Library and Community-based Services Programme Q&A   February 2016

In February 2016 Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet discussed how a sustainable future could be found for Swindon's Cultural Assets, Libraries and Community Services.

This document summarises key questions and answers about the programme of work relating to libraries and community services and will be updated at key milestones.

More info can be found at www.swindon.gov.uk/librariesfuture

1. Libraries Questions

1.1. What is proposed for libraries?

Swindon Borough Council is in a time of significant change that necessitates the reshaping of the role of the council and its services to respond to current and future needs of Swindon's communities and to its financial context.

The Council has published a Vision for Swindon to 2030, which has a clear focus on Swindon's economic growth. It is clear that local services will need to play a particular role in helping to raise the skills and therefore employment opportunities of local people, in order that they are best able to benefit from a strengthening local economy, and the library service is key to this.

The Council has assessed the needs in Swindon, summarised the statutory duties for Swindon Borough Council as a library authority, and has identified an emerging model as one way that Libraries and Community-based Services could respond to delivering the Vision for Swindon, within the financial context it faces.

The emerging model is proposed as the basis for initiating engagement with users, residents, community groups, ward members and other stakeholders in defining a Libraries strategy that will be bought back for Cabinet approval in June 2016 More information is available at www.swindon.gov.uk/librariesfuture

1.2. What is the emerging model for library services?

The emerging model is a radically different model, and is one way that Libraries and Community-based Services could respond to delivering the Vision for Swindon, within the future financial context it faces.

Given the context, any alternatives to the way services are currently designed need to be similarly radical.

However, there may be other ways the service could be redesigned to meet the Vision, respond to need, deliver a quality and sustainable service, within the financial envelope for the service by 2020.

The emerging model will form the basis of engagement with Library users, residents, ward members, partners and other stakeholders to develop a sustainable Library and Community Services Strategy for Swindon.

Discussion will be actively encouraged to consider what local delivery models could look like in local areas, or if there are any other ideas or proposed approaches which could be considered within the parameters.

- The **emerging model** is based on the idea of **Core Provision** from the central library:
    - Within 9 miles of all residents, 4 miles of 95% of residents
    - 24 hour online library
    - Home library service
    - Training and skills development

- Supported by **Targeted Core Services**:
    - Focussed work in areas with the highest need
    - Developed with local communities so it is tailored based on each areas needs

- The council will also encourage the development of **Local Community Service Points**:
    - Libraries outside the core provision can be taken on by local communities with support from the council
    - Services can be tailored to local need
    - Services can be co-located and integrated within 'community hubs' to provide single points of access for residents
    - Support from the council could include assets transfers, section 106 or capital funding, cash flow, equipment and officer support
    - These will not count as part of the council's core provision

1.3   What are the next steps? How can I have my say?

Over the coming months the council would like users, residents, community groups, ward members and other interested parties to help develop the libraries strategy for Swindon Borough. The emerging model has been proposed as one potential solution and to act as the basis for conversations and engagement.It is not the libraries strategy.

A libraries strategy will be developed that will be bought back for Cabinet consideration in June 2016.

Engagement sessions will include the Going Local engagement sessions advertised in Swindon News, as well as specific sessions in each library to be publicised. All dates for engagement sessions can be found atwww.swindon.gov.uk/goinglocal

1.4   How was the 'emerging model' for libraries and community-based services developed?

The emerging model sets out one way Libraries and Community-based Services could respond to delivering the Vision for Swindon, within the future financial context it faces. This will form the basis for initiating engagement with users, residents, community groups, ward members and other stakeholders.

Discussion will be actively encouraged to consider what local delivery models could look like in local areas, or if there are any other ideas or proposed approaches which could be considered within the parameters.

1.5   How much does each of the libraries cost?

What will the library service cost in the future?

Recognising the increasing proportion of Council expenditure having to be directed to support vulnerable people, the forecast level of budget available to fund these services is expected to be substantially less than that invested today by 2020 - expenditure on Libraries would need to reduce by around £1.5m from its current level of £2.6m by 2020.

While such a reduction is dramatic, it is felt to be a realistic basis on which to plan for a future service, as part of an overall approach to community-based services.

Financial information on each of the libraries can be found at www.swindon.gov.uk/librariesfuture

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

As well as the legal requirements for Swindon Borough Council to provide public library services, we know that library services are an important part of communities in Swindon Borough and an important part of the service we provide. However, how we provide that service has to change. The level of savings required is such that we cannot afford to run as many libraries as we currently do. Many councils are being forced to make cuts to their libraries budget and we will do everything we can to make sure a library service is provided that is suitable for as many residents as possible.

1.7   What will happen to my local library?

Which libraries will be targeted first and why?

What will happen to the staff / the buildings / user groups?

Why don't you just reduce opening hours and staffing at all the libraries?

At this stage, ideas and discussion are actively encouraged to consider what the library service could look like in local areas, or if there are any other ideas or proposed approaches to the future model which could be considered within the parameters. Indications of what may happen to individual libraries will be made in the libraries strategy.

The implementation plan will be developed following the sign off of the final strategy. It is at this point that impacts on individual libraries will be clearly understood.

Whilst it is too early to know what the implications of a strategy might be, based on the levels of savings required, there will undoubtedly be changes to the ways services are accessed and staffed.

1.8   Does this mean you are closing all Libraries other than Central?

The emerging model sets out a different way library services could be available to local communities in 2020.

This does not mean that all libraries except Central would close but that library services need to be provided in a different way across the borough – this includes thinking about how the services at Central Library may change too.

