Sharing Responsibility for Libraries: More than a Library

Bletchley Library

Milton Keynes **Libraries**

MILTON KEYNES
C O U N C I L

Table of Contents

Introduction

This report sets out the proposals for Milton Keynes Libraries in the context of the Council's budget proposals for 2015/16 to 2017/18. This includes the outcomes from an extensive three month engagement programme on the future of the libraries and sets out a proposed way forward for Bletchley Library.

Vision for the Future

Bletchley Library is a vital part of the library network in Milton Keynes. It is the second busiest library in Milton Keynes attracting around 100,000 people per year.

It is clear that the public value libraries and want to see them develop and grow through the 21st century to become community hubs serving as spaces for education, learning and events as well as somewhere where they can meet, attend activities and from where community groups can operate.

This is a challenge in today's financial climate. It is clear that there will have to be some changes to the way libraries operate for the future. This will mean using technology to allow people to access services for longer. Using the "open libraries" technology will enable this to be achieved and means that services like loaning books and accessing computers can be delivered without a staff presence. Volunteers will help to support this, so enabling a number of tasks and events to be delivered. Embracing this new technology will allow libraries to be open longer than they are at present.

The concept of a community hub is clear as a way forward. This can be delivered without a continual library staff presence and will allow use of the building to be maximised, enabling income to be generated through rental of space and the introduction of new facilities such as a café/coffee shop.

The building is too large for the current library function and there is scope to reconfigure the library to free up space for other uses.

The reconfiguration of the library will release space for more community activities and will allow the library to work in partnership with a number of different organisations. These partnerships and potential co-locations will assist with income generation and management as well as bringing greater footfall and volunteers into the library. One of the key partnerships, and one that was highlighted in the engagement process, was with the Town Council.

The current financial climate means that libraries have to look hard at the way income is generated. Rental of space will be the most successful way of generating income, but Bletchley Library will continue to seek other forms of income through donations, sponsorship and events as well as looking at other ways of reducing costs such as energy reduction.

This vision will be delivered through a Delivery Plan which will look at the libraries overall as well as on an individual basis.

The key themes are:

- Development of "open libraries" – this will allow libraries to be open for longer hours while still reducing costs.

- Maintaining a flexible, professionally staffed library service.

- Developing the role of the library as a 'platform' for community and enterprise use and to enable others to organise and develop it.

- Supporting the development of Friends Groups at all libraries to help shape the use of libraries and develop fundraising initiatives.

- To continue to encourage the valuable role of volunteers in libraries providing support and training as required.

- To provide IT infrastructure, be it through Wi-Fi, PCs or technology, to manage libraries in a timely cost effective manner.

- Developing links with businesses, voluntary, public and education sectors to deliver services and share resources.

- To continue to work towards the development of a sustainable network of libraries that can share and develop services.

- To continue to develop strong partnerships with Town and Parish Councils to provide local services.

- To continue to review stock and space required to ensure that footfall is maintained and services provided meet the needs of local communities.

Key Messages from the Engagement Process

The engagement meeting at Bletchley Library was very well attended with 53 attendees and over 60 people responding online. There were some excellent discussions with the following themes emerging:

- Majority of attendees were opposed to the move to Bletchley Leisure Centre.

- Bletchley and Fenny Town Council should utilise the building.

- Volunteer recruitment should be promoted more.

- Using areas for Nursery/Children's Centres would add to the community offering and bring in young people.

- The library was seen in a very traditional manner as a place of education and information but also as an important community hub.

Work Undertaken Following Engagement Process

During the engagement process a number of potential leads for the development of partnerships and possible users of the building were identified. Library staff have pursued these leads to investigate their viability.

This has included:

- Work has been continuing to explore rental of space to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and a rental rate has been agreed. An in principle agreement has been reached for the relocation to the library.

- Following a series of meetings a proposal of interest has been received for the rental of space to a nursery.

- A meeting was held with Age UK to explore possible rental of space. This can be developed fully once the reconfiguration is complete.

- Discussions were held with the Town Councils to explore contributions and funding options.

