

Executive Summary

Swindon Borough Council is in a time of significant change that necessitates the reshaping of the role of the council and its services to respond to current and future needs of Swindon's communities and to its financial context

This document summarises the needs in Swindon, summarises and interprets the statutory duties for Swindon Borough Council as a library authority, and identifies an emerging model as one way that Libraries and Community-based Services could respond to delivering the Vision for Swindon, within the current and future financial context it faces.

The Council has published a Vision for Swindon to 2030, which has a clear focus on Swindon's economic growth. It is clear that local services will need to play a particular role in helping to raise the skills and therefore employment opportunities of local people, in order that they are best able to benefit from a strengthening local economy, and the library service is key to this.

The emerging model presented in this paper is radically different. This is inevitable, given the context local government is having to operate in and any alternatives to the way services are currently designed need to be similarly radical. However, there may be other ways the service could be redesigned to meet the Vision, respond to need, deliver a quality and sustainable service, within the financial envelope for the service by 2020.

The emerging model will form the basis of engagement with Library users, residents, ward members, partners and other stakeholders to develop a sustainable Library and Community Services Strategy for Swindon. Discussion will be actively encouraged to consider what local delivery models could look like in local areas, or if there are any other ideas or proposed approaches which could be considered within the parameters.

This emerging model proposes a way to help achieve the Vision for Swindon by transforming library and other community-based assets to deliver a core service, and then working with local partners and communities to develop locally tailored solutions based on local resources, appetite and need.

*The **Core Service** refocuses the Council's direct involvement on providing access to a core provision of professional and dedicated resources primarily through the **Central Library** - located within 9 miles of all Borough residents and 4 miles of 95% of the Borough's population. The scale of this facility may be reduced to allow resources to be spread across other service points.*

*This will be enhanced by a **Core Plus** provision of a much reduced level of **targeted services and support** to a range of area focused, community based and locally provided services in areas with the highest levels of need.*

*Communities and local groups will be encouraged and supported to develop '**Local Community Service Points**' for library and other community services. Local community service points will be self-managed, resourced and operated by communities, partners or volunteers as part of a **co-located or integrated** offer accessible in local areas through other public and community buildings, in the most appropriate and **sustainable** space for their local area.*

SBC will facilitate and support this transition, encouraging communities who wish to take the lead in developing local solutions to help ensure there is access to provision across the borough. Working in partnership, communities will be able to develop services and support best appropriate to their local needs and priorities in a sustainable format.

During the engagement, more information will be gathered about current users of all library services and activities, to understand their ideas and consult on the potential impacts of this emerging model. The council has conducted an initial Diversity Impact Assessment and aims to specifically engage and consult with those groups who may be affected by this emerging model and consider measures which could be put in place to mitigate any adverse impacts on particular groups.

Local groups and communities will also be encouraged to consider what local delivery models could look like in their local areas, or if they have any other ideas or proposed approaches which could be considered within the financial parameters.

1. Strategic context

The Vision for Swindon, four Priorities, and thirty Pledges are a clear statement of intent about what the Council believes Swindon should look like in the future. The Vision calls for a renewed focus on strategic, Borough-wide priorities, namely; growing the economy; creating jobs; attracting investment; and securing well managed housing growth. It sets out how the Council will shape the Borough, and deliver economic growth that allows communities to prosper, families to live healthy and happy lives, and children to fulfil their potential.

The Vision for Swindon is that:

“By 2030, Swindon will have all of the positive characteristics of a British city with one of the UK’s most successful economies; a low-carbon environment with compelling cultural, retail and leisure opportunities and excellent infrastructure. It will be a model of well managed housing growth that supports and improves new and existing communities.

Swindon will be physically transformed with existing heritage and landmarks complemented by new ones that people who live, work and visit here would recognise and admire. It will remain, at heart, a place of fairness and opportunity where people can aspire to and achieve prosperity, supported by strong civic and community leadership.”

In order to achieve the Vision, the Council has some clear choices to make on behalf of the whole community. To achieve the Vision the council will need to reshape its own role, the role of partners and the role of communities so that residents are best supported. The council will need to provide strategic leadership whilst delivery of services will need to be designed and delivered in partnership with other organisations and communities given the council’s financial position.

2. Financial context

The profile of the Council’s Budget has changed significantly in past 10 years with a reducing element being spent on universal services (such as leisure, waste, grass cutting, libraries etc) each year, and a rising proportion being targeted at specialist services supporting vulnerable people. This trend is expected to continue and quicken over the next four years as demand for services changes and the council responds to meet its statutory obligations.

