

Library service Q&A

Thank you to the 3,600 people who responded to the library consultation, attended meetings, met with library staff and submitted letters and emails. In response to your feedback we've made a number of significant changes to the proposals for delivering savings to our library services, which were discussed by the South Gloucestershire Environment and Community Services (ECS) Committee on 7 September 2016.

The committee accepted these new recommendations and adopted a new preferred option for the future of library services, which will now be subject to additional consultation that is running from 10 October 2016 until 2 January 2017.

The detailed proposals for the library service build on the report submitted to committee (report can be found here <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/documents/CSP-Library-Service-Review.pdf>), and at the meeting the following recommendations were agreed:

That the Environment and Communities Service Committee:

- i. Adopts Option LIB4C (Installing Open Plus to make library facilities available 9am to 8pm [nb: these proposed times have now been changed to 08:30am to 19:30pm] 7 days a week while introducing Community Centre Libraries in place of the mobile library and keeping Chipping Sodbury library open with local support) as a preferred option, subject to a comprehensive assessment of the day to day operational risk and a total capital cost not exceeding £400,000
- ii. Recommends to the Policy and Resources Committee that up to £400k capital is allocated for the implementation of Open Plus, to be initially funded through prudential borrowing; Section 106 funding for libraries; the ECS IT reserve; and an over-achievement of revenue savings by the library service in 2017/18.
- iii. Recommends to Policy & Resources that the funding package for the capital spend be reviewed at the year end to consider if there is an opportunity to substitute revenue contributions for prudential borrowing;
- iv. In setting its budget for 2017/18, identifies further savings of £150k in order to meet the shortfall in achievement of Council Savings Programme targets.
- v. Delegates to the Director of Environment and Community Services, in consultation with the Chairman of the Environment and Community Services Committee, authority to finalise operational implementation of savings option LIB4C following completion of a the risk assessment in recommendation (i) above, including final capital costings

The following frequently asked questions provide some more detail on the proposed plans for the library service and the decision-making processes that will now follow this next round of consultation.

General questions

Q: How much would the library budget be reduced by?

A: It is proposed that the current budget of £2.6million is reduced by £500,000.

(Originally the budget reduction was proposed to be £650,000, but following feedback from the public consultation it is being recommended the level of savings is reduced by £150,000).

Q: Why is the libraries budget being reduced?

A: The Council Savings Programme is our response to national austerity measures and the sharp fall in the amount of grant funding from central government. The council has already saved £56million mainly through efficiency measures but we are now required to save a further £22million by 2019-20. All areas of the council have been given outline savings targets on this journey towards 2020.

The library service has already achieved £350,000 savings through a range of measures including introducing self-serve facilities in libraries.

Q: How will you save money and what will you do to mitigate the impact of changes?

A: It is proposed to make the savings through:

- Reducing the number of hours libraries are staffed, this will allow the council to make the required £500,000 in savings.
- To limit the impact of reducing staffing hours, we are proposing to introduce a system that will allow users to access the library when no staff are on duty. This is the system referred to as 'open access' in phase 2 of the library consultation. Use of open access will increase the time libraries are open by nearly 100% on current opening hours. This will give library users greater choice and flexibility about when they use the library and longer access to the services the library offers. The use of an open access system is subject to public consultation.
- Stopping the mobile library service and replacing it with a network of community centre based services.
- Reducing the amount we spend on stock, but introducing an improved system to manage the stock movement around branches to make the best use of it.
- Continuing to support the costs of maintaining the Library building in Chipping Sodbury, but enabling the community to operate the service.

Q: What will happen next in the decision-making process?

A: The next phase of consultation is running from 10 October 2016 until 02 January 2017. We would like to hear the public's views on the use of open access-style technology and staffed library opening hours within the preferred option model.

All the results will be collated from this second round of consultation and feedback from both phases of consultation will be taken into account in reaching a decision. A final decision will be made by March 2017 with implementation to take place in October 2017.

Q: I completed the last consultation form, where can I see the responses?

A: The summary of the comments and analysis by library can be viewed [here](#).

Q: When will the service change?

A: The service will operate as it does now until the new arrangements take effect at the beginning of October 2017.

Questions about the consultation process

Q: What happens if people disagree with the proposal or suggest alternatives?

A: The Council is keen to find ways to protect the library service as much as possible. It will actively consider all proposals from the consultation and use these to develop a plan that meets both the findings from the consultation and can be delivered within the resources available.

Q: Is this really a consultation or has the council already made up its mind?

A: Proposals have already been changed in response to the feedback from the first phase of consultation, including the recommendation to reduce the level of savings by £150,000 to £500,000. Feedback from the second phase of consultation will be fully considered before a decision is made and we would like to hear of any alternative suggestions to achieve the savings.

The library service

Q: How much does it cost to operate a library per hour – are these costs flexible?

A: The cost of operating each library is listed in the library information packs and is divided into fixed and variable costs. The library information packs can be found on the consultation website [here](#). The variable costs for each hour are mainly staffing costs and provide an indicative cost based on the current level of staffing and structure.

Q: What about funding from parishes?

