

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Cabinet
DATE:	21 March 2022
SUBJECT:	Slough Library Service Plan and new delivery model
PORTFOLIO:	Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills – Cllr Christine Hulme
CONTACT OFFICER:	Liz Jones (Group Manager)
WARD(S):	All
KEY DECISION:	YES
EXEMPT:	NO
DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:	YES
APPENDICES:	A: Library service Needs Assessment B: CIPFA Comparative Profile – public libraries C: Draft strategic service plan for Slough library services D: Equalities Impact Assessment E: Consultation survey results (including response to Citizen) F: Feedback from focus groups (adults and children/young people) G: Formal responses to consultation H: Proposed new opening hours

1 Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report sets out the results of the public consultation into the future of statutory library services in Slough. The report takes these results together with the existing Needs Assessment and makes recommendations about the future delivery model of the library service.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- a. Agree the strategic service plan for Slough library services (2022 to 2027) (Appendix C).
- b. Agree to reduce the current library publication budget from £220,500 to £90,000 per annum to align our spend just within the CIPFA most similar group rather than towards the top of it.

- c. Agree that for a minimum period of 12 months the library service operates from the current buildings in which libraries are accommodated (Langley Library, Cippenham Library, Britwell Hub and The Curve) with a reduction in the opening hours and hours when specialist library staff will be in attendance as described in paragraph 2.14 of this report.
- d. Note that a report will be brought back to Cabinet in 12 months to provide an update and make recommendations for future options to deliver library services within the Council's current constrained financial position.

Reason:

Cabinet is recommended to approve a service plan containing clear strategic aims for delivery of library services, as well as recommending an interim model for delivery of a comprehensive and efficient library service, delivering a saving of £400,000 to the budget in 2022/23. This allows the Council to undertake detailed work to respond to the consultation results, ensure the library service aligns with the Council's wider recovery and improvement plans and explores opportunities for utilising community assets in a different way.

The key findings of the library consultation are that:

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

The Council must deliver significant levels of savings over the next few years, as well as disposing of surplus assets to reduce its borrowing levels. The Council's plans and priorities will be set out in a future Recovery and Improvement Plan, with more detailed service plans and policies aligning to this. An in-depth consultation and needs analysis for the Council's library service has allowed us to capture data on what a comprehensive and efficient library service could be in Slough and to set a service plan with clear strategic aims. However it is not possible to consider all options alongside the level of savings that may be required from key services in the future, to be able to determine a longer-term delivery model at this time. It is also important to note that many people refer to libraries within the context of physical buildings when a comprehensive and efficient library service is much wider than a building-based model. The consultation results have demonstrated the need to publicise the online resources and focus on outreach work, as well as ensuring that effective services are delivered in buildings.

Commissioner Review

"The response to the consultation is noted. It is important that options are explored to maximise the use of buildings occupied by library services to ensure value for money is

achieved. This includes the co-location of other services which will make the locations more useful for the residents of Slough and the wider use of volunteers (these are both mentioned as desirable in the consultation responses). Further developments in terms of an on-line offer and the use of a consortium approach to the publications budget could further enhance the service whilst minimising costs.”

2 Report

- 1.1 Library services are a statutory service delivered by local authorities under the duty described in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. This duty requires councils to deliver a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. There are no prescriptive definitions in the Act about what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient service. However, case law has determined that if any significant changes are made to how a library service is delivered, the council must follow a fair process to locally determine what a comprehensive and efficient library service looks like and what it delivers. This includes considering local needs and consulting with the public when devising a new way of delivering services.
- 1.2 Over the past 5 years there have been changes to our library service, including the opening of The Curve, changes to how residents use the library service, including a decline in visits to library buildings and an increase in online access and changes to the council’s finances which mean now is an appropriate time to review how the service will be delivered to ensure it is fit for the future and remains able to deliver a comprehensive and efficient service.
- 1.3 This report makes recommendations about a model of the library service that balances the views of residents, the statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service and the financial pressures faced by the council.

