

# TRANSFORMING MILTON KEYNES LIBRARIES

## Looking to the future ...

Library Strategy 2020 – 2025



MK

milton keynes council

## **Introduction from Councillor Zoe Nolan**

I am incredibly proud of the library service in Milton Keynes and the employees and volunteers who deliver it. Milton Keynes has developed a thriving service with nine libraries, a mobile vehicle and a Schools Library Service, including brand new libraries in Kingston and Westcroft.



Milton Keynes is a great and growing city and we want to ensure that our libraries reflect this, and contribute to the aims and ambitions that we have identified as part of our MK Futures 2050 programme.

We have asked the stakeholders of Milton Keynes Libraries about their priorities for future libraries. Our strategic plan reflects the views of these stakeholders and sets out our vision to deliver high quality, accessible and vibrant public library services, at the heart of communities, meeting the needs of all.

We are ambitious in our thinking; we will explore the opportunities technology offers and be open to new and creative ideas such as exploring robot deliveries and extending library opening times with Libraries Xtra. We want to ensure that our libraries offer far more than being a building where you can simply borrow a book, as important as that is. We want our libraries to be places where learning takes place, where people can find out about employment and career opportunities, where families can support their children's development and places to go to help with health and wellbeing issues.

This strategy sets out how over the next five years we can ensure that MK libraries can continue grow and develop along with the city itself.

Councillor Zoe Nolan, Cabinet Member responsible for Children and Families

November 2019

# Our ABC...

## Access

- free to all
- online resources wherever the customer may be
- mobile services that can get to areas where there is not a library
- longer opening hours

## Better

- information and knowledge that can improve and enhance lives
- implementing new technological advances that improve our services
- delivering learning opportunities so people can gain new skills
- support to help individuals find and secure employment opportunities

## Communities

- creating modern community spaces fit for the 21st Century
- offering volunteer opportunities so people can gain new experiences and play an active role in their community
- developing partnerships that support our citizens to use libraries
- offering access to partners who provide support to individuals with their health and wellbeing

# TRANSFORMING LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2020 – 2025

We are proud of our Library Service in Milton Keynes and what we have achieved. Libraries across Milton Keynes are thriving.



Milton Keynes Council in its *Council Plan 2016 – 2022* has stated that it will “7.12 Maintain our full provision of library services” as one of its objectives and priorities.

This strategy outlines our vision for the public libraries in Milton Keynes and what it aims to achieve in the next five years and how it can contribute to Milton Keynes Council’s three main aims.

- 1. A City of Opportunity - we will support people to succeed and develop the skills they need to access well paid employment and have the opportunity to meet their potential.**
- 2. An Affordable City - we will offer access to high quality services, a range of facilities and cultural offers that are the fabric of any modern, diverse and successful city.**
- 3. A Healthy City – we will contribute to lifelong wellbeing for everyone.**

We will do this by ensuring that Milton Keynes has a first class and 21st century library service; that the vital and unique community spaces libraries provide offer access to a range of services and activities that meet the needs of individuals and communities across Milton Keynes.

**Our vision is to deliver high quality, accessible and vibrant public library services, at the heart of communities, meeting the needs of all.**

This strategy represents the journey that we are on. In response to budget challenges across all council services, Milton Keynes Libraries responded in 2012 with its *Future Libraries Strategy*. This laid out its future direction following a reduction in its budgets. In 2015 the *Sharing Libraries Strategy* looked to our communities to take on a greater role in continuing to deliver library services as the financial situation became more challenging.

In 2019 Milton Keynes Libraries are thriving. We are proud that we have found ways of bucking the national trend seen in many public library authorities across England and Wales and not closed any of our libraries. Indeed Milton Keynes Libraries during the last eight years has been able to embark on an extensive building and refurbishment programme costing in excess of £3.5M including the building of brand new libraries at both Kingston and Westcroft.

## Technology

Milton Keynes Libraries have survived and thrived because they have been willing to change and embrace new ideas and ways of working.