Parishes may wish to contribute funds towards additional staffed hours, if staffed hours are reduced. We will work with any parishes that would like to explore this opportunity.

Q: What support will the council offer to communities that come forward to run the brand new Community Centre Library type of service?

A: The Council will provide stock and enable the centre to use the library management system to issue / discharge books and to manage reservations. For more information please contact us on libraries@southglos.gov.uk.

Q: Why can't you look at reducing management and other back office costs?

A: In 2011 the service reviewed its structure and made reductions across all levels of staff. South Gloucestershire is a member of the LibrariesWest consortium and is able to share back office functions as well as improving the range of stock available to customers.

Q: What savings has the library service made already?

A: Since 2011 a review of the structure, the introduction of self-service kiosks to enable customers to issue and discharge their own stock and changes to terms and conditions in South Gloucestershire Council have enabled the service to save £350,000 a year.

Q: Can you charge for services?

We are not allowed to charge for entering a library or lending books. We do make charges for overdue items, hire of audio visual items, lettings of libraries and printing. We could charge for use of the internet as other authorities do but the council considers this a fundamental service especially for people with no internet access, and so has chosen not to introduce such a charge.

Q: Will library staff lose their jobs?

A: The library service has already made savings of £350,000 since 2010. The proposals will inevitably have an impact on the number of staff. If staffed opening hours reduce then the council has a support package in place to help staff through any staffing restructure process and, where possible, staff who do not secure a position in the new structure will be redeployed.

Q: I have books that I no longer want, can I donate them to help the service?

A: Yes, we would welcome donations of any books that residents no longer want; contact your local library branch for more information.

Legal

Q: Public libraries are a statutory service; don't your proposals contravene the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964?

A: As well as the legal requirements for us to provide public library services, we know that library services are an important part of communities in South Gloucestershire and an important part of the service we provide. We will still have a good network of libraries across South Gloucestershire which will meet our statutory requirements. In addition we have an increasing virtual library delivering services such as eBooks, e audio, information and e magazines. This is in addition to enabling people to reserve and renew items online.

Options

Q: How will the options affect my library?

A: We have outlined the council's preferred option which is based on classifying libraries by tiers based on usage, clustering them together geographically and trying to fit staffed hours to current usage patterns. This is the preferred option unless other ways of providing the service while reducing the budget by the amount needed can be found. The final decision in early 2017 will confirm what the changes will be for each library.

Q: Why is my library in a cluster?

A: The clusters have been created to help us design a pattern of staffed hours that ensures that wherever possible there is a library with staffed hours in the local area every day from Monday to Saturday.

Q: Why are libraries in different 'tiers', with different numbers of staffed hours?

A: We have drawn up the tiers of staffed hours by looking at levels of usage. The libraries which currently have more visits are the ones with more staffed hours under these proposals.

Q: When will the library be staffed?

We have given some suggested options for staffed hours for the libraries and are seeking feedback on these, along with any alternative suggestions. The final staffed hours for each library will be confirmed in the final decision in early 2017.

Q: Are the actual hours proposed final or could they change?

A: The hours may change depending on the outcome of the consultation. We will continue to review them in the future to reflect changing needs and demands within South Gloucestershire

Q: If I currently attend an activity in a library at a time when it would be closed under these proposals, what would happen to that activity?

A: We will be aiming to ensure that when the library is staffed we will provide the full range of services. We will continue to review the activities we provide to ensure we have the staff capacity to support all services and these will be re-arranged where necessary to the days when the library is open.

Q: Will there be a reduction in service provided?

A: When the library is open and staffed we will provide the full range of services. We will continue to review the activities we provide to ensure we have the staff capacity to support all services.

Opening hours

Q: When will I be able to use my library?

A: Current library opening hours have not changed and you can find out when your library is currently open by visiting the library or online (<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/libraries>). A final decision on the scheduling of staffed opening hours and the introduction of open access technology will not be taken until early 2017. Any changes to the service will not take effect until October 2017.

If implemented, the current preferred option to install open access technology would mean that library users (who register for the service) would have access to libraries, even when they are not staffed, from potentially 8:30am until 7:30pm seven days a week. This would significantly increase the number of hours that libraries are accessible for use.

Q: When will the libraries be staffed?

A: Current library opening hours have not changed and you can find out when your library is currently open by visiting the library or online (<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/libraries>). Under existing arrangements the libraries are staffed throughout opening times. The new proposals still see libraries being staffed each week, but in order to deliver the savings the number of staffed hours will be reduced as agreed following consultation.

Q: Will any libraries close?

A: If we get agreement to proposals from the Town Lands Charity (who own Chipping Sodbury Library), and sufficient commitment from local volunteers to provide volunteers, no library will be closed. However it is proposed to withdraw the mobile library service with vulnerable residents being supported through the existing home visit service or being encouraged to use other library locations. The council will work to develop a network of community libraries which would be managed and staffed by volunteers but using South Gloucestershire library stock and IT systems.

Q: Will my group be able to continue to use the library?