Options considered

- 1.4 The following options for future service delivery have been considered and were a key element of the public consultation. The options are not all mutually exclusive and therefore a number of these options are being recommended:

Option	Description	Consideration summary
A	Reduce the money available to spend on buying publications (both hard copy and eResources – books / magazines / comics / newspapers - anything that can be read).	<p>The Needs Assessment (Appendix A) compared Slough library service to the most similar group of authorities (CIPFA report – Appendix B) and demonstrates that between 2018 and 2020 Slough’s spending on publications/materials as a % of total revenue spending was higher than average in the group (pg. 20), as was the actual amount spent on publications/materials (pg. 17).</p> <p>The results of the public consultation concluded that 52% of respondents chose this as their preferred option (listed in top 3 options).</p>

		<p>How a smaller budget is spent to ensure that a good range of publications is available for the children/young people's library (currently 70% of resources borrowed from our library service) and to cater for users with protected characteristics will be challenging. Once the budget is set operational managers will be able to decide on the material purchased to ensure the libraries continue to provide a comprehensive service in terms of range of publications available.</p> <p>This option IS being recommended.</p>
<p>B</p>	<p>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).</p>	<p>Maintaining all current library buildings is one way of ensuring that our library service remains at the heart of our localities.</p> <p>Reducing hours that library staff are available for users to engage with will mean that users will have to plan when they use the physical buildings and a booking system may be introduced to ensure users who need assistance visit the library when staff are available (e.g., support using IT).</p> <p>Reducing the space in the buildings dedicated to library use (shelving for books, quiet study areas and event areas) will allow co-location into the buildings by other services / organisations to take place.</p> <p>This option will result in reduction in the number of paid staff working in the library service as well as a reduction in the hours that paid staff are available to support library users. There is the opportunity to increase the role of volunteers in some library services.</p> <p>For any co-located services, there will be clear agreements about what library-orientated tasks they are able to support (e.g., supporting a "click-and-collect" model) and further training will provided to facilitate this and to grow the range of services that they can support over time.</p>

		<p>While a reduction in dedicated library space will reduce the opportunity for users to browse publications physically we will mitigate this by developing an on-line catalogue which can be accessed both within buildings used for library services and at home. It time this may all but replace the need for physical space.</p> <p>Study space can be provided at many other locations other than in buildings providing library services. Indeed where workshop style conversations benefit study this is best done away from quiet space.</p> <p>There are many alternative spaces suitable for “library events” which will be used where the space used in buildings to provide physical library services is reduced</p> <p>Many respondents raised concerns about the “Open +” model, based on concerns about health and safety and lack of specialist staff. Safety concerns can be mitigated in a number of ways other than and in addition to having staff present and appropriate measures to ensure safety will be adopted at each location. Many users of Library services do not need specialist library staff to be in attendance and where there is this need then it will be possible to arrange appointments, attend at advertised times when specialist staff will be in attendance and/or to provide support remotely via such as “teams” or “zoom”.</p> <p>This option IS being recommended as an interim measure whilst further work is undertaken on identifying co-location opportunities and use of other community buildings.</p>
C	<p>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.</p>	<p>Maintaining all current library buildings is one way of enabling our library service to remain at the heart of our localities. Reducing hours that library staff are available for users to engage with will mean that users will have to plan their visit to the library more carefully if they want to see a member of staff and a booking system may be</p>

