

Sharing Responsibility for Libraries: More than a Library

Stony Stratford 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 Stony Stratford Library.

Vision for the Future

Stony Stratford Library is a vital part of the library network in Milton Keynes. It is a local library providing valuable services to the local community in partnership with the Town Council.

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 this is very restricted at Stony Stratford Library and efforts 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 an action 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 Stony Stratford Library attracted 45 people and 36 people provided comments about the library through the online survey. The following themes emerged during the process:

- The library as a community hub was important.
- There was a traditional perception of the library as a place for learning and advice.
- The response indicated a need to encourage a more diverse community to become engaged with the operation of the library.

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:

- More work has been undertaken with FoSSL (Friends of Stony Stratford Library) to continue to develop their role.
- Communications with Oxfam, but the space was not appropriate for their needs.
- Continuing to work with the Town Council with regard to the remodelling of space.

Use of the Building

Maximising the Community Use of the Building

The Town Council have plans to redesign the building in the next few years in order to make the space more flexible and user-friendly for the community. The plans are still evolving and Milton Keynes Libraries will be consulted as part of this process. The plans

may take some time to come to fruition, but they do show enormous potential to develop a true community hub.

Reduction in Library Size and Rental of Released Space

With the plans to reconfigure the space at the library, there is potential to provide more modern shelving which would reduce the area needed for books by about a third. This would free up space for other uses.

Parish and Town Council Partnerships

Development of partnerships with Town and Parish Councils are an important part of the delivery of the library services. These partnerships offer co-location, with the benefits of increased footfall and shared costs. Stony Stratford Library already operates in partnership with the Town Council who own the building and are based there.

Recent discussions have focussed on the following:

- How to increase volunteering.
- The development of the Friends Group.
- Development of community engagement through funding.
- More flexible use of the building.
- Shared frontline services to support both Town Council and the library.
- Potential to share some staff resources.

Discussions will continue on developing the future of the library and how they might contribute.

Co-located Services

There are currently no other co-located services although the Town Council are keen to engage a local charity once the remodelling is complete.

Management and Operation of Libraries

Stock

The library is spread over two floors in the building and there is ample space for the existing library stock. This has resulted in stock sitting on the shelves to fill the space which is not being used. This is particularly true of the adult non-fiction stock. If older and low-issuing stock were to be withdrawn, the stock could be reduced by 30% freeing up space for other functions.

The long term plans for the stock will need to be refined as the Town Council develop their plans for the future.

“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 3.5 hours per week.
- Staffed hours reduced by 8.5 hours per week.
- Staffing reduced from 2.4 FTE to 1.56 FTE.
- Hours will be kept under review.
- Possibility of additional opening hours in the future in “open libraries” mode on Sundays.

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

The proposed new opening hours for Stony Stratford 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	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		39.5		31		12		31	43

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, however, given that the library is owned by Stony Stratford Town Council, any income generated would not be received by the library in line with the partnership agreement with the Town Council.

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).

The income generated by Stony Stratford Library to November 2015 is just under £3,500.

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

Stony Stratford 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 library building belongs to Stony Stratford Town Council and this is their area of responsibility. It is assumed that this will be factored in under the redevelopment plans for the site.

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 Stony Stratford Library and the introduction of the "open libraries" technology, the staffed hours will change from a current establishment of 3.96 FTE (of which only 2.4 FTE posts are currently filled) to 1.56 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 9 volunteers at Stony Stratford Library who provided 36 hours of their time per month. This exceeded the target set, but there is still scope for more involvement and the recruitment campaign continues.

There is an established Friends Group at Stony Stratford Library (FoSSL). All the people who attended the engagement event and provided an email address have been approached, and work is continuing to develop and grow the group.

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 Stony Stratford Library (5-7 Church Street)	Completed by
S1	Work closely with the Town Council on their plans to reconfigure and extend 5 – 7 Church Street to become a community learning hub for the town.	2018
S2	Carry out a review of stock in accordance with the levels of borrowing to facilitate the release of space for wider community use of the building both in the short term and long term to facilitate the proposed building configuration.	2017
S3	Support the development and enhancement of FOSSL (friends group) to support the work of the library.	Ongoing
S4	Work with the Town Council in their continuing desire to support the work of the library. (eg: volunteers, friends group, funding, promoting activities, shared posts and resources).	Ongoing
S5	Update and review the partnership Agreement to reflect changes in the working relationship between the two Councils.	As required

S6

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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
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