

Swindon Libraries Review Consultation Findings

CABINET

Date: 22 July 2009

Author: Deputy Leader of the Council/Director of Housing and Leisure

Parish / Wards Affected: Gorse Hill & Pinehurst
Old Town & Lawns/Eastcott
Western

Purpose

- To make recommendations on the future library provision for Old Town, Even Swindon, and Gorse Hill, following consultations.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to

1. note the consultation findings and authorise the Director of Housing and Leisure to implement the following:
 - The Old Town library service point be re-provided with one member of staff, working in partnership with Discovering Autistic Spectrum Happiness (DASH), a registered charity, and Farleigh college to provide supported work experience in Old Town library. These arrangements commence as soon as possible.
 - Even Swindon library service point remains open with single staffing and support from Community Centre caretaker staff. These arrangements commence as soon as possible.
 - Gorse Hill static library service point is re-provided by the mobile library service point on a Saturday and during the week. These arrangements commence from 1 September 2009.
2. note the current review of the Arts Centre and the potential of the Old Town Library facility to be co-located within the Arts Centre.

1. Reasons

- 1.1 In 2007/2008, proposals were put forward to close Old Town and Walcot Libraries. However, following consultation it was agreed to defer the closure until April 2009, following the opening of the refurbished and extended Parks library and the new Central library, supporting this with one-off funding for 2008/09. .
- 1.2 Cabinet approved the draft budget for 2009/10 on 11 February 2009 proposing a £92K saving resulting from changes in alternative

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approaches to delivering the library services. Options as to how the £92K proposed savings could be achieved included the possible closure of the Walcot and Old Town libraries or them being run by volunteers. This was followed by a three month consultation on alternative library provision for Gorse Hill and Even Swindon Libraries.

1.3 Future library provision for Old Town library was discussed at the meeting of Old Town and Lawn Area Panel on 11 December 2008 and 22 January 2009, with the then named Friends of Old Town Library Group, on 15 December 2008 and at the Queens Park Community Council on the 4 March 2009. Following a meeting of Old Town and Lawn Area Panel on 12 March 2009, a request made by Old Town Ward Councillors was agreed by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Property, Leisure and Recreation so a more comprehensive consultation on the Old Town library could be carried out.

1.4 In January 2009, a proposal was made by the Trustees of the Walcot Community Shop to share the library premises, building costs and for them to run Walcot Library with support from the Council. This arrangement commenced on 16 April 2009.

2. Detail

- 2.1 The Council has successfully reduced non-front line library management costs by over £150K in the past two years whilst being able to significantly invest in the library service. Examples of recent investment includes:
- £9.8 million new Central Library.
 - £490K in an extended and refurbished Park Library.
 - £2.5 million contribution towards the new Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.
 - £2.5 million in new libraries at North Swindon and Highworth.
 - £16K updating furniture and fittings at Covingham Library.
- 2.2 The library budget for 2008/2009 has increased by £377K from the 2007/2008, largely due to additional provision and extended opening hours for the new Central Library. To balance the library budget there was a requirement to achieve a £92K saving. The detail of the £92K proposal (as highlighted in Section 1.2) to Council followed much debate and discussion by Cabinet Members.

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2.3 Consultation

With Walcot Library operating with volunteers, consultation was focussed on Old Town, Even Swindon, and Gorse Hill Libraries. The following activities took place as part of the consultation process:

- Two drop-in consultation events were held at each library (a third event was held at Gorse Hill on a Saturday morning). Posters were displayed in the libraries before each event explaining its purpose. The events were also reported by local radio and newspaper.
- Letters were sent to all known community groups and interested individuals inviting comments and feedback .
- Ward councillors attended consultation and/or community meetings in their ward.
- Officers attended public meetings in Old Town and Even Swindon.
- Officers have attended meetings of community groups in Old Town, Eastcott, and Even Swindon.
- Officers attended a meeting of the Gorse Hill Community Centre management committee.
- Advice was sought from the Museum Libraries and Archives Council on the process for consultation.
- Correspondence and communication with individuals and community groups by email, letter, telephone, and meetings.