		<p>introduced to enable this to allow specific tasks to take place (e.g., support using IT).</p> <p>This option will result in reduction in the number of staff working in the library service. There is the opportunity to increase the role of volunteers in some library services.</p> <p>This option is NOT being recommended as an interim model as it is a subset of Option B which is being recommended.</p>
D	<p>Close both Langley and Cippenham library buildings but maintain the staffing and opening hours at The Curve library and at Britwell library.</p>	<p>The Needs Assessment and public consultation demonstrated that residents generally make good use of library buildings, although The Curve is the building used the most both for browsing and borrowing items and for IT use.</p> <p>If Langley and Cippenham Libraries were closed this would mean no specific building in the south of the Borough and would reduce opportunities for residents to walk to a local library building.</p> <p>This option will result in reduction in the number of staff working in the library service. There is an opportunity to increase the role of volunteers in some library services.</p> <p>This option would allow for casual browsing of publications at The Curve and Britwell for longer opening hours than is proposed under B and C, and for continuing to offer a full range of activities and events at both of these locations.</p> <p>This option is NOT recommended as an interim model.</p>
E	<p>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 on-line) across the borough.</p>	<p>The Needs Assessment and public consultation demonstrated that residents make good use of current library buildings.</p> <p>Although there has been a shift towards more on-line and electronic borrowing and events from library users, the EIA (Appendix D) demonstrates that some users (notably the visually impaired) may struggle to access library services if</p>

		<p>more elements were moved to our current on-line offer.</p> <p>The Council also delivers physical events from library buildings, some of which or similar cannot currently easily be replicated online. Some of these events can be offered from other community venues and increasingly it is anticipated that on-line alternatives will become more main stream. .</p> <p>This option, to move to alternative buildings within the borough, is not deliverable within 12 months and therefore is NOT recommended as an interim model. Alternative locations will be explored and our on-line offer will be developed to enable future consideration of this option.</p>
F	Make no changes to the current library service	<p>The Needs Assessment demonstrates how people in Slough use library services is changing (e.g., increase demand for on-line services). The public consultation reached residents who do not currently use the library service and it is clear that changes need to be made in future to attract these potential new users.</p> <p>The specific statutory duty relating to library service provision (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964) is for the local authority to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. The general “best value” duty is for local councils to have regard for a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of services delivered to ensure best value is achieved (Local Government Act 1999).</p> <p>Keeping library services as they are now does not adequately address how we can attract new users, respond to changes in use and demonstrate best value in light of the council’s current financial position.</p> <p>This option is NOT recommended.</p>

G	Increase spending and expand library service	<p>The specific statutory duty relating to library service provision (Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964) is for the local authority to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. The general “best value” duty is for local councils to have regard for a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of services delivered to ensure best value is achieved (Local Government Act 1999).</p> <p>There was no evidence within the Needs Assessment (Appendix A) or the analysis of the public consultation that demonstrate a need to increase spending and expand the library service in order for it to deliver a comprehensive or efficient service. To do so at the present time would not deliver best value.</p> <p>Given the authority’s financial position, the service could only be expanded if other services provided by the Council are reduced</p> <p>This option is NOT recommended.</p>
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1.5 Options A to E were tested during the public consultation. The consultation gave respondents the opportunity to offer alternative models for the council to consider. There were no detailed alternative models proposed, but two general alternatives were suggested, and these have been listed as F and G in the table above.

Background

1.6 In October 2021, Cabinet received a report that included a Needs Assessment for library services, a draft Equality Impact Assessment and details of a public consultation that would run for 12-weeks until 20 January 2022. This report outlines the current situation in relation to Slough’s library service, why a change is being recommended and what consultation will take place.

1.7 The Needs Assessment is attached at Appendix A and highlights some relevant considerations for the library service:

- There is no mobile library service.
- Some of the Council’s children’s centres are used to provide satellite library services for parents and young children.
- The online offer is not well known about, although its use increased during the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions.
- The home library service is under-utilised with a rate of usage below similar areas, for instance Slough’s rate of use is 0.9% per 1000 compared with Reading’s rate of 2.5% per 1000 of the population.

- 44% of visitors attended The Curve and 54% of active borrowers were from The Curve.
- 70% borrowed items from the children's section.
- 67% of IT use is at The Curve, with other buildings making up between 10% and 13.5% each.

Consultation feedback

1.8 A detailed consultation process was undertaken between October 2021 and January 2022. This included an online questionnaire, a brief survey contained within a wider consultation booklet, a number of focus groups and drop-in sessions.

