

**Central
Bedfordshire
Libraries**

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Library Service Strategy 2012

Find out more at:

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/libraries

Foreword

Libraries in Central Bedfordshire are recognised as an invaluable community service providing access to learning, information and culture for all. It is because of this that the Council has decided that no library should close and that the service should seek to improve access and consider methods of extending reach into local communities.

It is clear that our libraries are valued by residents and this can be seen in the increasing usage of both our buildings and online library services.

It has been recognised, however, that libraries will need to become more efficient to contribute to local government savings targets and modernise in order to meet the future needs of residents. The 'modernisation' agenda is one which particularly resonated with respondents in the 'Libraries for the Future' consultation exercise, to which 2200 people contributed.

We have listened to residents views and have embedded them into this strategy. These include ensuring that libraries:

- Maintain book lending which is valued
- Continue to help children, young people and adults to improve skills and learn
- Have suitably trained staff to deliver services
- Extend their reach even further in Central Bedfordshire to make them more accessible

What has emerged is an ambitious and challenging vision for Central Bedfordshire libraries but one that has the backing of both the Council and, we believe, the public.

It only remains for me to express my gratitude to everyone who has given their time and ideas contributing to this library strategy – I look forward to working with the library service on your behalf in future.

Councillor Brian Spurr
Executive Member Sustainable Communities Services

1. Introduction

This strategy sets out the vision and ambitions for Central Bedfordshire Library Service for the next 15 years, building on the service's current strong foundations. The strategy will see the Council continuing to provide a comprehensive library service to all residents, whilst also ensuring that it is more relevant, efficient and sustainable.

Our vision is to deliver a “vibrant, high quality, relevant and sustainable library service for the people of Central Bedfordshire for the 21st century” by:

- Involving local people in making decisions about their library
- Being accessible when, where, and how people want
- Helping children, young people, and adults to improve skills
- Modernising the service, finding new ways to provide better services and save money
- Delivering a library service that is tailored to local people

The challenge for the service will be to deliver the strategy in a period of financial stringency. Central Bedfordshire Council will have to reduce its budget by £40 million in the next four years and some of these savings must come from the library service. The library service will deliver over £550,000 of efficiency savings by March 2014 without closing any of our libraries.

2. Our Statutory Role

Local authorities are obliged by law to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service under the terms of the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. The Act requires local authorities to provide a free lending and information service and appropriate access to meet the general and special requirements of adults and children who live, work or study in the area. There are no national standards for library provision.

As a result, library services across the country are not all the same. Services are shaped by factors such as local policy, customer need and, in some cases, historical developments. The Secretary of State has the power to intervene if he believes that a local authority is not providing a “comprehensive and efficient” service under the terms of the Act but such intervention is rare.

3. Where we are now

Central Bedfordshire has 12 libraries, supports a Library Access Point, a housebound and Library Link service and an online Virtual Library. The libraries are situated in an authority which is predominantly rural, relatively affluent, has pockets of deprivation and has an ageing population. 26,000 new dwellings are planned for the authority between 2001 and 2021.

Central Bedfordshire Libraries offer a wide range of activities in support of the Council's political priorities for the medium term, including delivery of a key universal service, offering good value for money and enhancing Central Bedfordshire as a place to live and work.

The public perception of the library service is very good, customer satisfaction levels are at 93% for adults and 90% for children and the number of visits to libraries increased by 13% between 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Central Bedfordshire Libraries, Bedford Borough Libraries and Luton Cultural Trust Libraries share 'back office' services across the three authorities known as Hub Services.