2.4 Old Town Library

2.4.1 Old Town Library is currently situated in a single shop unit at Victoria Road, Old Town. The library is currently open 18 hours per week over 3 days.

2.4.2 A petition was received by the Mayor on 10 February 2009 signed by 1335 residents in favour of keeping Old Town library open, with its professional staff, and in opposition to requests for it to be run uniquely by volunteers or its closure.

2.4.2 Analysis of the questionnaires filled in at the drop-in consultation sessions and after the public meeting show that of the 112 returns:

- 96% were members of the library.
- 69% used the library weekly.
- 46% used other libraries
- 69% thought the current library provision was excellent and 25% thought it was good.

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- 2.4.3 Comments show that parents with young families and the elderly value the service.
- 2.4.4 The location of the Central Library at the bottom of a steep hill is seen as a barrier to people using the Central Library, along with the lack of a much more personal service from staff at Old Town Library.
- 2.4.5 Many of the returns showed that people valued the library space as a community space in which to meet other residents.
- 2.4.6 Many felt that a mobile service was not adequate, and some people would be prepared to use a library staffed or partly staffed by volunteers.
- 2.4.7 A full breakdown of the consultation response for Old Town Library is shown at Appendix 1.
- 2.4.8 The proposal to close Old Town Library took into account the limited opening hours of Old Town Library, the extended opening hours of Central Library and its close proximity to Old Town, the provision of regular bus service to the town centre, the lack of scope due to its size and layout of the building to develop it into a modern fit for purpose library for the future, and the budget implications.
- 2.4.9 Visits to Old Town Library rose by 13% in the year ending March 2009. In the six months from October 2008 to March 2009, the visits increased by 4% compared to the previous year. Loans at Old Town increased by 9% in the year ending March 2009. In the six months from October 2008 to March 2009, the loans decreased by 8% compared to the previous year. This is probably due to the opening of the new Central Library in October 2008.
- 2.4.10 During the consultation period, a proposal from Discovering Autistic Spectrum Happiness (DASH), a local registered charity, was put forward. The primary aim of DASH is to improve the quality of life for adults of working age with Asperger syndrome living in Swindon.
- 2.4.11 Asperger syndrome is sometimes referred to as 'able autism' or high-functioning autism. It includes people of average to high intelligence, and their apparent independence often belies their social disability. Lack of understanding causes many of the

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difficulties associated with Asperger syndrome. Once its condition and its affects are understood, the individual can concentrate on overcoming the negative aspects and making the most of the positive. Qualities like honesty, reliability, determination, and dedication are associated with the condition and many people show talent in computing and research.

2.4.12 The proposal is for DASH to provide supported volunteers for their members to gain work experience. Hopefully, this would mean their members are more likely to gain paid employment in the future. DASH would like their members, many of whom have residency in Old Town, to work alongside library staff to develop their skills. The proposal would mean reducing the library staff from two to single staffing and extending the opening hours to remain open during lunch hours. Apart from the obvious social benefit, this will achieve a revenue saving of £9,750 per annum.

2.4.13 DASH and Farleigh College in Old Town have proposed that their members and students could work for two to three hour shifts in the library, supporting the library staff after receiving the appropriate training. DASH and Farleigh College would be responsible for ensuring that volunteers are in place and monitored. Accreditation opportunities will be sought for students of Farleigh College and members of DASH.

2.4.14 It may be that library provision in Old Town could be improved and extended by co-locating the library facility in the Arts Centre. This is currently being considered as part of the review of Lydiard, CRE8, and the Arts Centre by David Pratley Associates. Library hours could be extended by the installation of a self-service loans and returns unit. Single staffing, as in the proposal from DASH, would continue, so revenue savings of £9,750 per annum would continue. This proposal would require some capital investment. The amount is not known at this stage, as the consultants will not present their report until the end of July. Should the consultants' report show there is a sound business case for the amalgamation, this will form part of the recommendations arising from that review.