1.9 Appendix E provides more detail about the results of the public consultation. Headline results from the consultation are described below in paragraphs 2.11 to 2.12. Information about the consultation responses is described in paragraph 2.10. To provide some context to the consultation responses:

- Slough total population (2011 Census) is 150,000
- 2019/20: 629,922 visits were made to physical SBC libraries, of these approx. 67,000 visits were to attend an event.
- 2019/20: 17,347 active borrowers in Slough (had borrowed an item during 12-mth period)
- 2019/20: 100,000 e-resources were borrowed, and 500,000 physical resources (books) were borrowed.

1.10 Consultation responses - Between October 2021 and January 2022: -

- 2,522 responses were received on-line
- 36 responses were received in hard copy
- 595 responses were received in response to the "key question" placed in Citizen magazine delivered to all households in December 2021
- 2 on-line drop-in information sessions were held
- 13 real-life drop-in information sessions were held
- 34 presentations were made to community, voluntary and other stakeholder groups

2.10.1 In response to feedback from Cabinet in October a concerted effort was made to engage with children and young people, as well as adults who may struggle to complete a survey. We achieved this by

- Asking all children and young people who visited a library to write a comment about Slough's library service to be shown on display boards at each library (150 responses).
- Making presentations and carrying out workshops at 8 schools (some whole school assemblies and some class/key stage specific assemblies).
- Two workshops held at after-school/Christmas school holiday clubs.
- A workshop with members of Youth Parliament.
- A workshop with students from Creative Academy.
- A workshop for young people hosted by Aik Saath.
- Workshops with specific community groups that support adults.
- Video explaining the consultation made available via YouTube and SBC website. The video was sub-titled to make it easier for people with a hearing impairment to participate.

2.10.2 These workshops, presentations and assemblies engaged with 1995 children and young people. Their feedback, suggestions and ideas are referenced in this report and in Appendix E as a summary of all resident responses.

2.10.3 Ward councillors were invited to respond to the consultation during the main 12-week consultation period. Once the main consultation window had closed all ward councillors were reminded to complete the on-line survey in a week-long extension period for members (21 to 28 January 2022). In the week extension in late January a further 17 responses were received. However, over the whole of the survey period, only 4 respondents ticked the box to say they were responding specifically as a ward member. Councillors also attended some of the on-line and real-life drop-in sessions.

2.10.3 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.

2.10.4 A report on the background to the review of the library service (including information about the Needs Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment, consultation, and proposed strategic service plan) was presented to the Customer and Community Scrutiny Panel on 2 March 2022 (item 6 “Slough Library Service Plan and new delivery model”). The Panel made two specific comments; the first was to see a copy of the formal response to Unisons comments made as part of the consultation, and the second was to maintain a library building in Langley.

1.11 Key findings from public consultation:

- Slough Borough Council’s library service is highly valued by respondents, across all age groups. 86% of respondents were from current users of the library service, with just over half of respondents saying they use the library service more than 12 times a year. Many respondents commented on the frustration caused by not being able to use the library service as normal due to Covid related restrictions.
- The physical library buildings (and buildings where library services operate from) are seen as valuable community assets. The respondents came from people who mainly used the Curve and Langley library buildings, followed by Cippenham library users. Responses from users of Britwell were low, but this could be contributed to by the fact that the building is currently being re-developed and the service is therefore more limited than usual. Responses from users of satellite library services was low suggesting that this is not a significant contributor to our overall library service. A high number of respondents gave a clear message that having a physical library facility close to where they live/within easy walking distance was very positive. Comments from the survey and the workshops highlighted the benefits of social interactions taking place in libraries and how these strengthened family bonds (especially between parents/grandparents with children) and reduced loneliness.