4. The Challenges we face

It is clear that the service faces a number of challenges in the future, these include:

- The need to market the service more effectively
- The need to modernise the service and buildings and update equipment
- Concerns about the levels of fees and charges
- Requests to increase opening hours
- Spending constraints in a time of austerity for local government
- Learning from emerging national best practice in the libraries field
- Managing developing technologies such as e-books and their impact on services
- A need to manage tensions between those who want the service to change and those who do not and the different expectations of the different user and age groups
- Challenges arising from the rural nature of the area, particularly as a result of the cessation of the mobile library service
- The needs of an ageing population, particularly in respect of the capacity and cost of delivering services to people that are housebound and unable to physically visit a library
- Areas where deprivation and unemployment are significant, particularly in respect of Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard, Sandy, and Flitwick and how the service can better engage these groups
- Areas in the authority that have limited coverage and access to services including Aspley and Woburn, Caddington, Cranfield and Marston, Eaton Bray, Heath and Reach, Northill, Potton and Sandy wards
- Under use of libraries by disadvantaged groups such as people living in accommodation designed for older people and those living in brand new developments

5. What we will do

We commit to deliver this strategy through five priorities:

Priority 1: Involving local people in making decisions about their library:

- Support and encourage people to get involved in the delivery of library services
- Ensure people have opportunities to tell us what they think about the service

Priority 2: Be accessible when, where, and how people want:

- Keep our libraries open and find new places and ways to offer services
- Provide better services for people who find it hard to get to a library or to use a library
- Enhance the online 'virtual library' which can be accessed at any time
- Be better at telling people what the library offers

Priority 3: Help children, young people, and adults to improve skills and learn:

- To read and to enjoy reading
- To develop skills that will help them get a job
- To use the latest information technology

Priority 4: Modernise the service, and find new ways to provide better services and save money:

- Ensure the service is run efficiently and provides value for money
- Use new technology like self-service and e-books
- Share library buildings to provide other services that people want locally
- Look for opportunities to create modern libraries when town centres are being redeveloped

Priority 5: Deliver a tailored library service to local people:

- Provide individual plans for the development of each library service in Central Bedfordshire

6. How we arrived at these priorities

Throughout 2011 Central Bedfordshire Libraries undertook a service wide review which consisted of five components:

- Market research 'The Big Library Debate' conducted over the summer of 2011 undertaken with library users and non-users, stakeholders and internal and external partners
- Information gathering and needs analysis
- A review of best practice and an options analysis for service delivery
- 'Libraries for the Future' public consultation, October 2011 – January 2012
- Review of systems, processes and staffing to identify how efficiencies can be delivered

The aim of the review was to ensure:

- We deliver our statutory duties whilst providing a high quality service in the most cost effective manner, in order to meet local needs
- We make the best use of assets and increase their impact for the benefit of local communities
- That the service is flexible, adaptable and fit for the future
- That the service is accessible to all, supports the most vulnerable and individuals as required throughout their lives

We will continue to engage residents to ensure we deliver what people want.

7. How does our strategy compare to what is happening nationally?

In 2010, the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals¹ published guidance for local councils which said that a good public library service would deliver::

- "A positive future for children and young people
- A fulfilling life for older people
- Strong, safe and sustainable communities
- Promotion of local identity and community pride
- Learning, skills and workforce development

¹ (Source: What makes a good library service? CILIP, 2010)

- Health improvements and wellbeing
- Equality, community cohesion and social justice
- Economic regeneration”

The DCMS² suggested that libraries should provide a core offer including:

- Library membership from birth; and opportunity to be a member of all libraries in England
- Opportunity for the public to help shape the service; and services that reach out to local people
- Free access to a range and quality of book stock and online resources and information; 24-hour access through online catalogues and services; and access to the national book collection
- Connecting a community of readers through reading groups, activities and recommendations
- Free internet access for all and help to get online
- Commitment to customer service and expert, helpful staff
- A safe local space that is accessible and convenient; and flexible opening hours to suit local need
- Links to other public services and opportunities

8. What will success look like?

We have set an ambitious target to maintain customer satisfaction levels at **93%** and increase library service usage by **20%** by March 2016.

² (Source: The modernisation review of public libraries – a policy statement London, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2011).

9. How we will deliver the priorities?

The remainder of the strategy outlines the key actions we believe we need to take to help us transform the library service.