2.5 Even Swindon Library

2.5.1 Even Swindon Library is situated in the Even Swindon Community Centre, Jennings Street, Rodbourne. The centre is staffed by a full time caretaker and the Management Committee

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when he is not on site. The library is currently open 10 hours per week, over 3 days.

2.5.2 Analysis of the questionnaires filled in at the drop-in consultation sessions and after the public meeting shows that of the 42 returns:

- 100% were members of the library.
- 55% used the library weekly
- 33% used other libraries
- 88% thought the current library provision was excellent and 13% thought it was good.

2.5.3 Comments from the questionnaires show that the people of Rodbourne value Even Swindon Library as a community meeting place.

2.5.4 The library is valued by the elderly and the young. Many elderly people find it difficult to access the bus service to visit Central library. Parents and young children enjoyed the library service together and some children were able to use the service without their parents as the library is close to their home.

2.5.5 The friendly personalised service is valued by users.

2.5.6 Visits to Even Swindon Library decreased by 5% in the year ending March 2009. In the six months from October 2008 to March 2009, the visits decreased by 2% compared to the previous year.

2.5.7 Loans at Even Swindon Library decreased by 5% in the year ending March 2009. In the six months from October 2008 to March 2009, the loans decreased by 5% compared to the previous year.

2.5.8 Western ward councillors carried out their own consultation with 66 responses:

- 61 favoured keeping the service as it is and 4 people wanted to see the service provided by one library staff and Centre staff cover.
- 56 people put the single staff member with Centre staff cover as their second choice.

2.5.9 A full breakdown of the consultation response for Even Swindon Library is shown at Appendix 2.

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2.5.10 During the consultation period, the Director of Housing and Leisure and Head of Library Services attended a public meeting at Even Swindon Community Centre, and a compromise solution of single-staffing the library with support from the Community Centre staff was proposed as a possibility by the Community.

2.5.11 The Deputy Leader and Head of Library Services subsequently attended a meeting with the management committee of the Centre and local councillors. It was agreed that they would be happy for this proposal to be recommended in the Cabinet report. The caretaker works full-time hours so staff safety would not be an issue. A full-time nursery is also present in the Community Centre building during daytime hours.

2.5.12 This solution would provide social benefits and deliver revenue savings of £5,380 per annum.

2.6 **Gorse Hill Library**

2.6.1 Gorse Hill Library is situated in the Gorse Hill Community Centre, Chapel Street, Gorse Hill. The library is currently open 10 hours per week, over 4 days.

2.6.2 Analysis of the questionnaires filled in at the drop-in consultation sessions and after the public meeting show that of the 45 returns:

- 98% were members of the library.
- 50% used the library weekly
- 42% used other libraries
- 52% thought the current library provision was excellent and 29% thought it was good.

2.6.3 Comments from the questionnaire showed that the service was valued, especially by the elderly and by families with younger children. An after school club meets in the Community Centre on a Monday afternoon, and the library is used by parents and children before the session.

2.6.4 Many people felt there should be a library at Gorse Hill, but some people did say they would use a mobile if it was provided.

2.6.5 Comments about the library being part of a community centre where people meet was not as evident at this library. The community centre is well used by groups and societies, but in many cases, they are not local groups.