- 71% of respondents confirmed they used the library service to browse, borrow or return books, with 53% using it for IT services, 32% to attend events, 22% to use the library space and 41% used online services.
- People who used library buildings wanted staff to be present and available to both help with library specific tasks (recommending books, helping with IT etc.) and to increase feelings of safety and security. Concerns were raised about whether libraries would remain safe spaces if no staff were present. There are other means of providing safe spaces and in addition, staff from co-located services and/or volunteers would provide a physical staff presence
- Almost universally the suggestion of introducing “self-service” libraries with no staff on site was unpopular. Concerns were raised about lack of management of library spaces, feelings of insecurity using an un-staffed space, queries about what would happen if machines broke down and the lack of human interaction. However, in practice more than 80% of transactions are via self-serve kiosks and staff from co-located services and/or volunteers would provide a physical staff presence
- Currently on-line library services were used, but even with the shift to 100% on-line delivery during Covid-lockdowns these virtual services were not widely known about. Communication of our on-line offer and development of our on-line offer are key objectives for the next 12 months
- Respondents recognised that opening (and staffing) hours may need to reduce to ensure the service remains efficient and offering good value for money. There were positive comments made about introducing more flexible opening times, especially to have some later evening and Saturday and Sunday opening.
- Respondents were very positive about co-locating other council services and other organisations within library buildings. Some respondents commented that the current co-location of Customer Services at libraries encouraged them to come into library buildings. When thinking about future service delivery there was support for introducing more co-location where this was possible.
- Reasons given for not using library services included the opening times, including lack of opening on Sundays, poor management of other library users, having access to alternative resources from elsewhere and not knowing about availability of online library service.
- There is an acceptance that bringing spending to be in-line with those councils in Slough’s “most similar group” of authorities was sensible.

1.12 A number of suggestions about services respondents were more likely to use in the future include:

- Library at Home service where volunteers bring library books to the homes of residents whose disability means they can’t get to a library building or use click-and-collect.
- Use of on-line and e-resources like researching family history, reading magazines, borrowing e- and audio-books.
- Volunteering opportunities.
- Attending events.

The free text comments flagged the following services respondents would use in the future:

- Accessing materials in non-English language.
- Using other non-library services that are available in the buildings.
- Using spaces to encourage education, learning and training.
- Use of space for socialising.
- Use of community space available for low rent or free of charge.

1.13 Although the survey specifically asked respondents to suggest alternative models of service delivery to be considered, no specific alternative suggestions came forward. Two general alternatives were made; the first was to not make any changes to the current service delivery and the second was to expand the library service.

1.14 The equality monitoring data indicated the more females than males responded and more working age adults than other age groups. This may reflect the data that indicates a high number of current users are parents of early years and school age children.

1.15 To ensure the views of particular groups were captured, the service held a number of focus groups and the feedback from these is included in Appendix F and summarised below:

- Children and young people: respondents wanted to see more books, more activities, space to play and borrow computer games and somewhere to eat in the library buildings.
- The 50 + forum: respondents wanted to see more outreach work and flagged the difficulties with lack of parking at the Curve.
- A men's only group: respondents flagged the option of a chess club, said the layout of the Curve was confusing compared to the previous building and that there was a lack of technical books.
- Carers' forum: respondents requested events that catered to those for whom English was not a first language and said they were not aware of the online offer.
- Voluntary sector: respondents would like to see partner organisations sharing the space, a balance between online and hard copy resources, the option of an online music service, better publicity of new services, online health and wellbeing support. Increased use of volunteers, options to hire out community space at low or no cost, options for corporate sponsorship explored and a coffee shop.

2.16 Two organisational responses were received, which are appended at Appendix G. Slough Museum supported The Curve remaining fully open and staffed to ensure The Curve remained the cultural hub in Slough. Unison raised concerns about how a reduced book fund would be used and the impact of the reduction, asked about a stock policy, flagged that e-resources were not well publicised and that library staff do considerable outreach work and activities which were not well known and that volunteers should not be used to replace paid staff.

2.17 Strategic service plan

The Needs Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment and public consultation 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 work streams will support the delivery of 3 overarching aims.

2.17.1 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

2.17.2 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.

2.17.2.1 The overarching themes and work streams have been created by considering the results of the Needs Assessment (and Equality Impact Assessment), the public consultation results and financial constraints.

