

Sharing Responsibility for Libraries: More than a Library

Olney Library



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Milton Keynes Libraries



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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 Olney Library.

Vision for the Future

Olney Library is a vital part of the library network in Milton Keynes. It is a local library providing valuable services to the local community.

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 in different ways.

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 Olney 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 Olney Library was very well attended with 53 attendees and 27 people completed the online survey.

The following themes emerged:

- A strong interest in developing volunteers and a new Friends Group.
- A recognition of the recent CAT transfer of The Olney Centre and the additional responsibilities now taken on by the Town Council.
- Possible links with Children's Centre activities.
- There was a strong sense of the library as a place for classes and events.

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:

- Meetings with the Town Council which are ongoing.
- Work to develop the Friends Group.
- Work with the Children's Centre to run events.
- Contact was made with the Emberton United Charity to explore funding opportunities, but this is restricted to residents of Emberton only.

Use of the Building

Maximising the Community Use of the Building

The library is located in a building which is managed by Olney Town Council and provides a wide range of community activities and services, including the preschool, four other function rooms and the offices of the Town Council. This arrangement provides the opportunity for cross fertilisation and increased footfall.

Within the library itself, weekly story time sessions were provided with Children's Centre colleagues with a Storybook session on a trial basis from September 2015. This is the type of activity that should be encouraged. There is also a weekly Knit and Natter group.

There is little scope to market the library space as there are other more flexible spaces available in the building. There is, however, scope for the Town Council/volunteers to extend the opening hours as they wish.

Parish and Town Council Partnerships

Olney Library is based in The Olney Centre which is managed by the Town Council. The library was transferred to the Town Council under Milton Keynes Council's Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Programme. This partnership has reduced the costs of running the library building. There is ongoing dialogue with the Town Council to improve services while reducing costs.

At the most recent meeting, the Town Council expressed an interest in:

- Funding some opening hours.
- Supporting the ongoing development of the Friends Group.
- Exploring contributions to the cost of IT equipment.

Further discussions will be held relating to the use and future of the library and how they might contribute.

Co-located Services

The site is currently shared with the Town Council and the local Pre-School. The Olney Centre is used by a variety of local organisations; this helps with communication and the sharing of resources.

Management and Operation of Libraries

Stock

Olney Library has been refurbished in recent years and is an attractive library. The space is well utilised and has no obvious areas which are underused. There are no plans to adjust the stock levels at present.

"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.

The proposals for operation under the “open libraries” system are:

- Library opening hours extended by 12 hours per week.
- Staffed hours reduced by 7 hours per week.
- Possible further extension of opening hours on Sundays and Wednesdays in “open libraries” mode.
- Hours will be kept under review.

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

The proposed new opening hours for Olney 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			4
Tues	10.00 – 18.00	8	13.00 - 17.00	4	9.00 – 13.00	4	13.00 - 17.00	4	8
Weds									
Thurs	10.00 – 17.30	7.5	13.00 - 17.00	4	9.00 – 13.00 17.00 – 20.00	7	13.00 – 17.00	4	11
Fri	13.00 – 17.30	4.5	13.00 - 17.00	4	9.00 – 13.00	4	13.00 – 17.00	4	8
Sat	10.00 – 13.00	3	10.00 – 13.00	3	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 – 13.00	3	4
Sun									
Total		23		15		20		15	35

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.

There is limited space available to rent within the library space.

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

Olney 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

The responsibility for the building and almost all premises costs belong to the Town Council and any energy efficiencies will be a matter for the Town Council.

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 Olney Library and the introduction of the “open libraries” technology, the staffed hours will change from a current establishment of 0.91 FTE to 0.46 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 10 volunteers at Olney Library who provided 40 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 Olney Library Group. All the people who attended the engagement event and provided an email address were approached. A meeting took place in the Olney area with the involvement of local councillors and the Friends Group is now looking to become fully constituted. They are proactively recruiting members.

The engagement with Olney has been very positive and they have responded and taken action very swiftly.

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 Olney Library	Completed by
O1	Continue to develop the strong relationship between the Town Council and Milton Keynes Council established in 2015 under a partnership agreement.	Ongoing
O2	Support the Town Council with any documentation or information that might support their conversations with other local parish council who may wish to contribute funding.	Ongoing
O3	Work closely with Town Council in their desire to support the work/ recruitment of volunteers developing a friends group as well as potential funding support to enhance the Council's core library offer.	Ongoing
O4	Update and review the Partnership Agreement to reflect changes in the working relationship between the two Councils.	10/03/2016
O5	Install the "open libraries" technology to extend the opening hours.	TBC

O6

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