

Appendix 2 - Slough Borough Council library service Consultation overview

Slough Borough Council conducted a public consultation into library use. The outcomes informed the current library service strategic plan 2023 – 2027 and current delivery model.

The council now needs to review the situation in terms of what is affordable and practical for library services in the borough while understanding resident needs.

Library services in Slough offer access to books, online reading resources, computers with internet, as well as a programme of events and activities for adults and children operating out of four buildings across the borough. Feedback from the Department for Culture, Media and Sports has confirmed that there is no one size fits all model of delivery for a library service, nor a requirement to provide a specific number of buildings or any buildings at all . The Council should determine what service is appropriate to meet the needs of its residents and meet its statutory duty. This includes consulting on proposals to inform an updated needs assessment and understand impact, including impact on specific parts of the community.

A proposal being put forward for consultation considers condensing library services into fewer buildings and not recruiting to vacant staff posts. Services currently provided at Cippenham and Langley are proposed to stop operating from the current buildings and instead be provided at Britwell and The Curve. The detailed data carried out in 2022 remains a useful resource for needs assessment and gauging public opinion on preferred services. This existing data will be used in consideration of the latest proposals.

To further inform the decision-making process, a new public consultation will run for 10 weeks from Tuesday 17 December 2024 to Tuesday 25 February 2025. The consultation will seek views on the proposed option as outlined in the Cabinet report for Monday 16 December 2024.

The consultation will seek views on the following matters and seek general feedback:

1. Whether the needs identified in 2021 remain appropriate and any additional needs that should be considered:

Ensure that library services are affordable and deliver value for money

Ensure library services are accessible and meet local needs

Support and promote good use of technology including digitalisation of services where appropriate

2. Whether the high level aims set out the Library Service Plan remain appropriate and any additional priorities that should be considered:

Priority 1: Improved literacy and love of reading for all residents

Priority 2: Affordable services available to all users

Priority 3: Levelling up opportunities for all residents

3. The extent to which the current service is meeting the priorities set out in the Library Service Plan.
4. The impact of reducing the number of library buildings and the location of the remaining buildings.
5. The impact of reducing the staffing in the library service.
6. Other options for the Council and local partners to support the strategic aims and priorities under the Library Service Plan:
 - (a) Other options to meet a savings target of approximately £200k from the library service.
 - (a) Any other comments including options to save money and raise capital in alternative ways.

Consultation process – overview of plans

- An online survey will be launched on the council's Citizen Space engagement hub. The survey will be available throughout the 10-week consultation period. Respondents will be asked to complete the survey to share their views, using either their own IT equipment or using the publicly available IT at libraries.
- There will be a number of virtual and face-to-face consultation drop in events held at library buildings during January and/or February for residents to attend.
- Information and guidance will also be available at the library buildings.
- In addition, there will be a number of stakeholder events during January and/or early February (online and face-to-face) to encourage participation from partners, ranging from schools and nurseries to community and special interest groups and other council services.
- Information about the consultation will be shared with library user groups, elected members, MPs, schools and other community organisations to encourage feedback and increase participation.

These activities will be organised by the library service. The activity will be promoted in the libraries as well as through the council corporate channels and directly to relevant groups.

The results of the consultation will be brought back to Cabinet in Spring 2025 for consideration and a decision about what changes, if any, will be implemented to ensure our library service remains comprehensive, efficient, and affordable.