2.18 Reduced publications budget:

2.18.1 The publications budget for 2020/21 was £220,500 which placed Slough as the second highest spending library service across the councils in our most similar group in relation to spend per resident. Sloughs spend on library materials was £1,293 per 1,000 residents and the average across the group was £982 per 1,000 residents.

2.18.2 The savings plan in 2021/22 reduced the publications budget as a one-off saving from £220,000 to £49,500 Recommendation b. brings the publications budget to £90,000 per annum to align our spend just within the CIPFA most similar group rather than towards the top of it.

2.18.3 A reduced publications budget will mean that spend on resources and materials will have to be carefully planned in future years. Currently the library service is able to

take benefits of low cost of hard-copy publications and the same discounts are not yet available for e-resources. For the immediate future it would be inaccurate to assume that digital and electronic resources will be cheaper to purchase than hard copy items.

2.18.4 A high proportion of publications spend will be on books for babies and children as these resources suffer more “wear and tear” than books for young people and adults. This will mean the amount of budget available for books in the general library will be relatively low compared to recent years. The Equality Impact Assessment demonstrates that the Service must continue to provide publications in non-English languages and in formats that are accessible to users with sensory impairments.

2.18.5 The Service may not be able to purchase multiple copies of publications to allow each library to stock at least best-selling books. Users will be able to order particular books that are stocked but the waiting time for when these will be available to loan may increase. The Service will continue to seek out examples of good practice from other authorities to identify ways to mitigate further the impact of a reduced publications budget. This will include looking into joining a consortium. To do this we need to have a firm publications budget agreed so the consortium know how much “buying power” we are bringing, and we will also need to carry out a procurement exercise.

2.19 Reduced opening and staffed hours

2.19.1 Currently the 4 main buildings used to provide the library service are open and staffed for library use for a total of 203 hours per week. The proposal is to reduce the opening hours staffed for library use to 110 hours per week.

2.19.2 The detail of the proposed hours is based on the feedback received from the consultation survey (questions 12 and 13) and comments made in the other engagement activities. Although feedback suggested that self-service only times were unpopular, our data shows that between 80% and 90% of all current library transactions (borrowing, returning books and booking events etc.) happen through the self-service kiosks. All the kiosks have been upgraded recently to make them more user friendly and even less likely to malfunction. This is why every library has proposed times when self-service only is provided.

2.19.3 Appendix H describes the new, proposed opening hours which will be in place until otherwise agreed.

2.19.4 The principles used to draft the proposed hours are:

- ❖ Ensure that there is at least one library building open with staff available each morning.
- ❖ Ensure that there is at least one library building open with staff available each weekday evening.
- ❖ Ensure that all libraries are open and staffed during Saturdays.
- ❖ Where buildings are already open for non-library service delivery, the library self-service kiosks are made available for customers to use.

Currently all libraries have staff available for all the hours they are open (59 hours per week at The Curve, 48 hours per week at the other three library buildings). The proposal will result in the following changes:

The Curve: Open with staff available 40 hours per week. Open for self-service only 18 hours per week.

Britwell: Open with staff available 22 hours per week. Open for self-service only 20 hours per week.

Cippenham: Open with staff available 23 hours per week. Open for self-service only is not currently available but this will be considered further as a matter of urgency.

Langley: Open with staff available 25 hours per week. Open for self-service only is not currently available but this will be considered further as a matter of urgency

2.20 Co-location considerations:

Currently all buildings from which the library service operates from have some formal co-location of services:

The Curve – Library Service, Registrar Service and Community Learning & Skills Service operate from here. There are often external events being held at the building.

Britwell Hub – Library Service, Housing Advice Service and Customer Service operate from here. A new co-located health centre is planned to open in early 2022.

Cippenham Library – Library Service and Customer Service operate from here.

Langley Library – Library Service and Customer Service operate from here.

The Community Learning & Skills Service has expressed an interest in delivering teaching and learning from all locations, both at times when library staff and other services are operating from the buildings and at times when there may not be any other services working on-site. It is likely that Customer Services will align bookable appointment slots for customers at Langley and Cippenham with the times library staff will be on-site.

