higher than the comparator group average of £982 per 1,000 population. This level of spending puts Slough at 26th highest out of a total of 125 library services across the UK (UK average spend is £1,042 per 1,000 population).

The comparisons on staffing costs in the CIPFA report are not as useful because since the data collection the number of full-time equivalent staff in Slough library service has fallen by 25% (from 28.78 FTE to 22.22 FTE). This will place the revenue expenditure on staff per 1,000 population below the comparator group average of £5,437 per 1,000 population.

The CIPFA data for building costs for Slough is missing some information so can't be used as a comparison to similar councils. However, Slough libraries spend £125,900 per annum on building costs (for Langley and Cippenham libraries as these are the only stand-alone library buildings).

The council should consider options to improve value for money in terms of the publications budget which should not exclude the option to reduce the budget from £220,500 per annum to between £117,000 and £147,000 per annum to bring us in line with the average spend across the UK (lower figure is taken from 2016 FOI costs for UK and higher figure is from CIPFA comparator group).

In addition, although staff numbers have declined since 2018 there is still scope for the council to assess whether expanded volunteering and embedding the shift (accelerated through Covid lockdown) to digital and self-serve customer service could allow for a reduction in dedicated staff in all library buildings at all times. Part of this review will need to consider the opportunities for services and their staff to co-locate meaning that staff could be more multidisciplinary and deliver a range of support and guidance services for customers.

Ensure library services are accessible and meet local needs

As discussed in recommendation 1 above, there is an opportunity to review the current publications budget as part of the move to ensure the library service is still affordable.

Over the Covid lockdown period the volume of on-line lending activity in Slough rose by 300%, demonstrating a willingness from some customers to move to a predominantly on-line service. However, the Library Connected research suggests that moving to a totally on-line offer can make services less affordable. In addition,

the participation in events was significantly lower when they were exclusively offered on-line compared to both face-to-face only and a mix of on-line and face-to-face.

In light of this it is recommended that Slough focusses on planning and delivering a hybrid model of service delivery for both material resources and event delivery.

As mentioned in recommendation 1 there is opportunity to expand the volunteer cohort in libraries which would be a critical resource to allow events and activities to be held in face-to-face settings. The activities on offer need to be carefully planned to serve all members of our community and be explicit in how they will support current library users but also how they will attract new users to the library service. One specific aspect of volunteering which needs to be expanded is the provision and marketing of the Home Library Service to bring the library into the homes of residents who are unable to go to a building.

It is also recommended that the library service reviews the range of locations where different lending and outreach activities could be offered from. An expansion to beyond the traditional library setting into more/different Children's Centres, locality hubs, community buildings, health settings, leisure centres etc could result in an increase in library users and an expansion of the range of communities using and engaging with this important resource.

Support and promote good use of technology including digitalisation of services where appropriate.
Slough Borough Council is moving to a general service delivery model of "digital by default". This move will include the provision of library services, but also creates an opportunity for the library service to be a valued gateway into the digital world for customers who are reluctant to embrace this new technology.

This needs assessment highlights that libraries currently play an important role in promoting eResources whether this is by on-line book borrowing, or by running coding clubs for young people or helping adults access the Internet for free. Libraries in Slough are an important resource to ensure residents are not digitally excluded.

It is recommended that this role undertaken by the library service is enhanced. The council should ensure that there is adequate IT equipment available for residents in community locations, including at libraries. Staff and volunteers across the borough in a range of organisations, including libraries, should be able to provide first level guidance and support to a resident who might be struggling to enter the digital world. Libraries and services delivering post-16 skills and training need to build upon existing links to ensure they work effectively together to promote and deliver digital skills opportunities for residents.