- A series of meetings was held with MK Council social workers to rent space but they have chosen not to proceed with this option.

- Options to share the space with Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council had previously been explored and not taken forward.

- There are proposals to close the Police Station in Bletchley and this may raise the potential for co-location. An approach is awaited.

Use of the Building

Maximising the Community Use of the Building

There are a number of spaces at Bletchley Library which are available for use. Some of the areas are already attracting the potential for long term use, but the library itself is also a usable space. The community needs to be encouraged to come forward and make better use of the space in order for it to become the community hub that people are suggesting.

Reduction in Library Size and Rental of Released Space

One of the proposals put forward at the community engagement process was for the library to relocate to Bletchley Leisure Centre. This was not a popular option and it is proposed that the library therefore remains in its current location.

The library building, however, is too large for the services that it currently provides. It is proposed that the building should be reconfigured with a smaller space created for the library which will be refurbished to create a vibrant community library. This will create space in which two new areas can be defined which can then be made available for rent and generate income. The Schools Library Service will remain in its current location.

Alternatively, the building could be rebuilt which would allow the library to meet modern day needs and be more cost effective to operate. This would resolve the issue of a deteriorating building.

Both options are being looked at by the Design and Build contractors appointed to the project to determine the best way forward.

Partnership Working

The Citizens Advice Bureau is looking at the possibility of applying for some community grants so they can continue to offer advice sessions in the library.

In addition, Community Action MK have identified Bletchley as an area to develop a volunteer programme and this would help to complement the work that is already being undertaken in this area.

Town Council Partnership

One of the key outcomes from the Community Engagement was for partnerships to be developed with Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council. To date it has not been possible to develop any partnership in relation to the asset, but further discussions will be held relating to the use and future of the library and how they could contribute. This will also be extended to West Bletchley Town Council.

Co-located Services

With the new spaces becoming available, the opportunity to work closely with other organisations becomes possible. Potential options include working with CAHMS and nursery providers.

Management and Operation of Libraries

Stock

As has already been stated, the library building is too large for the services provided. The library is holding many books that remain static for long or indefinite periods of time. Research has shown that stock can be reduced by at least 25% with little or no impact on usage.

A smaller library space can be created which will be more appealing to users and which can be funded through the use of Section 106 Developer Contributions. An indicative design is shown below.

"Open Libraries"

Milton Keynes Libraries are being challenged to maintain services while reducing costs at the same time. This is being achieved through the introduction of new technology, known as "open libraries", which would allow the library to operate extended opening times with no staff presence. The alternative is for additional hours to be provided either through funding from partners or through the community becoming more involved through volunteering.

This technology is being adopted by a number of UK Libraries, the nearest being in Peterborough. Through the use of CCTV, swipe card entry systems, automated lighting, self-service machines, PCs and Wi-Fi, customers can use the library without the need for staff to be present.

With the introduction of "open libraries" technology the following proposals are possible:

- Library opening hours extended by 4.5 hours per week.

- Staffed hours reduced by 9.5 hours per week.

- Staffing reduced from 5.58 FTE to 2.42 FTE.

- Open from 9-10 am in "open libraries" mode.

- Hours will be kept under review.

- Possibility of additional opening hours in the future in "open libraries" mode including Sundays.

Central Library will be the control centre for other service points when they are in "open libraries" mode.

The proposed new opening hours for Bletchley Library are as follows:

	Current		From 1st April until "open libraries"		Proposed				
	Opening Hours				"open libraries"		Staffed		Total hours open
Mon	9.00 – 13.00	4	10.00-13.00	3	9.00 – 10.00 13.00 – 17.00	5	10.00 - 13.00	3	8
Tues	9.00 – 19.00	10	10.00-17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 17.00	7	8
Weds	9.00 – 17.30	8.5	10.00-17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 17.00	7	8
Thurs	9.00 – 17.30	8.5	10.00-17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00 17.00 – 20.00	4	10.00 - 17.00	7	11
Fri	9.00 – 17.30	8.5	10.00-17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 17.00	7	8
Sat	9.00 – 13.00	4	10.00-13.00	3	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 13.00	3	4
Sun									
Total		43.5		34		13		34	47

Financial Issues

Income Generation

This has always been a key challenge for the libraries and was a key focus during the engagement. Legally the Council cannot charge for the loan of books. The reliance on fine income is self-defeating and comes at the same time as a hugely declining market in CD and DVD loans which means income generation is a major hurdle for the Council.