In 2007-08, over half of the Council’s Budget was spent on universal services plus the core operating costs of the organisation, with that figure being expected to reduce to 21.5% by 2020-21. This means there is a large scale shift of Council funding from universal services that most residents receive towards those that are targeted to support vulnerable people. In response, the council needs to explore different ways of ensuring universal services valued by residents can be delivered at a lower cost to the Borough Council.

In December 2015 the Council's Cabinet confirmed its view that, in order to secure a sustainable future within the Council's overall resources, expenditure on Libraries would need to reduce by around £1.5m from its current level of £2.6m (2014-15 spend) over that period. While such a reduction is dramatic, it is felt to be a realistic basis on which to plan for a future service, as part of an overall approach to community-based services.

The Council needs to balance its statutory duties to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service within this significantly reduced financial envelope.

The financial context and scale of funding change brings the opportunity to set out the vision for libraries and community-based services in 4 years time and to transform the model of service delivery in a managed way rather than subjecting libraries and community-based assets to reactionary service cuts and the on-going erosion of a service.

3. Statutory Duties

Swindon Borough Council has a duty as a Library Authority under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it (section 7), taking into account local needs and within available resources.

7 General duty of library authorities.

- (1) *It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof*

Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

- (2) *In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—*

- (a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and*
- (b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and*
- (c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.*

Swindon Borough Council also has a duty to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The duty relates to different groups who share any of the

“protected characteristics” of age, sex, pregnancy and maternity, disability, race, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, sexual orientation. The Equality Act states that due regard involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport published guidance on 16 December 2015 on Libraries as a statutory service. In examples of decisions made in other areas it is clear that a comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library but that the service is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, and there is a clear link with the availability of council resources in determining what constitutes an efficient service.

To understand how to best respond to its statutory duties within a significantly reduced financial envelope, Swindon Borough Council has completed an assessment of need – profiling the current use of libraries in Swindon and defining the needs of the communities of the borough.

4. Current Library services

The Swindon library service is currently delivered from 15 libraries of different sizes across the borough, as well as a mobile library, online access to resources and a home library provision. Libraries provide a range of services and facilities including reading, information, digital and health and wellbeing offers, and they also provide access to skills development and training, and host a range of events and community activities.

Library buildings are part of a network of over 70 community-based assets that provide a range of services and activities across the Borough, many of which are community led. This includes 15 Libraries, 28 Community – SBC (2) and community operated (26), 8 Youth Centres, 4 Childrens Locality Centres, Community hire facilities e.g. scout huts. Services or support are also accessed from facilities owned or operated by other groups or partners including Strategic partners e.g. police, health, Local partners e.g. Town and Parish councils, special interest groups; Charities e.g. CAB, Credit Union.

If services are co-located in a building, e.g. a library service being offered from a community centre, the offer is not integrated – only co-located. Of the 26 community centres operated by the community there is not a counterpart arrangement in place to support communities to deliver in line with the Council’s wider aims and priorities. Community centres also have a variety of business models, based on different principles and with differing levels of financial return and community benefit / social value.

The Needs Assessment

Swindon Borough Council has conducted an assessment of needs in Swindon.

The Needs Assessment shows there is a range of different service offers and patterns of use for each library. The profile of each library and the heat map of active borrowers show some libraries have

borrowers on an almost borough-wide scale, and other libraries are accessed by a very local population.

A thorough picture has been developed of users who actively borrow items from the library service, and information is available about volumes of users of IT facilities or groups and activities or other events which take place in libraries. More information will be gathered to understand more about the users of IT services and facilities, and those who attend group activities.

The Needs Assessment shows that across the library service, active borrowing of books or resources is broadly accessed by all types of MOSAIC groups across the borough, but there are distinct differences in how each library is used in each area depending on the makeup of their local community. In particular, where communities have higher levels of need or deprivation, these groups are often not active borrowers from the library service.

Whilst the number of visits to Swindon libraries have remained relatively consistent or in slight decline across most of Swindon libraries in the past five years, use of Public Network computers has increased, quite sharply in some libraries.

Libraries as buildings are used for services wider than their original libraries purpose e.g. health and well-being activities, social space, safe public space, locality meetings, free and accessible meeting space for community groups etc. The range of community activities accessed in libraries reflects national trends of libraries playing an increasing role as community bases or hubs of activity.

Four out of Five respondents to the 2014 library user consultation believe it is vitally important to have a library service in their local area. National data shows that may be gap between perception and use of libraries – a study in 2012 showed that 74% of respondents in England felt libraries were ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ for communities while 47% felt they were ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ to them personally.

