
Library Service Proposals

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	20 October 2016
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Dominic Boeck
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	11 October 2016
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Forward Plan Ref:	EX3181

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the recent Needs Assessment and proposals for the future shape of the Council's Library Service by consultants RedQuadrant and approve public consultation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Executive note the three options suggested by RedQuadrant regarding the future shape of the library service and that they be put to the public in accordance with the Council's usual consultation policy and that consultation should take place simultaneously with the publication of the Needs Assessment report to inform responses from stakeholders.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:**

Efficiency savings have been identified which achieve within the region of £250k by retaining Newbury Library with reduced staffing, closing Wash Common library, merging the two mobile libraries and retaining a further 7 branches with different options for reduced staffing.

Opportunities to increase income through a charge for book reservations and extra room hire could offer potential savings of up to £30k, but this is not easy to predict and is dependent on issues around take-up and building security.

The indicative savings figures given in this report all assume contributions from parish/town councils in the region of £150k in total.

It is considered that the target saving of £690k is unlikely to be realised in full.

Option A provides reduced staffing at branch libraries with volunteers replacing half the staff, achieving an estimated total saving of £580k.

Option B provides a "hub and spoke" network with reduced staffing and volunteers replacing half the staff at two branches, and the remaining five branches run by

volunteers with no day to day paid staffing on site, with an estimated total saving of £620k.

Option C replaces all staff in the seven branches with volunteers, with an estimated total saving of £645k.

- 3.2 **Policy:** The Council remains committed to meeting its statutory responsibilities under the relevant legislation, the Public Library and Museum Act 1964 and the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.3 **Personnel:** All options will include a need for a number of redundancies.
- 3.4 **Legal:** The provision of a “comprehensive and efficient service” is a requirement of the Public Library and Museums Act 1964. All three options suggested by RedQuadrant carry potential risks of challenge of varying degrees. There will be a loss of staff which may give rise to redundancies and will need to be carefully handled. Service level agreements with local communities would need careful drafting in order to maintain the Council’s statutory duties.)
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** Risk of community groups not coming forward to provide volunteer support at branch libraries.
Risk of parish/town councils not providing financial contributions.
- 3.6 **Property:** All options involve the closure of one branch library at Wash Common.
- 3.7 **Other:**

4. Other options considered

- 4.1 The scale of savings required means that continuing to run our libraries the way we do now is not a viable option.
- 4.2 This paper contains 3 options for the transformation of the library service.

5. Executive Summary

- 5.1 In order to make savings of up to £690k pa from the Libraries revenue budget, the Council commissioned library consultants RedQuadrant to conduct a Needs Assessment and report on how the Council could retain a legally compliant library service which meets community needs.
- 5.2 RedQuadrant were also asked to provide guidance on options for the future shape of the library service to achieve savings whilst maintaining compliance with the Act.
- 5.3 A Project Board provided oversight during the process and considered options identified by the consultants for the reshaping of the service. It is unlikely that the full target saving of £690k can be delivered. The strengths and risks of each of the three options are detailed in the supporting information at 5.1.
- 5.4 The Needs Assessment considered demographic and performance data which showed the extent to which West Berkshire's libraries are currently meeting the needs of communities, including data used by the service in drawing up initial savings proposals prior to the Revenue Support Grant decision of December 2015.
- 5.5 The consultants agreed with the earlier savings proposals relating to efficiencies around the reduction of staffing at Newbury library and the reduction of the two mobile libraries into one. They further suggested the Council seek financial contributions from parish and town councils, especially in view of the fact that they have shown a strong will to support their local library.
- 5.6 Having analysed the needs, the consultants identified four options for the future direction of the library service.
- (1) Closure of a majority of libraries. This option did not give details of which libraries should close or of how the target saving could be achieved. It carried a strong warning that this option would leave the Council exposed to challenge.
 - (2) Reduced staffing at branch libraries with volunteers replacing half the staff.
 - (3) A "hub and spoke" network, with reduced staffing at two branches with volunteers replacing half the staff, and with volunteers replacing all staff at five branches.
 - (4) Volunteers replacing all staff at seven branch libraries

All options assume streamlining of staffing at the centre and at Newbury Library, closure of Wash Common library, a reduction from two mobile libraries to one vehicle, and increased income generation.

Options 2, 3 and 4 assume an annual financial contribution to Libraries by parish/town councils in the region of £150k.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This report recommends that Executive note the options for re-shaping the library service and the estimated savings.

- 6.2 That public consultation be undertaken on these options, in accordance with the Council's consultation policy.
- 6.3 This report notes that Project Board believes it is unlikely that the full target saving of £690k can be achieved.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A - Supporting Information
- 7.2 Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment
- 7.3 Appendix C – West Berkshire Libraries Needs Assessment