Utilising new technology has been a big part of our success. This has included installing self-service machines in all of our libraries and encouraging their use. Library customers now make 90% of all library transactions using self-service machines freeing up library staff to carry out other library duties.

Milton Keynes Libraries was one of the early pioneers of installing Libraries Xtra technology. This technology allows customers to use their library cards to enter the library without staff being present and at times that better suit them. Customers can then access the services within the building using the self-service machines to issue and return books. Libraries Xtra has allowed for the opening hours to be increased at both Kingston and Westcroft and from early 2020, when Libraries Xtra has been installed, at Newport Pagnell Library as well.

## Volunteers

The greater use of a large team of c100 volunteers supports our work and has been another success story. The continued support of our Friends groups including Friends of Stony Stratford Library (FoSSL), Friends of the Library in Olney (FoLiO) and the Woburn Sands Town Council volunteers, have allowed us to extend the opening hours at these libraries as well as providing increased community activities in these buildings.

## Partnerships

Our Sharing Libraries 2015 Strategy was about working closer with key partners. Milton Keynes Libraries has close links with Town and Parish Councils particularly when the library is situated in their ward and library buildings are shared such as at Bletchley, Olney, Stony Stratford, Wolverton and Woburn Sands.

## Moving forward with our vision

With a fast growing, more complex and more diverse population Milton Keynes Libraries cannot afford to stand still.

The previous two library strategies were mainly driven by financial concerns. Whilst we recognise that finances across local government will remain challenging, this new Transforming Libraries Strategy is a continuation of our journey and will evolve and grow alongside the library service, its users and its stakeholders.

Our aspiration for libraries over the next five years is a modern service that is inclusive and vibrant, and enables users to learn, engage and remain connected to their communities. Over the lifetime of this strategy, our ambition is that we will:

- **Have knowledge and learning at the heart of our library service offer.**
- **Ensure that libraries develop and reflect the aims and ambitions as outlined in MK Futures 2050.**
- **Embrace digital technology and have a world-class eLearning offer.**
- **Work in partnership with our communities to run and improve library services.**
- **Offer a consistently good customer experience.**

Our vision focuses on how best to provide library services, both physical and online. What we provide will be based on need, and will be provided in different ways and in different locations and spaces. For instance, library shelves and study spaces could be in community centres, children's storytimes or library events could take place in children and family centres, smart access and self-service technology could make it much easier for customers to browse, study, borrow and return books outside regular opening hours.

Parish, Town and Community Councils are likely to be involved in making community decisions in the future direction of library services. They best understand the unique needs of their community to work in partnership with Milton Keynes Council in ways that fit local needs. Libraries are integral to society, helping people to thrive and prosper. They help create great places to grow up, live and work and help people get a good start in life and age well.

By committing to meeting its statutory duties under the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*, the council needs to ensure it provides a library service that is appropriate for the future, financially sustainable and fits with people's lives and expectations. Customer expectations are changing, our population is growing, and we need to make sure that we offer the best possible value for money.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

After seeking the views of stakeholders and library customers through an online survey, meetings and focus groups it has helped shape and develop our strategic plan.

Our strategic plan for library services in Milton Keynes will allow us to meet our vision to provide high quality, accessible and vibrant public library services, at the heart of communities, meeting the needs of all.

# Access

### To revitalise the Central Library as an exemplar of innovative practice

The Central Library needs to be remodelled and refreshed so that it is proudly the flagship library in Milton Keynes. A considerable investment will need to be realised as well as agreeing the long term future of the land at the rear of the library.

We believe that by developing the Central Library as a 21st century hub we will support the council's goals laid out in Project 5 of MK Futures 2050 plan. Renaissance: CMK states *"(re)create an even stronger city centre fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century."* Part of this should be ensuring that one of Milton Keynes Council's largest city centre public access buildings is a true destination that reflects everything that is great about our modern thriving city.