The engagement process highlighted many ideas for the use of library spaces and active measures are under way to market rooms for hire where there is a strong demand for this type of activity.

Room rentals from April through to November 2015 have generated under £20,000.

Room rental is not the only way of raising income, the following have already been planned or are in place across Milton Keynes Libraries:

- Charges for visits and provision of services for schools and nurseries.

- Introducing charges for events such as children's hour (from April 2016).

Fundraising, Sponsorship and Donations

Raising funds through sponsorship and donations was one of the key areas within the community engagement. Whilst people were quick to point out the potential for sponsorship, experience has shown that this can be a very challenging, time-consuming exercise with little or no reward.

The libraries will continue to be responsive to offers of help and donations.

Friends Groups are vital to help libraries raise income. This can be done through a wide range of activities including:

- fundraising events;

- obtaining sponsorship;

- supporting activities in libraries;

- delivering additional programmes of events;

- activities at local fetes and festivals.

Central Support Costs

Bletchley Library is an important part of the library provision in Milton Keynes. As with any service there are shared central costs which are apportioned to each library.

These costs enable all library users to have access to the following:

- Access to nine library buildings and the mobile library which provide space and support infrastructure for people to work, study and research in our libraries.

- A professionally led library service across the Borough led by qualified librarians providing specialist and strategic support, frontline staff (daily staffed hours at each library), management and cover for sickness and leave.

- New books purchased and processed centrally before distribution to all libraries.

- Membership to South East Library Management System which allows access to 6 million items in addition to over a quarter of a million books and other items through Milton Keynes Libraries.

- Access to the Virtual Library. This allows renewals, reservations, online payments, room hire bookings and access to the full range of library facilities 24 hours a day.

- IT related costs including the maintenance and management of the Library Management System, public access to PCs and free Wi-Fi.

- Library development to promote and market the benefits of libraries through outreach activities and social media across all areas of Milton Keynes.

- Access to digital resources including eBooks, eAudio books and digital databases including Ancestry, business databases and online encyclopaedias.

- Management of a volunteer programme supporting council staff at all libraries including the Home Library Service and the development of "Friends" Groups in each of the nine library locations.

- Delivery of the School Library Service to Milton Keynes Primary Schools.

- Health & Safety relating to buildings, staff and customers.

- Cleaning, general maintenance and other building related services.

- HR and other staff related matters.

During the "Sharing Libraries" Review a comprehensive re-assessment of the service function and requirements of all libraries has been undertaken. This has resulted in further efficiencies and savings across the central costs of 35%. This saving is the equivalent of 8.3 FTE equivalent from central staff.

Making the Library More Energy Efficient

All areas of library operation have been examined, and a key area where more savings can be made is through the installation of energy efficient systems.

With the proposed reconfiguration of the library possible priorities could include:

- Improving the lighting in the library.

- Investigating the potential for a more economical and efficient heating system.

If a decision is made to proceed with the new build option, energy efficiency will be built into the project from the start.

Publicity and Promotions

In the past, library promotions have included paper-based marketing with flyers, leaflets and posters distributed throughout the community and within libraries as well as press

releases and regular online marketing through the council website and social media sites.

Statistics demonstrate that the future marketing strategy for libraries needs to embrace online promotional opportunities as these are increasingly being used. Visitors to the Council's library website have increased by over 6% in the last year. Similarly, Facebook "likes" and Twitter followers have also increased steadily and posts are viewed over 40,000 times each month. Hits on Google pages for the libraries now reaches 60,000 visitors monthly.