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- 2.6.6 A full breakdown of the consultation response for Gorse Hill Library is shown at Appendix 3.
- 2.6.7 Visits to Gorse Hill Library decreased by 13% in the year ending March 2009. In the six months from October 2008 to March 2009, the visits decreased by 21% compared to the previous year.
- 2.6.8 Loans at Gorse Hill Library decreased by 7% in the year ending March 2009. In the six months from October 2008 to March 2009, the loans decreased by 9% compared to the previous year. The single computer available for public use in the library is used less than 1 hour per week.
- 2.6.9 Low volume of use in the current static library does not provide value for money and is unsustainable. The location and size of the current library is small and does not provide a flexible space for further development of the service. The community centre does not have a full-time caretaker or security staff. The building is opened as and when required for people hiring the building, with the hirers then being responsible for health and safety. Sometimes the library is the only room open in the community centre so single staffing the library would be difficult, raising concerns for lone working.
- 2.6.10 The opportunity for partnership working within the community centre has been explored. No partners in the community have come forward with proposals to support the library and only two members of the public have come forward as potential volunteers. As there has been no proposals that can support the library and reduce the revenue costs at Gorse Hill Library, the proposal is to reprovide the static library provision at Gorse Hill, providing a mobile service outside the Gorse Hill Community Centre for an equivalent number of hours.
- 2.6.11 At a meeting of the Gorse Hill Community Centre management committee provision of a stop for the mobile at the Centre was suggested and supported by the management committee.
- 2.6.12 Providing a flexible library service point will ensure more users can access the library service and avoid additional costs associated with a static library service point, book-stock will be more frequently refreshed and it provides the opportunity to deliver the library service to different locations within the area.

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As part of the strategy review there will be further engagement with residents of Gorse Hill.

2.6.13 We would expect to provide a mobile library service to the community on a Saturday and on two weekdays to suit community needs with equivalent opening hours.

2.6.14 There is capacity within the current mobile library schedule to allow this. There would be costs of £6K maximum to provide a driver for some extra hours but savings by closing Gorse Hill library would be £18,440 per annum.

2.7 Diversity Impact Assessment

2.7.1 A diversity impact assessment on the original proposals was carried out in February 2009, and is attached as Appendix 4.

2.8 Next steps – library strategy/vision

2.8.1 A revised library strategy is currently being developed with help from the MLA (Museum, Libraries and Archives Council) and supported by ERS consultants.

2.8.2 The differing offer in the libraries will be part of the review, as a full library provision cannot be offered in all libraries, and partnership working will be explored to develop the full potential of libraries in local communities.

Alternative Options

- Close all three libraries.

Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

The 2009/10 Budget assumed annual savings of £92k per annum. These can be delivered in a full year by a combination of changes that are set out in the table below:

| Library | Staff | Premises | Total |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|---------------------|
| Old Town | £9,750 | - | £9,750 |
| Even Swindon | £5,380 | - | £5,380 |
| Gorse Hill | £15,740 (less £6K mobile) | £2,700 | £18,440 (£6,000) |
| Other Savings (incl. Walcot) | £64,330 | £1,000 | £64,430 |
| Total | | | £92,000 |

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If Cabinet agree to make the changes, they will be implemented part way through 2009/10 resulting in a shortfall in the level of budgeted savings during the current financial year of £34k. This will be managed within the Library Service budget as part of the on-going budget management process and met from savings in book supply contracts, vacancy and recruitment management and reduction in strategy support. Any potential shortfall will be reported as part of the routine Budget Management reports.

Legal / Human Rights Implications

- Legal and Human Rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of this report are compatible with convention rights.

Links to Corporate Plans and Policies (in particular to Swindon 2010 Promises)

- Linked to Promise 16, we will have a new central library by 2008 and in effective local library service with flexible opening hours.

Consultees

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.
- Director of Economic and Cultural Development.
- Head of Culture.

Background Papers and Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Full breakdown of the consultation response for Old Town Library.
- Appendix 2 – Full breakdown of the consultation response for Even Swindon Library.
- Appendix 3 – Full breakdown of the consultation response for Gorse Hill Library.
- Appendix 4 – Diversity Impact Assessment, February 2009.
- Appendix 5 - Loan and visitor statistics for the previous two years
- Background Paper - ERS Consultants Report (Draft)

Key Decision / Decision in Forward Plan

- This is a key decision and is included in the Cabinet Forward Plan for July 2009.

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