

Library Review - Background Information

Turning the page..... A New Chapter for: Buckinghamshire Libraries

Library Service Review - Background Information

During 2004/5 senior library managers, supported by external consultants, undertook a fundamental review of Buckinghamshire Library Service. The aim of the Review was to provide a strategic template for the future development of library services in the County for the next 10 years, which would be affordable within available resources.

The Review made the following proposals:

- A major reorganisation of the management structure of the service, including the creation of dedicated teams to support key areas such as Reading, Children and Family Learning, and Community Development.
- Creation of a new Libraries Information Service, based on on-line and telephone contact from across the County.

These proposals have been agreed and implemented, delivering a saving of approximately £300,000. The County Council is now being asked to consider three further proposals:

- Extending library opening hours at weekends
- Closing eight small community libraries, at Chalfont St. Giles, Iver, Little Chalfont, Micklefield, Richings Park, Steeple Claydon, Stewkley and West Wycombe
- Reinvestment of savings in providing alternative services to those communities affected including purchase of a new "super mobile" library, and the development of the Home Library Service to provide a delivered service to anyone who is unable to visit a library in person

The following information contributed to the recommendation to close the libraries.

- The catchment populations of all eight libraries are below the proposed minimum recommended standard of 7,500 necessary for provision of a branch library.
- Public use of the eight libraries recommended for closure has declined rapidly in recent years. The number of items borrowed has fallen by an average 36.6%, and visits have fallen by 38.8%.
- On 4 October 2005, the average percentage of local residents with material on loan from the eight libraries was 5.76%
- All eight libraries are within 4 miles of an alternative, larger service point, which research shows many local residents are already using. Six of the libraries are within 3 miles of a larger library.
- The eight libraries are open for an average of 15.8 hours per week. They contain almost 30,000 books and other items, which are inaccessible and unused for long periods.
- Closure of the eight libraries will save approximately £200,000 per annum, in addition to hidden costs relating to administration and relief staffing. These savings can be reinvested in the library service, which is required to meet stringent expenditure targets.
- The Review recommends that any capital receipts from the sale of disused premises (estimated as £800,000) are also reinvested in improving library services.

Alternative Services

The Library Service proposes to commission a new mobile library to visit those communities where branch libraries have been closed. Mobile library construction and technology have made huge advances in recent years, and the new mobile will bear very little resemblance to the mobile libraries which currently serve rural and suburban communities. It will be a 12 metre

“branch library on wheels”, with a shelf capacity of up to 3,000 items. It will be spacious and comfortable, and use satellite technology to provide a fully reliable Internet connection to People’s Network computers for public use. All the services currently available in community libraries will be available. The vehicles will have two members of staff, and spend a minimum of half a day at each stopping point. If the proposed branch library closures take place, each community can expect to receive an average of 12 hours per fortnight mobile library visits. Stopping locations can be varied to suit local needs, and the choice of books and other materials available will be constantly changing.

The Home Library Service provides a free monthly delivered library service to anyone who is unable to visit a branch library in person, for reasons of age, illness or disability. This service can be delivered either by volunteers working for the Womens Royal Voluntary Service, or by a dedicated small mobile library which will stop outside a customer’s house. Use of this service growing rapidly, and its availability will ensure that no housebound or otherwise disadvantaged person is left without a library service.

The Review has also proposed the introduction of all day Saturday opening at Buckingham, Bourne End, Chalfont St. Peter, Great Missenden, Haddenham, Princes Risborough, Wendover and Winslow libraries. The libraries at Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Amersham, Beaconsfield, Chesham, Hazlemere, Burnham, Gerrards Cross and Marlow already open all day on Saturdays. This will ensure that the users of all the eight libraries recommended for closure have opportunities for convenient alternative library use at weekends.