

Library Service consultation

Cabinet 21 March 2022



Library Service consultation

Introduction

- Incremental changes to our library service, impact of Covid and the current financial situation means the time is right to make sure our library service is fit for the future.
- The **Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964** states that the council has to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service.
- Guidance from government (**DCMS**) and case law has determined that any changes to library service delivery must only be implemented after a fair process has been followed and this includes:
 - A robust **Needs Assessment** (Appendix A)
 - A thorough **Equality Impact Assessment** (Appendix D)
 - Public and stakeholder **consultation** (Appendix E, F and G)
 - Clear, informed decisions taken by **Cabinet**

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Public consultation

Consultation took place between October 2021 and January 2022

- 2,522 responses were received on-line and 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
- 13 in-person drop-in information sessions, and 2 on-line drop-in information sessions were held
- 34 presentations were made to community, voluntary and other stakeholder groups. Included work with children & young people and 1995 responses were received.
- Also received formal responses from Unison and Museum, plus a petition on Change.org.uk

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Consultation results – current use of the service

- 86% of respondents were from **current users** of the library service
- Just over 70% of respondents confirmed they used the library service to **browse, borrow or return books**
- Just over 50% use a library building for **IT services**
- About 30% to attend **events** at a library
- Just over 20% use the library space for another reason e.g. informal **socialising or studying**
- About 40% have used **online** library services

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Consultation results – future use of the service

The top 3 most popular services that would be used in the future are:

- ✓ Be a library volunteer 86%
- ✓ Use the “library at home” service 84%
- ✓ Borrow e-Magazines/e-newspapers 83%

These activities/options recorded decreases in popularity between current use and future use:

- ✓ Visit a library to browse, borrow or return books from the general library: -19%
- ✓ Visit a library to browse, borrow or return books from the children’s section of a library: -15%
- ✓ Use a library in a location within walking distance from my home: -13%

These activities/options recorded the largest increases in popularity between current and future use:

- ✓ Be a library volunteer: + 58%
- ✓ Library at Home service (volunteers bring library books to you): + 55%
- ✓ Go online to carryout research – e.g., family history: + 41%

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Future models

The top 3 delivery models, in order of popularity, were:

- 1** 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**) (81%).
- 2** 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 (74%).
- 3** Reduce the money available to spend on buying **publications** (both hard copy and eResources) (52%).

The remaining two options were variations on closing current library buildings and these both received about 15% approval each.

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Recommendations

Agree the strategic service plan for Slough library services (2022 to 2027) (Appendix C).

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.

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 2.19 of this report.

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.