Some of the current catchment areas of different libraries (70% of the current active borrowers) overlap quite significantly; parts of the town overlap 6 library catchment areas, providing a large choice for communities on which libraries they wish to access. This also demonstrates that whilst many libraries have borrowers who only access that library, there is an ability for some active borrowers to choose their library access point, sometimes accessing several libraries.

5. Need in Swindon

Different communities across the borough have different needs and as Swindon grows the needs of the communities who live, work and study here are changing. Deprivation is a key issue for some small areas in Swindon and the borough has eight LSOAs (small areas) amongst the 10% most deprived nationally. The relative deprivation is particularly severe in the education, skills and training domain, with one LSOA (small area) in Penhill being amongst the 0.1% most deprived small areas in the country.

Other projected changes in need include that there will be much greater growth in the older than the younger generations across the borough.

The current model of library service delivery is aimed at delivering a core library service through multiple delivery points across a range of locations. This model does not enable different levels of services or support to be provided for communities who face more challenges, and in particular, where communities have higher levels of need or deprivation.

6. Strategic response

Given the Vision's focus on Swindon's economic growth, it is clear that local services will need to play a particular role in helping to raise the skills and therefore employment opportunities of local people, in order that they are best able to benefit from a strengthening local economy and the library service is key to this.

It is clear from the needs assessment that aspects of the current services delivered through library buildings are aligned to the Vision's objective of creating a better future for Swindon residents through building on and further enhancing the Borough's economic strength.

With funding for a dedicated, professional library service set to reduce significantly in the future, there is a strong argument that the service should focus its specialist skills on delivering against this objective. Local services would play a particular role in helping to raise the skills and therefore employment opportunities of local people, in order that they are best able to benefit from a strengthening local economy.

Within this context, and the statutory and financial context of the council, an emerging model of Libraries and Community-based Services has been developed as a basis for discussion and engagement with stakeholders. This is one way in which the service could be redesigned to meet the Vision, respond to need, deliver a quality and sustainable service, within the financial envelope for the service by 2020.

7. Emerging model for Library and Community-based Services

The emerging model for Library and Community-based Services is developed around co-locating services and working with communities and local organisations to enable access to them, and focuses core service delivery on helping to raise the skills and therefore employment opportunities of local people, in order that they are best able to benefit from a strengthening local economy, using Library provision as a catalyst to this development.

SBC Core provision

would concentrate the council's financial and staffing resources on the activities offered from **Central Library** as a focal point in Swindon with a professional, staffed library offer for everyone in the Borough to access - **developing a hub** of reading, information, digital and health and wellbeing offers with its costs to be partly subsidised by commercial and other service opportunities operating from the building located within 9 miles of all Borough residents and 4 miles of 95% of the Borough's population.

This could also include **IT access** and digital skills training to support job seekers; **24 hour library** with access to online resources and e-books etc; Support and facilitation of the **home library service** through volunteers to support those who are unable to access service points or provision in their local community.

The current scale of the central library could potentially be reduced to release resources for other targeted services.

Core plus - Targeted services

Provision of a much reduced level of targeted, **tailored service delivery in areas of high need**, supporting communities who are facing the highest levels of deprivation, and lowest levels of education, skills and training.

Targeted service provision will be **peripatetic** and **flexible for changing needs of communities**, using the best delivery mechanism for a local area, in co-ordination with local partners, to best support communities and could be delivered in a variety of settings in a variety of ways.

Local community service points

Alongside the core provision, communities and local groups will be encouraged and supported to develop **local community service points** for library and other community services.

Local community service points will be self-managed, resourced and operated by communities, partners or volunteers as part of a co-located or integrated offer accessible in local areas through other public and community buildings, in the most appropriate and sustainable space for their local area.

SBC will provide **professional expertise for library services and development** – enabling access to and promotion of national initiatives such as reading challenges, as well as **capacity and skills building support in local communities**.

SBC will also support community centres to become community hubs.

The activities currently taking place in libraries often mirror activities or aspirations of community centres and changing the model of library services offers an opportunity – a catalyst – for community centres to develop and enhance their offer for local communities.

SBC will also ensure the community-based assets it owns and supports are best placed to contribute to the future service delivery for libraries and community-based services as co-located service points for local communities – working with best appropriate local partners to ensure sustainability of community assets and services in the local area.

A set of high-level principles will be developed, working with existing community centre operators and other partners to set out what a successful community centre looks like and how this should be measured, and SBC will support community centres to transition to this. This needs to go in to the Cabinet paper.

8. Next steps – engagement

During the proposed Engagement February-May 2016, the council will discuss this emerging model with library users and communities, groups, partners, schools and other stakeholders. More information will also be gathered about current users of all library services and activities, to understand their ideas and consult on the potential impacts of this emerging model.

