

Slough Borough Council

Report to: Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel
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Contact officer (s): Richard West – Executive Director Place & Community
Liz Jones – Group Manager Localities & Neighbourhoods

For all enquiries: (01753) 875500

Ward(s): All

Part I

For comment & consideration

Slough Library Service Plan and new delivery model

1. Purpose of report

To update the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel on the results of the public consultation about the future delivery model for the council's library services and to consider the new strategic service plan (Appendix A) for the library service.

2. Recommendation(s)/proposed action

The Panel is requested to consider the consultation responses and the draft strategic service plan and consider whether they think the service plan meets the statutory need to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service.

3. The Slough joint wellbeing strategy, the JSNA and the Five-year plan

The [Slough joint wellbeing strategy](#) (SJWS) details the priorities agreed for Slough with partner organisations. The SJWS has been developed using a comprehensive evidence base that includes the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

3a. Slough wellbeing strategy priorities

Slough library services support the delivery of two of the priorities in the Slough Wellbeing Strategy; priority 1 (Starting Well) and priority 3 (Strong Healthy and Attractive Neighbourhoods).

Library services support children to start school with a good level of health and development so they are more likely to go on to succeed in later stages of education. Library services also support strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods which are built around people, place, local pride and strong collaborative working between the community and its partners. People in strong, healthy and attractive communities are part of a shared local identity and are empowered to have the skills and opportunities to take part in local life

3b. Five-year plan outcomes

The strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods' initiative cuts across all of the Councils five Year Plan Outcomes; however, it has a particular focus on Outcomes 1, 2 & 3

Priority 1: Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy, and successful.

Priority 2: Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs.

Priority 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work, and stay

4. Other implications

(a) Financial

The proposed strategic service plan for library services sets out the strategic aims for the future service. The service has a savings target of £400,000 for 2022/23, however the Council's financial position means that there may need to be further savings from this service and therefore it is important to focus on the key aims of the service and whether it meets the requirements of a comprehensive and efficient library service.

(b) Risk management

The following key risks have been assessed and are included in the directorate risk register.

Risk	Rating	Mitigation	Residual risk
Co-location opportunities are not taken up by other services or organisations.	Medium	Delegated authority to Executive Director to explore opportunities and report back to Cabinet.	Medium
The Library Service does not provide a comprehensive and efficient service and the council.	Medium	Throughout the process of carrying out the Needs Assessment, EIA and consultation there has been close liaison with HB Public Law. There have also been regular discussions with Department of Digital Culture, Media and Sport to receive guidance on how to deliver a robust plan.	Low

		The EIA Action Plan commits the service to carry out regular, light touch surveys of each library building and on-line resources to test and evaluate if usage is being affected.	
Increase in waiting times for publications to be available due to limited stock.	High	Identifying good practice from other councils in the most similar group to implement in Slough. This could include, for example, book donation schemes.	Medium

(c) Human rights act and other legal implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications.

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.*

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

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)

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 and the equality impact of the decision. When proposing to change and in particular 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.

(d) Equalities impact assessment

The library service carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in September 2021 as part of the Needs Assessment. This EIA included an action plan to ensure that any equality implications were mitigated and managed. The EIA was updated in light of the public consultation (Appendix B).

If the council continues to operate the library service in the current buildings, this will address the concern raised by users who were unable to drive or easily use public transport that not having a library within walking distance would reduce their access to the service. If library services could be delivered from other community locations will consider the ease of access for all sections of the community in the final decisions about any new locations.

Adoption of the strategic service plan will ensure that the service seeks out more volunteers to allow an expansion of the Library at Home service for residents who have disabilities that mean they are unable to leave their homes.

Reductions to the publications budget will mean that careful consideration about what resources to buy to ensure a good range of material for children and babies, non-English readers/speakers, and material for users with sensory impairments (large font, Talking Books etc.) will have to be made. The service management team will continue to seek out best practice from other councils and professional bodies to make sure our service is making appropriate choices of material to stock.

(e) Workforce

The recommendations in this report will have workforce implications. These implications include the deletion of some posts, the creation of new part-time and full-time posts and the creation of new job descriptions and person specifications to ensure the new workforce reflects the new service.

5. Supporting information

- 5.1 The Needs Assessment (Appendix C), Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix B) and public consultation (Appendix D) provide a wealth of information that has allowed the library service to create a robust strategic framework for delivering the service over the coming 5 years. The strategic service plan describes how eight workstreams will support the delivery of 3 overarching aims.
- 5.2 The three overarching aims of the library service over the next 5 years are to:
- Support improved literacy and love of reading for all residents
 - Deliver affordable services available to all users
 - Support levelling up opportunities for all residents
- 5.3 These will each be supported by the following workstreams:
- High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure.
 - 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.
 - Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development.
 - 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.
 - A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services.
 - Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users.
 - Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence.
 - Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources.
 - 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.
- 5.3 The overarching themes and workstreams have been created by considering the results of the Needs Assessment (and Equality Impact Assessment), the public consultation results and financial constraints.
- 5.4 In addition to the formal responses to the consultation a resident started a petition on Change.org ([Petition · Save our library · Change.org](#)) to save the library building in Langley from closure. By mid-February 2022 there were over 1.300 signatories. The petition specifically mentions the benefits local children derive from having the library at the heart of their community, in a prominent position and close to other educational facilities from a nursery, primary and secondary schools. The petitioner also mentions that school libraries are not able to hold the

range of stock that the council library does and that the range of activities held at the library are enjoyed by local children and helps them build friendships outside of their school-based circle.

Questions for scrutiny members:

1. How can we keep the best parts of the alternative ways of working that were adopted due to Covid?
 2. 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?
 3. How do we make sure our library service meets the needs of our residents including current library users and future or potential library users? This includes needs to particular groups, including those for whom English is not their first language, older and infirm residents who may struggle to access library buildings, children and young people.
4. Do the future strategic aims and service plan achieve the following ambition set out by the Library Taskforce:
- (a) Set out the clear benefits of the library service to enable residents to choose whether to use it;
 - (b) Set out what library services offer and how residents can make the most of these services;
 - (c) Allow residents to be open to new ideas and opportunities, gain confidence and have quick and easy access to tools, skills and information to improve their quality of life;
 - (d) Receive trusted guidance and build the skills needed to thrive in a changing world.
5. Do the future strategic aims and service plan achieve the following seven outcomes as identified by the Libraries Taskforce:
- (a) cultural and creative enrichment
 - (b) increased reading and literacy
 - (c) improved digital access and literacy
 - (d) helping everyone achieve their full potential
 - (e) healthier and happier lives
 - (f) greater prosperity
 - (g) stronger, more resilient communities

6. Comments of other committees

The draft strategic plan for library services will be considered at Cabinet on 21 March 2022 and the views of the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel will be included in the report to Cabinet.

7. Conclusion

The council has a legal duty to deliver a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. To facilitate this a Needs Assessment and EIA have been produced and a wide-ranging consultation undertaken. As a result of this work a new Library Service Plan has been developed to ensure that the future library service addresses the current issues facing the service whilst supporting the strategic outcomes set by Department for Digital Media Culture and Sport via the Libraries Taskforce.

8. Background papers

Appendix A: Draft Slough Library Service Plan

Appendix B: Slough library service Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix C: Slough library service Needs Assessment

Appendix D: Slough library service public consultation results (D1 to D4)