

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 16/17 Phase Two: Library Service		Mike Brook – Library Services Manager	24 March 2016 Version 2 (Executive/Council)
Proposal:	<p>To reduce the library network by closing eight branch libraries and stopping the two mobile libraries. This will leave one branch library at Newbury and the 'At Home' service.</p> <p>We will continue to provide assistance with access to the digital service, but will not develop the digital service any further.</p> <p><i>*This supersedes the Phase One Proposal*</i></p>		
Total budget 15/16:	£1,525,000	Recommended officer saving 16/17:	£690,000 (45%)
Initial proposed saving 16/17:	£690,000 (45%)	Final recommendation to Executive/Council:	To close Wash Common and Theale libraries, to reduce the mobile library service to one vehicle and to make £475,000 of transitional funding available in 2016/17
No. of responses:	<p>In total, 2,751 responses were received, 2307 of which included comments. Of those who responded::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,691 were individuals • 46 were groups/organisations • 13 were Town/Parish Councils • One was a District Councillor <p>102 responses were from non-users of the service.</p> <p>We received five petitions.</p>		
Key issues raised:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty of travel to Newbury and costs of travel by car or bus. Parking costs and removal of bus routes all combine to make access to a library much more difficult. • Proposal is Newbury-centric, and Newbury Library would be overwhelmed if expected to meet demands from 		

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	<p>the whole district</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative impact on young, old, disabled and vulnerable; increased isolation and loneliness with consequent impact on mental health; penalises the disadvantaged and less well-off; very damaging to literacy; job seekers lose access to finding employment opportunities; loss of internet access to those who can't afford/don't have home access. • Will harm communities, groups and quality of life in rural areas. And discourage people from moving into West Berkshire • Impact negatively on NHS, Police and other organisations • Passes the responsibility on to Parish/Town Councils and/or community groups • What is the Council's statutory responsibility under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act? • Need more information to do a response and more time to consider alternative suggestions • Some general criticism of Members for making this proposal • New housing and Rural Service Centres require libraries and other key services. • Harmful to literacy standards and to the local economy. 		
Equality issues:	Beyond previously identified groups, respondents have cited families with young children as being disadvantaged by the proposals, especially relating to removal of a range of activities for mothers and toddlers, with potential impact on mental well-being and quality of life.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Raise Council Tax for libraries	Current year proposal is already at the maximum level without calling a referendum. This is for Council Members to consider for future years. Parish/Town Councils might consider a library element in their precept.	
	Introduce a Home Delivery/postal service	This is one way to provide books, but not the full range of a library's service. Not necessarily practical or cost-effective across the whole district.	
	Raise library charges, rent out rooms, charge a subscription	It is worth looking at these, but income generation ideas only tend to yield small amounts. A subscription would be illegal as it infringes the principle of free access to the basic service.	
	Devolve responsibility for libraries to	We are in discussion with Parish/Town Councils as to how they might	

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	Community Organisations or Parish/Town Councils	help run the service.	
	Joint running with neighbouring library authorities. See what other authorities are doing?	We explored joint working and found our costs are already relatively low. We already achieve economies through sourcing major costs like bookstock and IT via consortia. We regularly monitor new ideas in governance and technology, and where these can show us potential savings we will investigate them.	
	Co-locate with other services to maximise use of buildings	We will seek chances to co-locate where feasible. This will retain services but will not achieve much of a saving.	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Close Newbury and retain all other libraries; expand mobiles to cover branch closures; amalgamate libraries; reduce open hours	Newbury Library provides over 42% of the service for West Berkshire and is a back up resource to the rest of the network. These ideas would generate a much smaller saving than is required.	
	Sell Shaw House	Not economically viable because the council would have to return grant funding.	
Suggestions for how others may help contribute:	Offers to volunteer with the library service and to donate second hand books. Willingness to see Council Tax rise to save libraries.		
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	<p>Evidence on equalities issues suggests there is a need to retain a significantly larger Libraries Service than the single library proposal. The level of interest from Parish/Town Councils suggests there is scope to investigate ways of working together to fund the retention of branch and mobile libraries and to seek the best model for this.</p> <p>Based on feedback from the consultation, it is proposed that the service moves to a Self Service option that would see the retention of seven branch libraries and the closure of two (Wash Common and Theale) and the retention of one mobile.</p> <p>It is recommended that Wash Common and Theale libraries are closed, the mobile library service is reduced to one vehicle and that transitional funding of £325,000 is allocated in 2016/17.</p>		

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