



# Buckinghamshire County Council

## Report

## Cabinet Member for Community Services

Decision to be taken on or after 31 July 2001

Cab Member Report No. CS 13/01

**Date** 25 July 2001

**Title** Adult Age for Library Registration

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### Electoral Divisions Affected

**Summary** Library membership currently requires adult registration at 18. This is increasingly out of step with social, economic and legislative developments and acts as a barrier to use of library services by young people. The Library by-laws will require amendment following this decision.

### Recommendation

**The Library by-laws be amended to redefine "child" to enable customers to register for library membership without the need for parental/guardian/guarantor signature at age 16.**

#### **A. The decision required, and why it is needed**

The decision required is to amend the by-laws to enable adult registration at age 16.

The current County Library reader registration form requires that all applicants under the age of 18 years have their registration countersigned by a parent/guardian or guarantor. In countersigning the parent/guardian/guarantor confirms that the applicant's details are correct and that the applicant is a person to whom library items may be safely entrusted and agrees to make good any loss, damage or default caused by that person.

In applying for membership an applicant also agrees to comply with the Library by-laws and regulations. The current by-laws, which were made in 1996, specifically define a "child" as a person under 18.

Currently at age 16 young people:

- Can work full time
- Will get a National Insurance number
- Can get married
- Can change their name by enrolling a deed poll
- Can have an abortion without parental consent
- Can buy tobacco products
- Pay full fare on trains, buses and the underground

The current situation is clearly out of step with legislative, cultural, social and economic developments. It causes practical and embarrassing difficulties in libraries, particularly those serving student populations, as many potential members cannot easily contact their parents or find an alternative guarantor. What has become an increasingly arbitrary and unrealistic age limit is creating a barrier to use by a group of people that national and local initiatives seek to encourage into using libraries.

#### **B. Recommended action, and the reasons for this**

The age at which customers can register for library membership without the need for parental/guardian/guarantor signature should be reduced from 18 to 16, consequently the definition of "child" in the by-laws will need to be altered to define a child as a person under the age of 16 years.

#### **C. Other options available, and their pros and cons**

The only other option is to leave the adult registration age as it is. The arguments against this option are listed above.

#### **D. Resource implications**

There are no resource implications arising directly from the implementation of this decision. It is intended to introduce this change in 2002 in tandem with a completely new registration form that will additionally be requiring ethnicity, disability and other information as required by the community profiling requirements of the national library standards. The cost of the required Newspaper advertisements, public notices etc are estimated at £800. The work undertaken by Legal Services will be charged as part of the current Libraries Service Level Agreement.

#### **E. Other implications**

Following approval of the decision Legal Services will require formal instruction to undertake the necessary work.

#### **F. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views**

Feedback from staff and customer comment entirely supports the recommendation.

Legal Services have advised that reducing the age of adult registration would mean that any proceedings taken under the basis of a contract formed by the signing of the registration form would not be effective if the defendant were under 18. However the Head of Service, should the occasion arise, has the power to commence legal proceedings as detailed below:

- Sue in tort as children can be liable
- Prosecute under the bye-laws as children over 10 can be criminally liable

In practical terms taking such legal redress is unlikely to happen and no other library authority that allows adult registration at 16 has reported any adverse reaction or problems generated by this decision.

The ALSi computer issuing system will be able to detect 18 videos borrowed on tickets held by under 18's enabling library staff to prevent their loan.

## **G. Communication issues**

The procedure for by-laws is set out in the Local Government Act 1972. At least one month before application of the confirmation of the by-laws is made, notice of the intention to apply for confirmation needs to be given in local newspaper, and copies of the by-laws deposited in libraries for public inspection. Following this the by-laws need to be sent to the Secretary of State for confirmation.

When confirmed, copies of the by-laws will need to be deposited in all libraries and be open to public inspection.

When this has been received, Library publicity and stationery will be altered to take account of the age change, which will additionally be promoted through the Web site and communicated to staff through briefings.

## **H. Other issues**

None

## **Background Papers**

None

## ***Your questions and views***

*If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.*

*If you have any views on this paper which you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Head of Cabinet Support by **5.00 pm on Monday 30 July 2001**. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382966), Fax (to 01296 383441), or e-mail to [cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk)*

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**Decision Taken:**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Decision Not Taken:**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_  
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