
Library Service Review

Committee considering report:	Extraordinary Council on 7 February 2017
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Dominic Boeck
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	30 January 2017
Report Author:	Mike Brook
Forward Plan Ref:	C3208

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report on the public consultation about the future shape of the Libraries service and determine the best option for the structure of this service.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council approve the adoption of Option A as the most appropriate structure for the Libraries service, with the proviso that different arrangements will be necessary in some libraries.
- 2.2 That officers examine opportunities to pilot community run services where communities provide sufficient support in line with options B and C in order to achieve the full savings target of £690k, and that this could include consideration of any proposal from the community in Wash Common.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:** Total savings of approximately £580k.
- Included in this amount are efficiency savings in excess of £400k through reduction of staffing levels at Newbury library, closure of Wash Common library, the reduction of the mobile library from two vehicles to one and retention of a further 7 branches with reduced staffing.
- Also included are requested contributions of £150k from town and parish councils to support the service.
- If a self access library system were needed to mitigate service reductions, as referred to under Risk Management below, this would cost approximately £200k capital and have annual revenue costs of about £2,500 per site.
- Full implementation will not happen until after April 2017 and transitional money will be requested for 2017-18. This is to allow sufficient time to engage with towns and parishes, to recruit volunteers and introduce the new structure.
- 3.2 **Policy:** The Council remains committed to meeting its statutory responsibilities under the Public Library and Museums Act 1964 and the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality

Act 2010

3.3 **Personnel:** This proposal includes a need for a significant number of redundancies to reduce the establishment by about 43% from 41.1fte to approximately 23.6fte.

3.4 **Legal:** The Council is committed to its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, informed by the needs assessment. The Council's legal responsibilities are set out more fully in the Supporting Information section of this report.

Option A offers a lower risk of challenge than B or C due to the retention of staff at each site to provide a professional lead to the service. Whilst Options B and C achieve greater savings, they also create a greater risk of challenge.

Option A can also be successfully implemented much faster than other options, whilst retaining the option to move to B or C later.

Parish Councils have various legal powers available which would enable them to contribute funding towards a Library Service provided by West Berkshire Council should they wish to do so.

3.5 **Risk Management:** Risk of community groups not coming forward to provide volunteering support.

Risk of parish/town councils not providing financial contributions.

Shortfalls in this support would require mitigation through extra spending by the Council. Efficiency savings account for about £300k of the total saving, so that amount would not be threatened.

The service could be reduced further, with fewer staff and shorter opening times, in consultation with partners and retaining sufficient access levels to remain compliant.

Implementation of self service/self access library systems, paid for by capital, would mitigate reduced staffed hours. Annual maintenance costs of around £2,500 per library should be compared with savings in staffing costs to ascertain if there is a saving. Implementation would also require time for commissioning a contractor and consultation with partners to assess the benefits of a self access branch.

3.6 **Property:** Closure of Wash Common library. Consider options for the building with reference to asset management group, subject to any proposals received from the local community

4. Other options considered

4.1 The scale of savings required means that continuing to run libraries the way we do now is not an option.

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- 4.2 Removal of all staff from branch libraries was not supported by the public and would create operational difficulties and may increase risk of challenge.
- 4.3 Closure of more branches would be counter to the findings of the needs assessment and may create increased risk of challenge.

5. Executive Summary

Options to Reduce the Costs of the Library Service

- 5.1 Under its statutory responsibilities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, the Council commissioned RedQuadrant Ltd to carry out a needs assessment to inform changes to the shape and structure of the service.
- 5.2 RedQuadrant found that there was a need to retain all branch libraries except Wash Common and to retain a mobile library service. They also worked with officers on proposals for the future shape of the service. Three emerging options were put to public consultation from October 24 to December 11.
- 5.3 Responses to the consultation indicated greatest support for option A, in which 7 branches would reduce paid staff and take on volunteers. Very little support was shown for options B and C, which propose greater staff reductions and greater reliance on volunteers.
- 5.4 Under Option A, 7 branch libraries will reduce staff and, with assistance from the community, recruit volunteers to support the one remaining member of staff. This represents a large increase in the service's volunteer workforce.
- 5.5 Town and parish councils are being asked to contribute financially to support the library service. This payment is being requested on the basis of £1 per head of resident population for each council.
- 5.6 To achieve savings, all options assume that Newbury library retains a fully staffed service provision but the staffing is reduced through review and restructuring, that Wash Common library will close, and that the Mobile Library service will reduce from two vehicles to one.
- 5.7 The service will also look to increase its income through reintroducing a charge for reserving books, further hiring out of library space, and small charges for outreach activities.
- 5.8 Libraries will work in partnership with local communities and councils to maintain and promote the local service, giving our partners an opportunity to influence the way their library develops. Some local meetings have already been held with partners, and others will follow.
- 5.9 With the variation in size in library buildings and communities served, it is clear that one size will not fit all and that local initiatives will help maintain services. Some flexibility of approach is desirable in the running of individual libraries.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 It is considered that Option A is the most appropriate option identified, which is reflected in the Recommendation.
- 6.2 This proposal also received the most support during the public consultation exercise. The public consultation on three options for shaping the library service, informed by the needs assessment, indicated the greatest level of support for Option A, which proposes retaining one member of staff at 7 branch libraries,

supported by volunteers. Support for options B and C, with greater levels of reliance on volunteers, received very little support.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A - Supporting Information

7.2 Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment

7.3 Appendix C – Public Responses to Options A, B and C – Tables showing how many respondents agreed or disagreed with each proposal.

7.4 Appendix D – Needs Assessment Report