

# Slough Library Service Plan 2022-2027

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## **Introduction from Lead Member**

Dear residents of Slough,

I am a passionate champion for our library service in Slough. I believe that this service has a vital role to play in improving the lives of our residents over the next 5 years.

Our library service is at the heart of our communities, whether that be in a building or via our on-line library. We want both offers to be welcoming and inviting, inclusive and accessible providing space for people to study, to attend creative clubs, to meet authors, to play and relax. Our library service should allow our residents to access a great range of books, e-resources, newspapers, and magazines. We want our library service to support people of all ages who are looking for work by providing excellent IT facilities and volunteering opportunities to help develop their skills and build their CV. Our library service is a place where residents can learn about their local area and research family history. We want our library service to help young children prepare for attending school, allow students to find a quiet space to study and be a place where residents can access lifelong learning opportunities. We also want our library service to work with our arts and culture partners to enrich creativity across Slough. Our well trained and experienced staff, supported by volunteers, will help you access the services you need.

This is my vision for the library service in Slough. We already deliver lots of my vision already, but this plan will help us focus on making sure we are doing this in the most effective and efficient way possible. Slough Borough Council will continue to face a challenging financial situation over the next 5 years, and we can't commit to continuing to use all of the buildings currently used to provide library services, but we are committed to making sure our library service is comprehensive, accessible, and meeting local needs.

I was so impressed that during 2020 and 2021 when the country was in lockdown, our library service adapted to make sure we could still deliver a service under very challenging circumstances. This has led us to re-think how a modern library service could operate and has taught us a lot about what is possible, from delivering services in different ways, to rethinking which buildings we need and what space we need to dedicate to the library service in those buildings which we are able to continue to provide. This plan makes sure that we just don't go back to where we were before the pandemic, we want to go further and design a service that we can be very proud of. We need to make sure our future library service is modern, vibrant, and sustainable. I want us to find ways to provide library services within our localities and to develop our excellent partnership with organisations across Slough to keep bringing good services to you.

In late 2021 we carried out a thorough Needs Assessment and large-scale public consultation about the future of our Library Service. The results of this work and the Equality Impact Assessment that sits alongside them means we are now in a position to set out our high-level aims for the service and the areas that we will be working on over the next five years.

Your responses to the consultation survey identified that the most important things you look for in a library service are being able to borrow books, including books from the Children's section, and having a library service within walking distance from where you live. You also told us that it was important that our library service was efficient, and this includes spending a reasonable amount on new books as well as seeing if other organisations could work from buildings in which we provide a library service to help spread the cost of running the buildings. The third consideration you wanted us to prioritise was to make sure our library service was open on days and at times that suited you.

Taking all this into account we will now focus on delivering these three high-level aims:

- Improved literacy and love of reading for all residents
- Affordable services available to all users
- Levelling up opportunities for all residents

This plan will summarise how we will achieve these aims by focussing on 8 key work areas.

## **Key work areas - What will residents see by 2027?**

At the end of the period covered by this plan our aim is that residents will see our Library Service delivering the following:

- ❖ High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure.
- ❖ Make sure the right library services are delivered in the right way in the right locations ensuring that the physical building spaces and events are fully accessible, supporting those with additional needs
- ❖ Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development.
- ❖ Increased range and diversity of on-line resources and support for residents to use these virtual resources, making sure that no resident is excluded from accessing the on-line world.
- ❖ A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services.
- ❖ Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users.
- ❖ Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence.
- ❖ Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources.
- ❖ We provide and spend a publications budget in line with councils in our most similar group and review our building opening times to ensure value for money.

## **Introduction to Slough Library Service**

This plan is about improving and promoting the opportunities that our library service can offer and placing this at the heart of our community. We are fortunate in Slough to have a strong foundation to build from<sup>1</sup>.

In February 2022 our library service is being delivered from 4 main buildings; The Curve, Britwell Hub, Langley Library and Cippenham Library. Satellite children's libraries are also provided at 3 Children's Centres (Chalvey Grove, Vicarage Way and Wexham). As well as these physical spaces we have an extensive range of resources available on-line; in 2019/20 over 100,000 e-resources were borrowed from Slough library service. Our libraries offer more than just somewhere to borrow hard copy and electronic publications. Over 66,000 hours of computer time were booked by library users during 2019/20 and 67,000 visits were made to attend an event or activity in one of our buildings.

Our on-line resource is available 24/7, but pre-Covid our physical library service was open for over 200 hours per week. Our staff were available at for all of those 200 hours. We also deliver a small "Library at Home" service for users unable to get to a building from which we provide library services supported by a small number of volunteers.

In common with all local councils, we have to make sure that all our services, including our library service delivery best value for money. The current financial challenge faced by the council means that we will have to check more often what we do, where we do it from and how we do it to make sure this service continues to be comprehensive, relevant, and efficient. One of the ways we will do this is to make sure we deliver core services well and that we compare favourably with the library service delivered by our "Most Similar Group" of councils. At the very least we want to be aligned with this Most Similar Group.

