

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL



Somerset **LIBRARIES**

LIBRARIES SERVICE RE-DESIGN: SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL'S SUMMARY RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

October 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document sets out a high level summary, for information only, of the County Council's response to the public consultation exercise. Many points were made by respondents to the consultation, and all of these have been considered carefully. Consultation feedback has played a key role in shaping the detailed assessments of need, access and impact that underpin the recommendations - an approach that has influenced every aspect of the service re-design proposals. The summary presented below takes a very high-level view and will be used to provide feedback to the many individuals and groups who spent some considerable time completing the questionnaires, giving comments and setting out their views and suggestions.
- 1.2. The summary information is being provided to Members to assist their understanding of how the proposals have developed over time and in response to feedback from the community. Decision makers should not have regard to the information presented here when considering the recommendations, and must base their judgments on the information set out in Appendix 3 (the consultation report), the assessments of need and equalities impact set out in Appendices 2 and 4 respectively, and the assessment of access and other considerations within Appendix 1.
- 1.3. The 'consultation feedback' summaries represent themes that have emerged across the public consultation (and, in one case, a particularly strong response on a specific issue relating to Shepton Mallet library) and are not taken directly from individual responses.

County Council's Response to the Consultation

Public Consultation Feedback	County Council Response	How original consultation proposals have been modified
<p>The council should find other ways of making savings, libraries should not be earmarked for potential closure.</p> <p>A library service should be delivered through library buildings - not changed to outreach or mobile models.</p>	<p>We no longer have the funding to provide the services that we used to, and we must live within our means. Evidence shows that some of our smaller library buildings are not well-used, and these don't provide good value for money. The network is over 40 years old, and we need to review where we fund library buildings, in order to ensure this much valued service is modernised, sustainable, and meets local needs effectively. This means that we are having to put forward some recommendations which could result in library closures. We understand that this will disappoint many people.</p> <p>However, after reflecting on this feedback, we have concluded that library outreach and mobile services are better suited to delivering services where there is reasonably good access to other library buildings, or in smaller communities with lower levels of need. We now view these alternative ways of providing library services as <i>complementing</i> access to library buildings, rather than as a replacement for library buildings. The recommendations we are putting forward place fewer libraries at risk of closure than the original consultation options proposed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library Outreach and / or Mobile Library Services were proposed as options for providing services in 7 communities (Dulverton, Cheddar, Wellington, Ilminster, Shepton Mallet, Martock and Crewkerne). Having considered consultation feedback, we are recommending that library buildings in these locations are maintained as part of the council network. • The final recommendations take a more holistic view of library services - the proposals would ensure that reasonable access to a library building is provided across Somerset, and is complemented by mobile, digital or outreach services to meet specific needs or mitigate impacts on vulnerable groups. • The recommendations include proposals to find £75,000 of savings from the library service in other ways, which helps support the library service and helps retain some existing library buildings.

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<p>Libraries aren't just a book-lending service. They provide real value to communities and play a key role in society - for example by preventing loneliness, supporting health and education, and instilling a love of reading in our children.</p>	<p>This feedback is really pleasing - it is exactly the vision we have for our library service. We've carried out a lot of careful analysis to make sure that people have reasonable access to library buildings and for those who have more difficulty accessing a library, some services will be provided in other ways. We also see new Library Outreach Services as being key in providing wider benefits to people who aren't currently using library services. The proposals will provide new services in areas where they can make the most difference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consulted on options for change in 7 communities, but are recommending retaining library buildings in these communities, because they will deliver important outcomes - for example, combating social isolation to help health and wellbeing, supporting children's education, and helping people to overcome digital exclusion. • We would provide additional outreach services to address social isolation (above what was originally proposed) in Somerton and Sunningdale (Yeovil) if the library buildings close. This is to address themes that came through consultation feedback in these areas.
<p>Public transport in Somerset is expensive and time-consuming - being able to walk to the library is really important.</p>	<p>The consultation feedback has reinforced our need to really consider the impact on people who don't have access to vehicles - especially those for whom public transport can be prohibitively expensive. We understand that this isn't just about households that don't have a car - it's also about families where one car is used for commuting in the week, leaving young children and primary carers at home with no access to a vehicle.</p> <p>We no longer have the funding to provide the services that we used to, and this means that we can't maintain walking access for everyone who can currently walk to a library building. However, we have tried to maximise walking access to library buildings in the design of proposals. We will support communities to develop Community Library Partnerships and if these prove not possible,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consulted on proposals for change for 22 libraries but are recommending retaining library buildings in 7 of these communities across the county. We estimate that over 55,000 people live within a 2-mile walking distance of one of these 7 libraries.