### We will

- **Engage with the architects commissioned to scope out plans for the land at the rear of the Central Library to ensure the best outcomes for the library are considered.**
- **Seek additional funding from external sources such as S106 funding, Tariff and through national and local bidding opportunities from the likes of South East**

**Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) and Arts Council England and Lottery Fund.**

### **To improve technological services and inclusion**

Milton Keynes Council is viewed as a leader in adopting new technology to enhance the lives of its citizens. We want to ensure that Milton Keynes Libraries are ready to take advantage and apply the technological advances that present themselves by ensuring that the libraries are truly 21st century, keeping pace with the rapidly growing and developing city.

#### **We will**

- **Extend the Libraries Xtra offer through the technology at Newport Pagnell Library as part of the refurbishment work, to begin operating in early 2020.**
- **Dedicate some of our events and activities programme to enabling access to technology and information. In the last 12 months libraries have hosted virtual reality events and accommodated a range of groups such as Coding Clubs.**
- **Continue to increase the range of services and information available online in line with public demand.**
- **Take the opportunities presented by the new university and ensure that library services have the ability and flexibility to adapt to meet this rapidly changing landscape.**
- **Explore the possibility of working with Starship Technologies to pilot robot library book delivery.**
- **Look to replace the existing mobile library with an environmentally friendly and innovative solution that provides access to additional services.**

# **Better**

### **To facilitate and provide learning opportunities for all**

Libraries have and always will provide learning opportunities for all and in doing so helps make Milton Keynes a City of Opportunity.

From providing children's hours and story times for pre-schoolers, code clubs, tuition and accessible study space, to the delivery of adult education and lifelong learning, Milton Keynes Libraries are already delivering a significant amount of learning opportunities.

We are, however, ambitious and want to do more to contribute to Milton Keynes being a City of Opportunity and to support every person having the chance of a good, well paid job and the skills to do it.

The links and close working relationships with Community Learning MK have seen an increase in the amount of courses that are delivered within our libraries.

Libraries play a critical role in providing study space for young people, many of whom do not have the space at home to study and prepare for their exams. This is something that we want to enhance and contribute to improving the skills, qualification and life chances of our young people by ensuring that libraries in Milton Keynes have the space, the resources and technology for them to do this.

We recognise that for low skilled adults and for those whose first language is not English, we need to ensure Milton Keynes has venues that meet the learning needs of everyone.

### **We will**

- **Offer core courses and learning opportunities in libraries.**
- **Provide technology and access to resources that support people in self-study.**
- **Provide comfortable study spaces in our libraries.**
- **Use Family Learning to support parents with their children's education.**
- **Work with the MK:U to ensure that libraries support and complement its offer.**

### **To support pathways to employment**

Libraries can also play a crucial role in ensuring Milton Keynes is a City of Opportunity by building partnerships that support people into work. Alongside this we will provide them with the information and resources that enable them to build their careers and take advantage of the opportunities the MK economy offers. We are already doing this with our thriving volunteer programme with c100 volunteers currently occupied across Milton Keynes Libraries.

We provide space and resources that are regularly used by job seekers and free access to technology and Wi-Fi. Through the relationship with Community Learning MK, Works for Us and Citizen Advice we can broaden the offer to help people learn new skill sets such as

developing computer literacy skills, supporting entrepreneurs, assisting in developing financial literacy and creating and creating and encouraging networks.

### **We will**

- **Enhance the promotion of activities that take place in libraries that support people looking for and/or progressing in work.**
- **Build on the strong partnerships so the libraries are used by multiple agencies so the public has an information hub regarding employment matters.**

# Communities

## **To support and further develop community involvement**

We will continue to work positively in partnership with Town and Parish Councils as a key to achieving the vision for library services. There are examples of where this collaboration is working positively and productively so we will build on these successes to ensure that the provision is centred in the communities.

Within an innovative strategy of community led collaborative working, there are additional possibilities for cultivating partnerships such as MK:U, health services, children and family centres, U3A and youth groups.

In addition we will reshape our mobile offer, utilising technology and using environmentally efficient mobile vehicle to visit more communities with a wider range of services.