A: We will continue to make libraries available for groups and encourage more groups to use them at times they are open to the public in order to make full use of buildings. We will be in contact with groups in the next few months to discuss how the proposals could affect their use.

Unstaffed 'open access'

The service is proposing to introduce a swipe card 'open access' system which would allow registered users to access the library building and use all the services including borrowing / returning items as well as accessing the IT facilities.

Q: How does open access work?

A: Registered library members will be able to use their existing library card with a PIN to 'swipe in' to the library. Their card will act as a key to release the door lock and the door will open. All the services – lights, heating, and computers are remotely controlled.

The library will be covered by CCTV both inside the building and outside and each person entering will be recorded. In the event of an incident the CCTV will be reviewed and appropriate action taken.

At closing time an announcement will warn people in the library that the building is closing, these announcements will commence 15 minutes before the actual close time.

Once closed, if someone has not left the building, an alarm will be activated and security staff will be alerted.

Q: I am a library user, how can I register for 'open access'?

A: Eligible library members will be able to apply to be able to use the open access system if the decision is taken to implement it. Members will be able to use their existing library card and will receive a full induction to understand how to access and safely use library buildings when there are no staff on duty. The council's preferred option to implement open access includes that users under 16 years old would not be able to access library buildings without another member over the age of 16 who is registered for open access and is able to take responsibility for that person whilst in the library

Q: What services can I use in 'open access' hours?

A: Everything you can do when staff are present – use the quiet space to meet or study, borrow or return books and other items through the self-service kiosks, use the computers and Wi-Fi, or use the printer/photocopier.

Q: Can anyone use the library during 'open access' hours?

A: The current proposal is that any library member over the age of 16 would be able to register to use open access and could enter an open access library following a short induction meeting with a member of staff. Those under the age of 16 would be welcome to use the library during open access hours, when accompanied by another member over the age of 16 who is registered for open access and is able to take responsibility for that person whilst in the library.

During registration and induction, staff will explain how it works and what to do if there are any problems.

Q: How will you stop unauthorised people entering the building?

A: The open access system will record everyone who enters and exits the library. Using CCTV images, the council will be able to take appropriate action in response to any incidents.

Q: What if something doesn't work?

A: We will provide a fault reporting book on the library counter. There will be a comments book for recording any aspect of the open access service – we will attend to it as soon as possible. Additionally, each library will be checked by security staff on each day that there are no library staff present.

Q: Could I get locked in?

A: There will be automatic announcements warning people that the library will be closing along with a visual warning. The closure procedure will be explained to users as part of their induction when they register to use the service so they are aware of closure procedures. If anyone is still in the library after closure an alarm will trigger and security staff will be alerted.

Q. What if I don't want to use the library when staff aren't there?

We appreciate that not everyone will want to use the library when there are no staff present. There will continue to be hours during the week when every library is open and staff able to help you use the services.

Q: Will the libraries go into open access mode if they're closed over lunchtime?

A: Yes, the libraries could be entered in open access mode if they were closed at lunchtime.

Q: Do we have open access already?

A: Open access technology is currently being installed at Bradley Stoke library. The decision to install this technology was not taken as part of this review, but was made possible because of the opportunity presented by the ongoing leisure centre development alongside community infrastructure contributions received from housing developers in the local area. Once open access is live in Bradley Stoke we will be reviewing its progress and looking to learn any lessons we can. This learning will be taken into account as part of the decision-making process at the end of this consultation.

Volunteers

Q: Will the service be using volunteers to run libraries?

A: The service will continue to use volunteers as it currently does to provide added-value services, such as supporting people to use IT, visiting home library users and as members of the Library User Groups.

As it is proposed to cease the mobile library service, we will work with community groups to establish community-based libraries. These will be operated by volunteers who will be trained by the library service.

If appropriate arrangements can be agreed for Chipping Sodbury Library, the Council will continue to support building costs and the service will be operated by volunteers.

Q: How can I volunteer?

A: We welcome offers of help from our community. All you need to do is complete and submit an application form, see [online for details](#). We will discuss with you the opportunities available and carry out an informal interview.

Mobile library

Q: How long will the mobile service be available for?

A: The service is likely to continue until around October 2017.

Q: What will replace the service?

A: It is proposed that we work with local communities to establish community centre based services. These will provide collections of books for local people that can be borrowed by library members. Collections will be supported by the library service but the service will be delivered by volunteers in the centres.

Books could be reserved locally and we will work with communities on options for having these supplied to the centres within a reasonable timescale.

Q: How can my community express an interest in offering a community centre library?

A: We will be contacting local communities through the parish and town councils during the autumn to invite expressions of interest in the scheme.

Q: I have difficulty getting to any library, how can I access services?

A: The service will continue to use volunteers to deliver books to people who are physically unable to visit a library and have no other means of receiving books (for example with help from family or friends).

Q: Can other organisations contribute to the funding of the mobile library?

The current cost of operating the mobile is £80,000 per year. Any agreement to fund the mobile from external sources would need to meet these full costs in order to be viable, and would also need to cover the purchase of a new vehicle from which to run the service.

Have we answered your question? If not then please email libraries@southglos.gov.uk.