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	<p>library services will continue to be delivered in communities via alternative means such as outreach, digital and mobile services.</p>	
<p>The ICT facilities in libraries are invaluable for older people, and those on low incomes (especially unemployed and homeless people), and this service won't be available through a mobile library.</p>	<p>We no longer have the funding to provide the services that we used to, and have to put the library service on a sustainable footing. We are having to look hard at areas where services aren't well-used. Over 125,000 hours were spent using public computer access across Somerset libraries in 2017/18, but 13 of the 15 libraries where we are proposing changes only accounted for 3% of these. In the other 2 communities (accounting for 6% of the total hours used) the recommendations would maintain some public computer network access, as an outreach service.</p> <p>Statistics aren't everything, and we do understand the value of ICT facilities in our smaller libraries, and the significant impact that withdrawing these facilities can have on some individuals, however few in number. The proposals ensure public computer access would continue to be provided in Community Library Partnerships, as part of our 'Core Offer', if these can be established.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consulted on proposals for change for 22 libraries, but are recommending retaining library buildings in 7 of these communities across the county. These 7 libraries accounted for 8% of the total number of hours spent on our public computer access service in 2017/18.
<p>Library staff are valued - they make a real difference to people's lives. Volunteer run libraries won't provide the same level of service and may not be realistic or viable.</p>	<p>We're very proud of our frontline library staff, and it has been fantastic to hear how valued they are by the public. We think that volunteer run libraries can work well in some communities - Porlock being a good example. But, having reflected on the consultation feedback and discussed this issue with community and stakeholder groups, we recognise that volunteer-led community library models might be more difficult to operate in larger, busier libraries.</p> <p>Through the consultation, we've gained new insights into the value that a paid, skilled workforce can bring to smaller communities too. The proposals provide training and ongoing support to volunteers as part of our 'Core Offer' to Community Library Partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations on the support we would provide to Community Library Partnerships (set out in section 5) now include proposals to provide match funding for staffing in larger communities, to try to incentivise investment in paid staff.

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	<p>We're also recommending that more funding be offered to Community Library Partnerships in key communities to help support this further.</p>	
<p>The County Council should use libraries to generate more income - by charging for services, running cafés, sharing buildings or asking for donations / sponsorship.</p>	<p>We agree that generating more income is a much better option than reducing services, and we're constantly looking for opportunities to do this. We're not allowed to charge for membership and quite a few library services have to be provided free of charge by law. However, we do raise a lot of income already, and compare well with other similar authorities in this area. This includes income from sharing buildings (we do this in 9 of our libraries, and we're actively pursuing opportunities in a further 5 locations).</p> <p>The consultation feedback has provided new insights which will really help us to continuously improve our ability to generate income. In particular, we are proposing to take forward an initiative to raise income from donations and philanthropic giving. The proposal has come directly from our consideration of consultation responses, and discussions with stakeholders and members of the public at the drop-in events and public meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cabinet report includes a new recommendation, which has emerged directly from the consultation, to develop an approach and a policy on donations and philanthropic giving for the library service. It's a good idea that has come out of the consultation, and we hope it will provide much needed income to help our libraries to thrive in the future.
<p>Housing and population growth is significant (more significant than estimated in the pre-consultation needs assessment). We need more libraries for a growing population.</p>	<p>We've considered the feedback provided on housing growth carefully, and we've revised our approach to the needs assessment in the light of feedback. The recommended library network is based on a robust needs assessment, which includes an analysis of potential housing and population growth.</p> <p>It's really difficult to forecast the amount of housing growth accurately, but our analysis of local plan target housing increases indicates that across all of the communities where we currently have libraries, over 40,000 houses could be built over the next 10 years. We estimate that over 90% of this growth is likely to take</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendations to retain library buildings in Cheddar, Wellington, Ilminster, Crewkerne and Shepton Mallet were influenced directly by consultation feedback on housing growth - these communities all originally had options for change proposed in the consultation.

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	place across the 19 communities where we are recommending libraries will continue to be fully funded.	
The County Council should run library buildings, but a Community Library Partnership would be much better than no library at all. The Council should provide a higher level of funding to support the viability of Community Library Partnerships.	We will support all Community Library Partnerships with a 'core offer' of technical support, book stock and ICT services, but with the reduction in funding we are facing, we cannot afford to provide direct financial support to all of the Community Library Partnerships we are seeking. However, where local needs are higher, access to alternative libraries is more difficult, and where libraries currently provide good value for money, the recommendations offer financial support over and above the Core Offer. We are recommending this approach because it represents good value for money, and because we agree with the view that further investment will help ensure the viability of Community Library Partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the 15 communities where we are proposing to try to establish Community Library Partnerships, we have increased the amount of direct funding over that originally proposed in the consultation by more than 70%.
The library in Shepton Mallet should remain in the town centre.	<p>We've listened to the concerns people have expressed about the proposed relocation of Shepton Mallet library to the Shape Mendip hub site, and the impact this could have on the town centre economy. We have an ambition for libraries to be at the heart of communities, and recognise the benefits that libraries can bring to town centre regeneration.</p> <p>However, usage of the current library in Shepton Mallet isn't as high as in comparable communities, and the current site is expensive compared to other libraries. We've carefully considered the feedback, and the issues with the current site, and we still recommend it's important that Shepton Mallet library moves to a location that is sustainable for the long term. We take the view that any new location should offer opportunities to improve the current service (particularly by increasing opening hours to try to improve usage) in a cost-effective, affordable way. We've had a very productive discussion with stakeholders and service users in Shepton Mallet, and hope we can work in partnership to develop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are recommending retaining a council-run library building in Shepton Mallet, but we want to take more time to carefully consider its location. We are proposing to spend 6 months developing ideas that have emerged through the consultation process, before making a decision on the relocation of the library by June 2019. If recommendations are agreed, we will work with Shepton Mallet Town Council, Mendip District Council and the Friends of Shepton Mallet library to try to find the right solution for Shepton Mallet library.

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	an option that meets our objectives for the library service, as well as local objectives for town centre regeneration.	