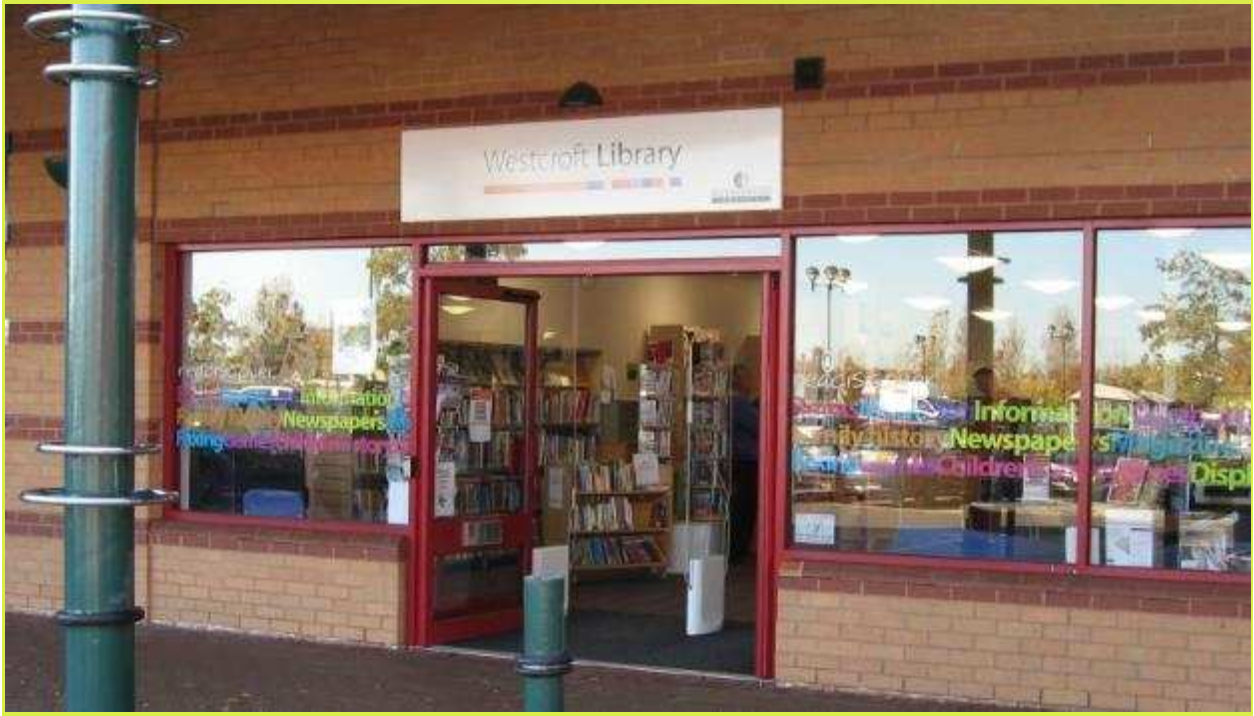
Sharing Responsibility for Libraries: More than a Library

Westcroft Library



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Milton Keynes Libraries

MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL

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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 Westcroft Library

Vision

Westcroft Library is a vital part of the library network in Milton Keynes. It is a busy library and its popularity is shown by the increasing use.

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 and this is very restricted at Westcroft Library, but 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. The new location will allow this by remaining in a high profile location adjacent to other community facilities.

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 attracted 30 people and the online survey received 42 responses that related directly to Westcroft Library. The following themes emerged:

- The library should remain in the Westcroft Centre.
- The concept of developing a community hub was important with people wanting more events and clubs based in the library and they saw the library as a place for education and advice.
- There was a limited response from young people and other minority groups.
- The role of a Friends Group and the engagement of volunteers was important.

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:

- Approached current landlord with a view to purchase library building. This was rejected.
- Approached the owner of small units at the front of The Meeting Place with a view to purchase. This was rejected.
- Secured further 2 years on the lease of the current building whilst new library is being built.