1.9   How many redundancies are you going to be making?

Until the libraries strategy is developed, any impacts on staffing will be unknown but based on the level of savings required, there will undoubtedly be changes to the ways services are accessed and staffed.

Staff and unions will be consulted about the impacts of any major staffing changes or redundancies.

1.10   What financial support would be provided by SBC to organisations and community groups that take on the running of libraries?

The council is open to discussions with community groups about potential future financial support should a community groups, or other organisation, wish to take on the running of one of our libraries. We have limited funds for set up costs and would be willing to pass on equipment and property if appropriate.

1.11 How much do community led libraries cost to set up and run and how does this compare with running and staffing a branch?

There are no typical figures for the costs of running community led libraries, as experience has shown us that these can be very different.

We do have details of the current costs and income for each library available from the main page here www.swindon.gov.uk/communityassets.

We will work closely with communities and partners who are interested in finding out more about their library and that are interested in taking over their library to look at costs and other information.

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

The engagement process, which will run until May, will develop a strategy in partnership with interested parties for consideration by Cabinet in June. There will then be a phase of formal consultation and a final strategy will be considered in the autumn. The results of the consultation will be considered by both Councillors and officers before a final recommendation is made.

At this stage absolutely no decisions have been made on our future strategy other than the budget for the library service in 2020, which has been made due to the financial situation the council finds itself in.

1.13   Why is this happening now? Why can't the council run these services and buildings?

Swindon Borough Council is facing, in common with all councils, reductions in government grants combined with large increases in demand for services for children and young people and vulnerable elderly residents.

With an increasing proportion of the councils budget needing to be spent on supporting vulnerable people, the council simply cannot afford to run services as it is does now. Up to 2020, the council must find another £60million in addition to the £20million required for the 2016-17 budget.

The library service will have to make savings along with most of the other departments in the council.

1.14   What are the 6 pilot areas?

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In parallel with the work to develop a longer-term strategy for the service, and to test and inform in practical ways the strategy's development, the Council has identified a number of areas to discuss and consider new approaches to local community-based assets and services.

Initial engagement has commenced with Ward Members and local organisations in six "pilot" areas in Liden, Penhill, Highworth, Moredon, Toothill and Wroughton around the range of assets in those areas.

1.15 What is planned in the 6 pilot areas?

The pilot areas were identified for a range of reasons and the aim of conversations in the pilot areas is to achieve a common understanding of the Council's financial position and to identify the current library and community-based assets and services in the local area, ultimately exploring possibilities and potential future operating models for developing sustainable library and community-based services provision in those areas.

Potential future models are emerging in some of the pilot areas but have not yet reached the stage of firm proposals.

It is proposed to continue engagement with Ward Members, community groups and other stakeholders in the pilot areas and in other areas where interest emerges to develop and, where possible, implement new models of delivery for library and community services.

This would enable the Council to both test and inform the further development of the strategy and help achieve savings towards the financial position envisaged by 2020.

1.16 How will the council make short term savings to the libraries budget? Isn't this short sighed whilst a strategy is being developed?

Given the overarching financial context, the council needs to make medium term savings and it is necessary to target savings of £300,000 in Libraries and community services in 2016/17.

The work in the pilot areas may identify ways of achieving those in year, and in addition the Library Service are working up other measures,

These will inevitably include reductions in operating hours and staffing levels across the current libraries network, that will need to be consulted on in their own right ahead of in-year implementation decisions.

2. Community-based Assets and Services

2.1. What is the Community-based Assets Programme?

There are over 70 community-based assets across the Borough, including 15 Libraries, 28 Community Centres, 8 Youth Centres, 4 Children's Locality Centres and community hire facilities such as scout and guide huts. Services or support are also accessed from facilities owned or operated by other groups or partners including Police, Health, town and parish councils and special interest groups such as charities.

The Community Assets Change Programme is reviewing the purpose of community-based assets and the services operated within them to develop co-location opportunities by working with communities and local organisations to ensure local access to services is sustainable and in line with local demand.

The council cannot afford to directly deliver services in the same way as it traditionally has and the council has the ambition to secure sustainable operating models for community-based services, including libraries, within much smaller funding envelopes available.

2.2   What is proposed for Community-based services and assets?

An emerging model is proposed for community-based assets, developed around co-locating services and working with communities and local organisations to enable access to them.

Under this model the Council would no longer directly operate some community buildings and services, enabling them to be led by community need and demand, increasing their sustainability and the benefits for local people through the co-location and integration of services.

Recognising that Libraries is the largest and most significant Council service operated from community-based assets and that the Council has one in most areas of the Borough, it is proposed that a refreshed Library service strategy is developed. The strategy will act to as a catalyst for a new approach to community assets and it is proposed that the strategy be developed for consideration by Cabinet in June 2016, to achieve a reduction in the budget for that service of at least £1.5m by 2020.

2.3   Who will pay for and run these services in the future?

In order to secure a sustainable future for Council services, including the universal services enjoyed by all residents, the Council will continue to work with community groups, existing parish councils, commercial organisations and others to enable services to be provided more locally with newly developed governance and funding arrangements.

This approach is based on our belief first set out in the Council's Stronger Together approach that decisions affecting neighbourhoods and communities should be made at a local level, in response to local priorities and circumstances. In the current and future context, it is only by working in this way that services will be sustained or improved.

Key to this approach is adopting a flexible approach to the way in which local services are delivered. In future, this is likely to be increasingly through a range of different providers using different and shared buildings which are multipurpose and best serve the needs of local areas.

This approach is central to the approach the Council is taking to its review of Community Based Assets

2.4   Who can I speak to if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss anything in more detail please contact LibrariesFuture@swindon.gov.uk