

# Sharing Responsibility for Libraries: “More than a Library”



## Overview

[www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/libraries)

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## Sharing Responsibilities: The Context

In February 2015 the Council proposed a review of libraries as a part of the budget to take effect from April 2015. Over the next three years Milton Keynes Libraries needs to secure an additional total of **£449k** in savings.

This has to be delivered against a need to comply with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 under which all local authorities have a statutory duty to deliver a “*comprehensive and efficient library service*” to all people who are resident, work or are in full time education in the Borough. The Act lays out the services that must be provided including the provision of facilities to borrow books, audio visual items, charges that can be levied, and the fact that local authorities “*must encourage adults and children to make full use of the service and provide advice*”.

The 2014 Independent Library Report published by the Department of Culture Media and Sport emphasised that libraries are about much more than just loaning books. The expectations are for a whole range of services and community activities to be provided for people of all ages.

Milton Keynes Council became a Co-operative Council in 2014 and is committed to services which nurture strong communities but recognises that they cannot do this alone, particularly in these very challenging financial times. The Council is talking to a wide range of local bodies and individuals about sharing responsibilities and developing options together. This document reflects this approach and the future direction of Milton Keynes Libraries.

## The Council’s “Eight Point Core Library Offer”

To focus conversations, the Council has identified core services that it is committed to providing long term, in order to serve the community across the Borough in each of the nine libraries and the mobile library. This is about the fundamental provision of books and materials as well as access to information and information technology with the aim of contributing to the health and wellbeing of communities.

Milton Keynes Council is committed to offering the following in all libraries across the Borough:

1. Access to ten library service points
2. A professional library service led by qualified Librarians, promoting literacy and engagement for adults and children through specialist departments
3. Support literacy, lifelong learning as well as learning for early years and school age
4. Support digital literacy and digital inclusion
5. Provide space and support infrastructure for people to work, study, research and engage their leisure time
6. Promote digital access for all citizens
7. Successful partnerships in place with stakeholders, communities and volunteers
8. Tackle social isolation by providing quality and welcoming community buildings and connecting citizens

## Performance and Use

**Milton Keynes Libraries carry a stock of over 250,000 books**, DVDs, CDs and audio books which are shared across all the libraries in Milton Keynes. One million items were issued in 2012/13 falling to 850,000 items in 2014/15. Nationally book lending is in decline and this is reflected in the book issues across all Milton Keynes Libraries.

Central Library is the busiest of all of Milton Keynes libraries accounting for 59% of all visits in 2013/14. Visits to the other libraries vary from 2-9% of total footfall.

Milton Keynes Libraries currently employs **54.89 full time equivalent staff** across all its locations. The figure for Central includes staff who provide functions for the entire service including management, stock provision, outreach and mobile services.

**The deployment of volunteers has become increasingly important** to the functioning of the libraries and currently there are 102 people volunteering their services. The volunteers are supported through a Volunteer Co-ordinator based at Central Library. Volunteer roles have been created to support the services available and to complement, but not replace, paid staff.

As in all walks of life, **digital technology** has become increasingly important. Digital services in Milton Keynes libraries allow them to be used **24/7** by being available to people outside of the physical building of their local library, wherever in the world they might be. Not only can people access services, but they can also renew and reserve books, DVDs and CDs as well as accessing the stock catalogue, online databases, read newspapers and make payments. In general, the use of these is growing.

The biggest growth has been in the use of eAudio and eBooks, the figures would be higher if more digital stock was made available by the UK publishers. This is an issue facing all UK libraries and is being addressed at a national level as publishers will not permit the release of Kindle books and other similar products.

One of the early savings identified in the libraries was for the introduction of self-service terminals in all of the libraries. This will save £78k in 2015/16 and £88k in 2016/17 across all the libraries by releasing customer facing staff from tasks such as issuing and returning items and managing customers' accounts. This then frees them up to undertake other duties and improves stock management and security. The introduction of self-service terminals has resulted in a reduction of 8.5 full time equivalent posts.

## Developing Options Together

There can be no doubt that the face of public library services is changing. Public libraries provide a vital function in local communities and are valued by those who use them whether to borrow a book, find a quiet place to work, access Wi-Fi, meet people and so on. However the way services have to be provided has to change, especially in the light of reducing finance.

Given the scale of the financial challenge, the Council cannot do this alone. It is seeking more collaborative models for the delivery of library services within localities across the Borough which is very much in keeping with the Council's status as a Cooperative Council. "Sharing Responsibilities for Libraries" is an opportunity to look at what may be possible in the future. The communities of Milton Keynes have an exciting opportunity to shape that future and this will only happen through active engagement with all sectors of the community.

This document sets out a number of proposed ideas that have been developed so far for both improving the libraries and for delivering savings and efficiencies. A number of these savings proposals build on some very successful relationships with parish and town councils, the voluntary sector as well as local citizens. They highlight how the use of some of the larger

library buildings can be maximised. They also build on best practice from elsewhere in the country. It provides information about how the building and non-core library services could be shared with others so that the Council can focus its financial and staff resources on the core library provision.

The Council are seeking ways in which they can further share responsibilities for library delivery across the Borough and would welcome ideas from library customers, businesses, charities, community groups, ward councillors, parish and town councils and other stakeholders, to enable greater local input and reduced Council resources. As part of this, the Council will be running a series of Community Engagement sessions to hear your views, ideas and your offers of help, and would encourage anyone who is interested in their local library to come along or to complete the online questionnaire.