

## **Get Involved: Developing Libraries for the Future in Buckinghamshire**

### **Introduction**

Developing new, low cost and sustainable models of delivery is a high priority across the council. The library service has reduced management costs and generated efficiencies totalling £1.2 million over the last year and we will continue to generate this type of efficiencies year on year. However to deliver already identified and anticipated future savings over the coming years Buckinghamshire's library service need to develop a radical strategy to ensure libraries in Buckinghamshire have a sustainable future.

We know that libraries are for most people a valued service and are important to Buckinghamshire residents as a social and community space. We also know that during the Bucks Debate library services was one of the hottest topics of debate – discussing the value of the service to individuals and families and options for the future. Whilst it was top of the list for a community led service for some, others argued that this service is one of those that families and individuals value the least.

We want the future library service to be at the heart of Buckinghamshire communities and for our customers to have a voice and a stake in their local library; to be able to deliver a library service that is equal to the local demand and need as identified by its residents.

### **The 'county and community' idea**

The 'Get Involved' consultation will propose the idea of a 'county and community' model which we want to develop in partnership with local communities across Buckinghamshire enabling them to feel ownership and the ability to improve on the current services they receive.

The '**county and community**' model groups existing libraries into the following categories based on the scale of provision and their catchment population.

The '**county**' service is proposed to consist of two centres of excellence at Aylesbury and High Wycombe, as well as district libraries in Amersham, Beaconsfield, Buckingham, Chesham, Hazlemere, Marlow and Princes Risborough. We also have three libraries that have been developed over the last three years with funding from the Big Lottery. Bourne End, Burnham and Micklefield libraries will remain as part of the 'county' service, and we will look to build on the existing community involvement to develop ongoing sustainable models for the future.

The '**community**' service aspires to engage with the local communities to develop community libraries, or community partnership models enabling local residents and community groups/ organisations to build upon a library service that is developed according

to their local need. The following are areas where we propose to work with the local community to seek opportunities for lower cost ways in continuing to have a library service:

|                 |                   |                 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Castlefield     | Chalfont St Peter | Farnham Common  |
| Flackwell Heath | Gerrards Cross    | Great Missenden |
| Haddenham       | Iver Heath        | Ivinghoe        |
| Long Crendon    | Stokenchurch      | Wendover        |
| Wing            | Winslow           |                 |

The 'county' aspect of the model will also include the library IT network, inter - library lending and online information services. It will also ensure that excluded and isolated residents can access library services through the Home Library service and the mobile libraries. These services will be available to all community options for delivering libraries for the future of Buckinghamshire.

The focus of this consultation is to consult and engage with individuals, local community groups, local businesses and partner organisations to develop lower cost ways of delivering a local service on these 14 community library sites.

We have a consultation document that describes the range of different community partnership models that might be developed, refers to existing community library partnerships and emphasises that varying models will be developed in a way that is appropriate to local need.

### Options for change

The options that we want to build upon and engage residents in discussion throughout the next 12 weeks are as follows:

- Community led libraries – libraries that are staffed and run by local residents, parishes and or community groups. In most cases these become registered charities to help raise funds to support the library. We currently have three different community libraries within Buckinghamshire whom we are working with to develop new sustainable partnership models. This option could be open to flexible support and grant agreements with the county council.

The existing Community libraries in Buckinghamshire have been successful in promoting real civic pride and community engagement. There is a real and personal benefit for the residents who volunteer in the library and for the community as a whole the libraries become a focal point for community spirit.

- Community Partnerships – where the council and another organisation or community group share facilities to generate revenue savings (either in the existing library building, or sharing another premises). Again we already have examples of these across the library service working with Thames Valley Police, District Councils and Sure Start children's centres to name just a few.

- Flexible options - these are many and varied and can include examples of libraries being mainly staffed by volunteers with a level of support from the county (such as a coordinator to oversee a few local libraries, IT support, training, low level financial support).

We currently have over 600 volunteers across the library service. We would look to develop this further working with local voluntary organisations as well as individuals who express an interest in helping us to build and improve on the community library service.

We know that each community is different and so we will be flexible in seeking to develop new community partnerships to deliver low cost/ sustainable library services.

These options are aiming to reach low cost, not no cost, libraries for the future and where possible we want to be able to make savings without having to close libraries. However, where alternative and sustainable models cannot be identified the closure of libraries will be considered.

### **A Statutory duty to consult**

The public consultation on the model for developing libraries for the future in Buckinghamshire will take place for a 12 week period between **9<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011**.

A *Consultation Plan* has been produced, which involves a launch event, and smaller consultation meetings around the county – one in each of the 17 community areas during November and December. In addition to events held by the council we will offer to attend local Parish Councils, Local Area Forums and other public meetings to engage in a discussion.

Following this, individual meetings and further discussions will be held throughout the consultation period with individuals, community groups and local businesses/ services. In addition, an FAQ sheet will be prepared and a survey questionnaire.

The questionnaire and consultation leaflet will be available in hard copy and electronically on the Council's website.

### **How to get involved**

We will be asking residents, community groups, local businesses and partners to get involved by responding to the questionnaire online, in hard copy and attending a public event to find out more. We want to hear their views on library partnerships, community involvement and the proposed 'county and community' idea.

### **Partnership Working and the bigger picture**

The strategy to develop libraries for the future is an opportunity to increase and realise the benefits of partnership working which will be critical to the delivery of this model. We have developed partnerships with Children's Centres, District Councils and Thames Valley Police to bring added value to our libraries and there are already several self managed community libraries models in existence within Buckinghamshire.

We have been pursuing local partnership opportunities in community areas already, for example,



- AVDC have now moved their local Winslow office into the library bringing a revenue contribution.
- Discussions are underway in Ivinghoe about a new delivery model involving the Post Office, community shop and the library.
- In Farnham Common Thames Valley Police and the Sure Start children's centre are already sharing the library facilities as their main office base in the local area.

Specific organisations, stakeholders and potential partners will be approached on a more formal basis and meetings arranged where possible. Negotiations with local communities, charity groups and other partners will go on throughout the proposed period of public consultation. The commitments they would be willing to make will be factored into the production of the full business case for consideration by the County Council in March 2011.

We have been working very closely with the current community libraries, understanding their different operating models, developing new agreements and gaining their support in helping roll out a new model across the county.

### **The bigger picture**

As part of the Big Society drive to empower local communities the government are asking us to encourage people to get more involved in their local community and also identify where savings can be made. As part of this we are asking the local community to get involved as much as they can during this consultation to tell us what their local needs are and where we can work together to make savings. It is important to note that we are not asking them to do it all and there would always be a level of support from the council for any of the options.

The Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and Museum, Libraries and Archive (MLA) have developed a national support programme for library authorities and are supporting 10 authorities in the first wave. We applied to be one of the pilots but were not chosen as our proposal was already well developed and they wanted a spread of new types of model and representation across the country. The MLA are however asking for our support in developing the community library model.

A number of authorities have now announced their proposals for their library services which include closures, staff reductions and greater use of volunteers. The messages from DCMS are about finding local solutions. We want to develop community partnership models to reduce the risk of having to do this.