## **To contribute to the public health agenda, particularly in the area of mental health**

Public Health England is responsible for making the public healthier and reducing differences between the health of different groups by promoting healthier lifestyles, advising government and supporting action by local government, the NHS and the public. Libraries are ideally positioned to provide information and resources to work with local communities to encourage changes in behaviour. In particular, libraries uniquely offer a venue that is universally accessible and free at the point of access which provides a place of safety and companionship for people who have a sense of isolation.

## **We will**

- **Provide a range of services that include creative activities and volunteering opportunities to help connect people.**
- **Continue to offer key services such as Books on Prescription and a home library service.**
- **Dedicate some of our events and activities programme to encourage positive wellbeing.**
- **Provide safe spaces for people with specific needs and support the council's loneliness and social isolation agenda.**

## **To support children and families as they grow, recognising that their needs change**

The importance of libraries in children's development is well documented and understood. Library services continue to be popular with parents, carers and their children. In a rapidly changing digital age, we want to be contemporary so that families and friends continue to get what they want from our libraries – whatever their age.

## **We will**

- **Offer parents and carers a space where children can learn and play together in libraries to ensure children have the best start to their lives.**
- **Increase the membership of children through a joint children's centre/libraries membership card.**
- **Work with children's and family centres to support their families and make access to library services easier.**

## What will success look like?

Throughout our journey we will review our outcomes.

We will consider this strategy to have achieved our ambition for libraries if:

- Overall use of library services, whether online or in person, increases.
- We know what our customers need and target books and materials to meet those needs.
- The service is economic, efficient and effective.
- The service is reaching new communities and bringing in new customers.
- The service is making a positive contribution to improving outcomes and opportunities for citizens.

This strategy will be kept under review during its lifetime to ensure that we continue to monitor and evaluate this ambition.

## Appendix 1

We have asked people's opinions about transforming Milton Keynes Libraries:

On-line questionnaire

Focus groups with Children's Centres parents and staff

Discussion with Youth Cabinet Milton Keynes (YCAB)

Discussions with Town and Parish Councils

Feedback from individual Councillor's

Friends of Libraries

Gathered the views of those recently arrived in the UK through a group of learners of English for speakers of other languages

Whilst there is a wealth of detail arising from the responses received so far, headline feedback includes:

- There were many positive responses broadly saying all needs are met by the library used.
- The strongest agreements in the on line survey were for libraries hosting adult education classes and for MPs and Councillor surgeries
- The strongest disagreement was for Post Office facilities in libraries and hosting work spaces for start-up companies
- Congratulations on continuing to provide an exceptional service (22,000 new books last year – awesome!)
- We are enormously pleased to see libraries remaining and expanding within the city – they are, without doubt, an essential part of communities and help with a whole range of issues that impact far more widely than simply borrowing books.
- Would like to see additional study space as they often struggle to find somewhere to work.
- Asked about Sunday opening.
- Public health and community development focus is positive
- Appreciation of IT developments to improve access
- Possibility of income generation through hiring out buildings
- TVs could be used to show sporting events and encourage people to watch them together in the library rather than the pub.
- Work better with local partners (e.g. shops)
- Overwhelming support for joint membership card (e.g. Children's Centres and Libraries)
- Focussed sessions (e.g. transition from university to world of work)
- Mixed response to robot delivery – but broadly in agreement
- Some comments about not changing true nature of libraries

## Appendix 2

### List of documents mentioned in the strategy

- Milton Keynes Council: Council Plan 2016 – 2020  
<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/your-council-and-elections/council-information-and-accounts/strategies-plans-and-policies/council-plan-2016-2020>
- Sharing Libraries Review 2015  
<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/libraries/library-community/sharing-libraries>
- Future Libraries 2012  
Copies of this document can be viewed at the Central Library
- Public Libraries & Museum Act 1964  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>
- Milton Keynes: Making a Great City Greater – Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission  
<https://www.mkfutures2050.com/read-our-report>

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