However, the responsibility for promoting libraries does not rest with Milton Keynes Council alone. It is important that partners and communities play their part too by raising the profile of the libraries as a community space.

Staffing and Volunteers

Staffing

With the proposed changes in the operation of Bletchley Library and the introduction of the "open libraries" technology, the staffed hours will change from a current establishment of 6.13 FTE (of which only 5.58 FTE posts are currently filled) to 2.42 FTE.

Volunteers and Friends

The engagement process highlighted the use of volunteers and Friends of Libraries Groups to help paid staff and support a variety of functions within the library service. This is an area of increasing importance and the last library restructure in 2013 saw the appointment of a Library Volunteer Co-ordinator.

As of July 2015 there were 17 volunteers at Bletchley Library who provided 68 hours of their time per month. This exceeded the target set, but there is still scope for more involvement and the recruitment campaign continues.

A priority has been set for the establishment of a Friends of Bletchley Library Group. All the people who attended the engagement event and provided an email address have been approached; work to engage them is continuing but this is proving difficult to achieve.

Information Technology

The current IT infrastructure across Milton Keynes Libraries, which is used by both staff and customers, is based on old technology. Due to lack of investment over the years it is now not fit for purpose and is regularly failing. Current IT problems include:

- Existing IT platforms not designed or configured to be able to support new IT needs such as "open libraries" technology and RFID (Self Service).

- Changes in customer demands are not catered for. This includes the ability to print from Wi-Fi, compatibility issues, up to date software and slow connections on public PCs.

- Greater demands placed on the IT systems due to Milton Keynes Libraries internal needs and systems are limiting working practices.

- Outdated, slow and inadequate servers with old redundant equipment remaining in the server cabinets at each library.

In addition to this, the current IT platform was not designed to support the planned library building reconfigurations which would require changes to the IT infrastructure. This is likely to cause further issues.

Many of the services are delivered on a paid for basis. This provides a useful source of income, but customers need to receive value for money and the service needs to be current and reliable.

IT underpins all the work and operations of the library and without substantial investment in new IT equipment, support and regular upgrades, Milton Keynes Libraries will have difficulty functioning. This is likely to cause major operational issues in the future as libraries become increasingly reliant on IT.

A full review of the current IT infrastructure has started and will examine what IT service is required for the future. It is likely that any IT upgrade work will be costly and capital funding will need to be sought.

Conclusion

Milton Keynes Libraries are entering into a new era which will see them embrace technology and bring them to the forefront of communities as a resource and a service whilst still meeting the Council's financial targets. To achieve this a Delivery Plan has been developed which will allow progress to be monitored.

Delivery Plan

Reference	Actions at Bletchley Library	Completed by
B1	Develop a design for a newly configured library or pursue a rebuild option with the Council's appointed Design and Build contractor.	1/02/2016
B2	Carry out a community engagement process on the development options for the investment at the library.	31/02/2016
B3	Define and agree a detailed fit out specification and occupancy agreement with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.	1/03/2016
B4	Advertise and secure a tenant for the rentable space created by the newly configured library (e.g.: Nursery)	Following Development Control approval
B5	Work with interested stakeholders such as Age UK and the ''Blue Light Services' as regards their potential to use the public space within the library both within library staffed hours and "open libraries".	31/03/2016
B6	With a defined reconfigured public library space, start to procure a supplier for fitting out of the library with furniture and fittings and install	31/03/2016
B7	Ensure that energy efficiency measures are embedded into the building plans.	29/02/2016
B8	Reduce the level of stock in accordance with the level of borrowing to facilitate a reconfigured library space.	1/04/2016
B9	Develop and support a friends group	Ongoing
B10	Developed a stronger partnership with Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council and West Bletchley Town Council to encourage a greater role for these Councils in supporting the library. (eg: developing friends group, volunteers, programming, publicising activities, contributing funding)	Ongoing
B11	Provide a temporary library offer during the construction/conversion works.	TBC

B12	Open the newly reconfigured and collocated library building including "open libraries" technology to increase and enhance open hours.	TBC

| B13 | | | | | | | | | | |

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December 2015