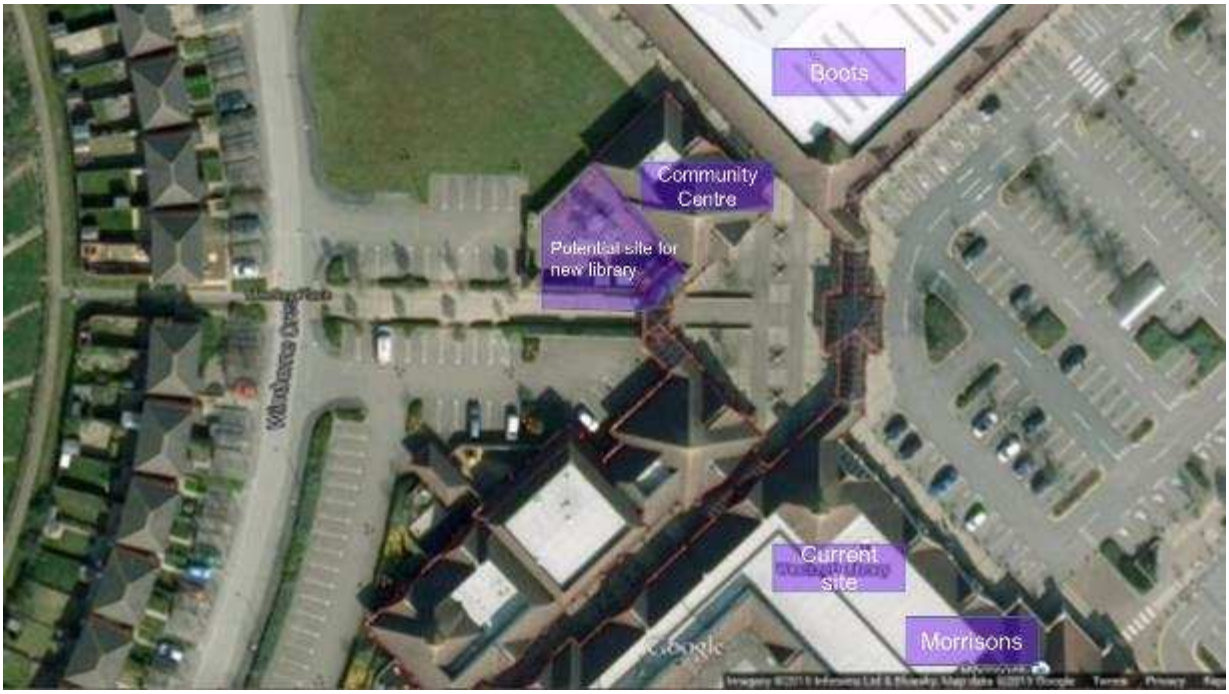
Use of the Building

Relocation of Westcroft Library

Westcroft library is the third busiest library in Milton Keynes and one of only two libraries in that is increasing its usage. However, the cost of operating Westcroft Library per user is the highest in Milton Keynes and this is due to the rental cost of the premises. In the current financial climate ways to reduce costs have to be found.

Several options were explored around the location of Westcroft Library, including unsuccessfully trying to purchase the small unit at the front of Westcroft Meeting Place. After completing the engagement process it was very apparent that it should remain located within the Westcroft Centre area. The Council have renegotiated the lease for the building and have secured a two-year lease until 26th October 2017 for the library to remain in its current location. A new library is now being planned in an extension to Westcroft Meeting Place. It is anticipated that the new library will be operational in Autumn 2017.

A proposed site plan is shown below.



Maximising the Community Use of the Building

Whilst in the medium-term the library will relocate, it is important that the use of the current building is maximised. The Sharing Libraries Review has highlighted the availability of room hire at Westcroft Library and four regular bookings have now been secured. In addition, talks are ongoing with Age UK with a view to them renting 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.

Partnership Working

A new short-term partnership has recently developed with Children and Family Services who will be using Westcroft Library to run a number of sessions, including one for teenage parents. They will also have a Family Support Worker available to attend the regular Storytime sessions if required.

Parish and Town Council Partnerships

One of the key outcomes from the Community Engagement was for partnerships to be developed with Town and Parish Councils. Discussions were previously held with Shenley Brook End and Tattenhoe Council with regard to co-locating but they are already relocating to a site elsewhere. Further discussions will be held relating to the use and future of the library and how they could contribute.

Co-located Services

The relocation to the new building in 2017 provides the opportunity to develop partnerships with new organisations. Work will continue in this area.

Management and Operation of libraries

Stock

Westcroft is currently the third busiest library in Milton Keynes. It has outstanding issues for children's stock and performs very well in all other categories. With the impending relocation in 2017 the current stock will be thoroughly reviewed at that time and it is possible that there might be a small reduction in the stock levels to allow for a better display of the books.

"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" technology are:

- Library opening hours extended by 9.5 hours per week.
- Staffed hours reduced by 9.5 hours per week.
- Staffing reduced from 3.7 FTE to 2.42 FTE.
- Retention of opening hours on Sundays in "open libraries" mode.

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

The proposed new opening hours for Westcroft 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 – 19.00	9	10.00 - 17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 17.00	7	8
Weds	10.00 – 17.30	7.5	10.00 - 17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 17.00	7	8
Thurs	10.00 – 17.30	7.5	10.00 - 17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00 17.00 - 20.00	4	10.00 - 17.00	7	11
Fri	10.00 – 17.30	7.5	10.00 - 17.00	7	9.00 – 10.00	1	10.00 - 17.00	7	8
Sat	10.00 – 16.00	6	10.00 - 13.00	3	9.00 – 10.00 13.00 - 17.00	5	9.00 - 13.00	3	8
Sun	11.00 – 14.00	3			11.00 – 14.00	3			3
Total		40.5		31		19		31	50

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 over £6,000.

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

Westcroft 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 plans to build a new library provides the opportunity to design with energy efficiency. When the design is being prepared, efficiency should be given careful consideration to allow for lower running costs.

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 Westcroft library and the introduction of the “open libraries” technology, the staffed hours will change from a current establishment of 3.7 FTE 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 20 volunteers at Westcroft library who provided 80 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 Westcroft Library Group. All the people who attended the engagement event and provided an email address have been approached; work to engage them is continuing.

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 Westcroft Library	Completed by
W1	Develop a design for a newly relocated library immediately adjacent to Westcroft Meeting Place with the Council's appointed Design and Build contractor.	1/02/2016
W2	Carry out a community engagement process on the proposed new library and seek to secure support for the relocated proposal.	31/02/2016
W3	Carry out a review of stock in accordance with the level of borrowing to facilitate a proposed move to a new library building.	1/04/2016
W4	Ensure that energy efficiency measures are embedded within a proposed new building.	1/02/2016
W5	Develop and support a friends group at Westcroft Library.	Ongoing
W6	Develop a stronger partnership with Shenley Brook End Parish Council and Shenley Church End Parish Council to ensure a greater role for these two Councils in the support of the library. (e.g. developing a friends group, volunteers, programming, publicising activities and contributing funding).	Ongoing
W7	Open the new library building (subject to community agreement reference W2) including "open libraries" technology to increase opening hours.	TBC
W8	Surrender the lease by 25/10/2017 and negotiate dilapidations on the existing library (subject to W2).	25/10/2017

W9

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