Priority 1: Involve local people in making decisions about their library			
Actions/Requirements	Outcomes and Timescales	How will it be measured*	Who will we work with
<i>Support and encourage people to get involved in the delivery of library services</i>			
Develop a volunteer strategy and increase the use of volunteers to extend the reach of the service through a range of activities	Increased number of volunteers	S Increase in number of volunteer hours in library service.	Volunteer Centres Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and others
Explore options to develop Library Access Points with local communities, particularly in areas where there are 'cold spots' in library provision.	Library Access Points in current 'cold spots' in the authority	S Visitor numbers and issues.	Town and Parish Councils Schools Community Centres C.B.C. teams.
<i>Ensure people have opportunities to tell us what they think about the service</i>			
Engage with the whole community to seek views on the development of services (users, non-users, under represented groups) through a Library Engagement Strategy.	Library offer shaped by local needs and communities Active groups promoting their local library.	S Increase in library visitor numbers and issues. Maintain customer satisfaction.	C.B.C. Communications.
Establish library groups, for example in support of library plans for new buildings.		S Residents survey Visitor numbers and issues.	

*S – short term (2012 – 2015), M - medium term (2015- 2018), L – Long term (2018 onwards)

Priority 2: Be accessible when, where, and how people want				
Actions/Requirements	Outcomes and Timescales		How will it be measured	Who will we work with
Keep our libraries open and find new places and ways to offer services				
Look for opportunities to create modern libraries when town centres are being redeveloped (town centre planning) e.g. Dunstable	Plan and develop replacement libraries	M	Opening of alternative libraries.	CBC Economic Development and Physical Regeneration
Capital investment to revitalize and modernize library buildings	Attractive, modernised buildings	S	Increased usage. Customer surveys.	C.B.C. Assets Management.
Work with other agencies and C.B.C departments to explore opportunities for co-location and shared premises	Efficient use of C.B.C. & economies of scale. Increased visibility of C.B.C. in communities	M	Efficiency savings on buildings / overheads etc.	C.B.C. and external partners C.B.C. Assets Management.
Provide better services for people who find it hard to get to or use a library				
Review Housebound / Library Link Service across the authority to provide efficient 'joined up' service.	Maintain service standards to housebound users but deliver service at a lower cost	S	Customer satisfaction surveys. Reduced service delivery cost.	Potentially Volunteer Centres, Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity.
Enhance the online Virtual Library				
Improve Virtual Library service and plan with implementation of Arena software.	More interactive functions / personalisation.	S	Increase in usage of the Virtual Library	Shared Hub Service.
Be better at telling people what the library offers				
Develop a core offer and service wide standards.	Increase in take up of library services.	S	Increase in usage. Maintain customer satisfaction	C.B.C. Communications and Human Resources.
Develop marketing and communication strategy to include e-mail communication/ database of users / newsletters / social media.	Increase in take up of library services. Staff ownership of performance targets.	S	Increase in visitor numbers, issues & People's Network uptake. Reduction in postage costs.	C.B.C. Communications.
Set local performance targets in consultation with those who deliver them.	Increase in take up of library services.	S	Increase in usage	Library Managers, Operations and Service Teams.

*S – short term (2012 – 2015), M - medium term (2015- 2018), L – Long term (2018 onwards)