The council has conducted an initial Diversity Impact Assessment and aims to specifically engage and consult with those groups who may be affected by this proposed strategy and consider measures which could be put in place to mitigate any adverse impacts on particular groups.

Local groups and communities will also be encouraged to consider what local delivery models could look like in their local areas, or if they have any other ideas or proposed approaches which could be considered to meet the Vision, respond to need, deliver a quality and sustainable service, within the financial envelope for the service by 2020.

9. Transition

Transition facilitation from SBC could include;

- Provision of books and equipment to pump-prime locally-based services, cash flow stepped-down council-run existing services over a three year period
- Section 106 or capital funding may also be available to create multi-purpose buildings– one off funding amount to be defined and will be dependent on the partnerships involved. There would also be opportunity for community asset transfers with the right and appropriate community group or local organisation, with the ultimate focus to be on co-located community hubs to develop the best, sustainable solution
- SBC will also support community centres to become community hubs, ensuring the community-based assets it owns and supports are best placed to contribute to the future service delivery for libraries and community-based services as co-located service points for local communities – working with best appropriate local partners to ensure sustainability of community assets and services in the local area.

SBC will support the development of and transition to the future delivery model. However, where any service point or provision which is not supported locally or transferred to a partner at the end of the transition timescale, this could close. Timescales for this have not been determined but would be within the 4 year implementation window of the strategy.

Questions

What could the emerging model look like in practice?

Different models of access to a library service are currently available across Swindon in different forms

Whilst SBC is keen to seek views on the emerging model at an early stage of its development, some potential options for what the model could look like in practice are set out below to help discussions, including;

- Community book drops hosted by partners - access to books, self-service machines, hosting volunteers to lead national literacy initiatives
- Hosting of IT terminals by partners - partners to provide support and training for customers to use IT, self-serve machines have ability to be used for variety of council services and payments.
- Hosted activities e.g. Story and Rhymetime, knit and natter - run by volunteers hosted by communities or local organisations

This approach would have the potential to make library services available across a much greater number of hours, linked to other activities including potentially other Council services.

This would enable the SBC core plus service provision to be targeted in areas of highest need. Services would be peripatetic in nature and effectively targeted to visit and provide services and support through partner and community facilities. This could include potentially pre-schools and nurseries, schools, community centres, care homes – wherever is needed to help people most in need to access library services, develop their skills employment opportunities, in order that they are best able to benefit from a strengthening local economy.

Will this emerging model work?

Examples already exist in Swindon that begin to demonstrate the potential of such an approach of working with communities to develop locally tailored offers, including Walcot and Even Swindon Libraries where volunteers support and enhance core staffing levels. A number of communities and volunteers also support community book drops including Blunsdon Parish Council, Gorse Hill Baptist church and the Grange Leisure Centre, operated by Stratton St Margaret Parish Council. The Grange Leisure Centre has co-located the book drop with a community café, point of contact and the community has enhanced the offer with donations of their own books. Pinetrees Community Centre has a library, community café and other facilities and acts as a community hub for information, advice and a place for the community to come together.

Although local community provision cannot be considered part of the council's core statutory provision, community groups and partners will be able to provide access to a less formal service, promoting the community services and social activities currently accessed in libraries.

This will in turn promote the resilience of the community hubs or community centres, enabling them to benefit from the co-location of activities and resources, enabling users to access multiple services and activities in their local community.

Will everyone be able to access Central Library?

The council has a significantly reduced funding envelope for library and community based services across the borough and the service has to be radically transformed to meet that challenge. The balance of the core offer and support to transition to local community service points will enable communities to find the best way to integrate services and find a sustainable model of operation.

As when any new model is developed, the impact on existing service users must be understood, carefully considered and any actions taken to mitigate any potential adverse impacts. A Diversity Impact Assessment has identified a number of groups who could potentially be adversely impacted by this proposed emerging model and the engagement phase will specifically engage with these groups or representative bodies to understand the impact and any potential mitigations which could be developed. These groups include; young children, teenagers, older people and disabled users.

Whilst Central Library is not used by all active borrowers, there are borrowers who travel to Central from all over the borough. In the 2014 consultation with library users, 29% of respondents used central on at least a weekly basis, and over half used Central at least monthly.

The Library user consultation in 2014 showed that around half of respondents indicated an interest in volunteering in a library. Although this was limited to expressions of general interest rather than outright enthusiasm, it shows that library users value the service and there is potential for discussion about how communities can play an increased role in access to services in local areas.