3. **Implications of the Recommendation**

3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 This report is seeking approval of the proposed service plan for library services which includes reducing the publications budget and staffing budget to ensure the council continues to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service and incorporates value for money principles while delivering annual savings of at least £400,000.

3.1.2 There will be a saving of £130,500 from the publications budget. The salary cost of 10.93 FTE is £369,705 which together add up to £500,205. The full salary saving of £369,705 will not be achieved in the first year as the service changes can't be implemented in full by 1 April 2022 and, although we will do all that we can to redeploy staff who are displaced by the changes through staff consultation on restructure, in the unlikely event that nobody could be redeployed then redundancy costs in the order of £85k could be incurred and if so then these would be absorbed within the service budget.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 Library services are provided under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, section 10 of which places a duty on the library authority to provide a: “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. Further detail is provided in the Act as follows:

library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability -

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and
(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it.

3.2.2 Case law has interpreted what a “comprehensive and efficient” library service may mean in practice. This includes confirming that it does not mean that every resident lives close to a library, instead meaning that the service is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service should make best use of the assets available 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.

3.2.3 The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) has published guidance, which should be considered and followed. The guidance makes clear that a comprehensive and efficient library service will differ between councils and will depend on the needs of each area. It is the role of councillors and local officials to determine how much they spend on libraries and how they manage and deliver their services, but this must be done:

- In consultation with their communities
- Through analysis of evidence around local needs
- In accordance with their statutory duties (these being wider than the specific duty set out above and including wider statutory duties, including duties under the Equality Act and best value duties)

3.2.4 When making public law decisions, the Council should take account of all relevant information, including the statutory framework, the financial position of the Council, the consultation results 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.

3.3 Risk management implications

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. 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.	Low
Increase in waiting times for publications to be available due to limited stock. Mitigated by managing expectations through communications	High/Medium	Identifying good practice from other councils in the most similar group to implement in Slough. This could include, for example, book donation schemes.	Medium/Low

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 Keeping the current buildings used to provide library services open, or use of other buildings similarly located but better suited to shared use, and promoting the on-line services available will reduce the need for users to drive to locations in order to receive library services. Reduction of total number of buildings by co-locating services will decrease energy consumption. The benefit of being able to walk to a local library was mentioned by many respondents to the consultation. Some residents did raise concerns about lack of parking at The Curve, but this location is well served by public transport being less than a 5-minute walk from Slough Bus Station and train station. Bus stops are also close by on Wellington Street, High Street and Windsor Road.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 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 D).

3.5.2 The recommendation to operate the library service in the current buildings for a minimum of the next 12-months 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. The recommendation to consider whether 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.

3.5.3 The recommendation to adopt the service plan will ensure that the service seeks out more volunteers to develop the overall service offer to allow an expansion of the Library at Home service for residents who have disabilities that mean they are unable to leave their homes.

3.5.4 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 including procurement options such as consortium purchasing.

3.5.5 Any changes to the workforce will require a separate EIA as part of the council's standard organisational change policy.

3.6 Procurement implications

Not applicable.

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 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.

3.7.2 The proposal would result in a total of 10.93 full time equivalent (FTE) posts being removed from the library service establishment. Of this number 4.39 FTE posts (all level 3 Customer Assistants and Weekend Customer Assistants) are currently vacant and would be deleted from the establishment. A staff restructure consultation will need to take place which will aim to find alternative suitable employment for those staff displaced as a result of the service changes. It is hoped that there will be no need for redundancy, but this can't be guaranteed.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 Facilities management support will be needed to drive the co-location of the Councils services into a smaller number of buildings / reduce the amount of space used by Council services within buildings. This will inform and be informed by the the Councils Asset Disposal Strategy through which the Council must sell c£600m of assets as part of its Recovery Plan. The buildings from where the Library Service is provided in future may change. Should there be a need to move a library to an alternative building or to co-locate other services into buildings currently used to provide our library service then this would be subject to further Cabinet report(s)

4. **Background Papers**

None