Priority 3: Help children, young people, and adults to improve skills and learn

Actions/Requirements	Outcomes and Timescales	How will it be measured	Who will we work with
To read and enjoy reading			
Revise Reading Strategy to reflect priority work with hard to reach groups, adult learners and people from the more deprived wards.	Contribute to educational attainment and literacy levels through case studies.	S Increase in MOSAIC representation profiles of people from more deprived backgrounds.	Library Service Teams Adult Learning Providers FE Colleges.
Establish new partnerships to support language and literacy development for all ages.	Partnership agreements.	S Increase in number of learning sessions delivered by partners.	Learning Providers.
Maintain Central Bedfordshire's high performance in Summer Reading Challenge (SRC) for Children by providing resources to promote challenge.	Children maintain reading / literacy levels across summer period.	S Numbers of children taking up / completing challenge.	Schools.
Expand magazine collections in libraries and other materials which engage people with lower literacy levels by re-prioritising resources funding.		S Take up of 6 Book Challenge / number of visits by literacy groups to libraries.	Library Managers Service Development Teams.
Encourage more book borrowing by improving promotion and display via staff training plan.		S Increased issues.	
To develop skills that will help them get a job			
Service Development Plan focused on delivery of skills and learning priorities.	Contribute to Increased skills and literacy levels.	S Number of skills and learning events / numbers participating. Use of Generic Learning Outcomes to provide qualitative data.	Learning and Skills Organisations Adult Learning Providers Learning Partnership.
Work with other agencies / services to develop learning and skills delivery partnerships, develop service level agreements.		S Number of Service Level Agreements in place.	Learning and Skills Providers and networks Learning Partnership.
Positive activities and interventions to ensure the engagement of children, young people and adult learners by development plan priorities re-aligned.	Contribute to Increased skills and literacy levels.	S Number of learning events / numbers participating. Use of Generic Learning Outcomes to provide qualitative data.	Children's Centres Schools.
Provide a range of opportunities for work experience and volunteering in libraries.	Contribute to increase in skills base and young people's employability.	S Number of volunteer hours in libraries. Establishment of apprentice posts in service.	Volunteer Centres.

*S – short term (2012 – 2015), M - medium term (2015- 2018), L – Long term (2018 onwards)

Priority 4: Modernise the service, and find new ways to provide better services and save money

Actions/Requirements	Outcomes and Timescales		How will it be measured	Who will we work with
Ensure the service is run efficiently and provides value for money				
Undertake a review of business processes.	Customer focused service.	S	Efficiency savings. Maintain customer satisfaction.	C.B.C. IT Library Managers, Operations and Service Teams.
Review staffing structure, roles and levels to deliver strategy via a staffing review and Learning and Development Plan.	New staffing structure in place.	S	Success against priorities in library strategy.	C.B.C. Human Resources.
Improve stock selection and delivery arrangements. Review of supplier selection and direct stock delivery options.	Streamlined stock processes.	S	Efficiency savings. Efficiency savings on buildings, overheads etc	Hub Services C.B.C partners
Use new technology like self-service and e-books				
Install RFID self-service technology in libraries through capital investment of £450,000.	Savings in staffing. Improvements in customer experience.	S	Efficiency savings on staffing achieved. Maintain customer satisfaction.	Hub Service C.B.C. Procurement C.B.C. IT C.B.C. Assets Management.
Develop an e-book lending service following emergence of appropriate library model via Virtual Library development plan.	24 hour library service. Improved access to service.	S	Number of issues.	Hub Services.
Continue to develop a cost efficient, structurally robust and secure IT network. Inclusion in CBC IT project planning.	Efficiencies on cost of library network. Improved access speeds for users.	S	Efficiency savings on network.	C.B.C. IT Hub Service.
Continued investment in modern PCs, Wi-Fi and IT equipment for public use. Inclusion in CBC IT project planning.	Improved IT access for C.B.C. residents.	M	Increased uptake of People's Network PCs.	C.B.C. IT Hub Service.

*S – short term (2012 – 2015), M - medium term (2015- 2018), L – Long term (2018 onwards)

Priority 5: Deliver a tailored library service to local people				
Actions/Requirements	Outcomes and Timescales		How will it be measured	Who will we work with
Meeting local priorities and needs				
Development of individual library 'road maps' based on the findings of the consultation and community profiles to inform the direction for each library in the authority.	Services delivered from library buildings fit needs of local communities.	S	Library visits / issues. Maintain customer satisfaction.	Library Managers C.B.C. Customer Insight Team.
Increase take up of library services particularly in the groups identified through community profiles and under-represented groups via an engagement strategy.	Library service meets needs of vulnerable / disadvantaged.	S	Increase in MOSAIC groups that are currently under-represented.	C.B.C. Customer Insight Team.
Review opening hours to ensure they meet the needs of the community within existing budgets.	Library opening hours reflect community needs.	S	Increase in library visits.	Library Managers Library users/non-users.
Explore options to 'zone' activities in libraries in order to meet the needs of different user groups at different times by reviewing the layout of buildings.	Buildings meet diverse needs of community.	S	Increase in library visits.	Library Managers C.B.C. Capital Assets.

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