The Needs Assessment and public consultation we carried out in 2021/22 has led us to ask ourselves questions about the best ways to deliver a library service in the future. Do we need to change the times our physical library service is open? Do library staff need to be available at all buildings used to provide our Library Service at all times? Can we deliver events and activities from different locations? How can we increase our volunteering opportunities? Are there other council services or partner organisations who could share space in buildings which we use to provide our library service? What more can our library service do to support the council's aspiration to move to "digital by default" service delivery? Should we bring our spend on publications in-line with our most similar councils?

Our plan sets out our high-level commitment to answering some of these questions whilst making sure we continue to deliver a comprehensive and efficient service for local library users now and in the future.

### **Our key foundations: Improved literacy and love of reading for all residents**

Encouraging, enabling, and promoting a love of reading will be at the core of our library service. We will do this by continuing to offer a wide range of books and publications both hard copy and e-resource and by hosting events and activities that help both children and adults who are developing a love of reading and improving their literacy levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Slough Library Service Needs Assessment 2021/22 – Slough Borough Council

It is estimated that around 16% of adults in England have “very poor literacy skills”<sup>2</sup> and the UK government says that this means 16% of adults have a reading age equivalent to that of an 11-year-old<sup>3</sup>. Mencap estimates that at least 1.5million people in the UK have some form of learning disability<sup>4</sup>. For both children and adults these issues can have a serious impact on their wellbeing as well as their ability to access information that can have a serious impact on their life chances such as finding job or support for their health.

Slough library service will build confidence in reading and writing for our residents by providing a safe real-life and virtual spaces where people can develop their literacy skills. The library service will focus on expanding opportunities to work with people who would benefit from additional support.

Our library service will remain inclusive and open to all. We will continue to provide free access to books and other reading materials, IT, events, and activities that inspire and engage residents to improve literacy levels and enjoy reading for pleasure. Slough library service will be a knowledge hub and support residents to connect with other services and organisations.

- ❖ High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure.
- ❖ Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development.

We will work with early years providers, parents, schools, and community groups to support children to be school ready, develop their literacy skills, support education catch-up and continue to provide a safe space for young people to study and learn outside of the classroom. Our library staff and volunteers will be available to provide support at times that are most popular for users. We will regularly review our opening times to make sure they meet the needs of our residents.

We will partner with a range of organisations which support adults to improve their literacy skills for their everyday lives. This will have a positive impact on job opportunities, aspirations, and independence.

- ❖ Make sure the right library services are delivered in the right way in the right locations ensuring that the physical building spaces and events are fully accessible and support those with additional needs.

We will actively encourage other services to co-locate in buildings from which we provide our library service so that there are a number of reasons for residents to come to a building. Part of the co-location offer will be organisations cross promoting the other facilities and services available at the location. We will also seek out opportunities for library services and events to be delivered from other locations outside of the buildings used for the library service. This will help ensure library services reach out to communities and individuals who may not be current library users.

- ❖ Increased range and diversity of on-line resources and support for residents to use these virtual resources, making sure that no resident is excluded from accessing the on-line world.

Slough’s online collections and resources like Ancestry UK as well as our wide range of e-books, e-newspapers and e-magazines increased in popularity during lockdown, and we will respond to this change in customer borrowing patterns. Our staff and volunteers will be able to support residents in low-key, informal ways to be comfortable and confident using these on-line resources as well as

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<sup>2</sup> Adult Literacy Trust [Adult literacy | National Literacy Trust](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Simone: dyslexic user - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Learning Disability Research and Statistics | Mencap](#)

accessing council services via digital routes. Wherever possible our library service will actively support and promote the work of Community Learning and other training providers to encourage residents to access formal training and up-skilling to use digital, virtual and e-resources.

- ❖ A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services.

The library service already runs a wide range of events and activities to encourage residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy reading and use the range of services on offer. We will work with local partners and volunteers to develop relevant and enjoyable programmes of events and activities for all ages, to ensure that our current and future library users can develop a lifelong love of reading and use of the library service.

- ❖ Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users.

Our desire to increase volunteering opportunities will help us achieve two important aims. The first is to support our committed staff team in delivering events and activities to inspire a love of reading in our residents. The second is to improve literacy and a love of reading in our increased volunteer cohort and demonstrate to these individuals the benefits to their own wellbeing, health, and employment outcomes of a love of reading and engaging positively with their community.

- ❖ Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence.

We will use the data we collect about borrowing and event attendance in Slough, and data from our Most Similar Group of councils to inform our decisions. This could be about what publications to buy and stock, what events to host or which partners to work with and what hours we should have dedicated library staff available to support residents improve their literacy and reading skills.

We will continue to develop and use a variety of methods to provide us with in-depth information about our stock management choices including: our own system data on users' borrowing choices and preferences, information from our suppliers, market analysis on national reading trends, alongside direct engagement, and feedback from residents.

- ❖ Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources.

Library users are at the heart of the service. So, it is important that the service we are offering reflects the diverse interests and needs of our residents. We will look at new ways for residents to share their views and get involved in helping to shape the service, help inform the resources on offer, and provide regular feedback and input.

- ❖ We spend an amount of our budget on publications aligned to that spent by councils in our Most Similar Group and will review our building opening times to ensure value for money.

Ensuring value for money is a key consideration now for all council services including our library service. Over the coming 5 years the Council's financial situation will mean that we are unable to aspire to be in the top quarter of our similar councils in terms of spending on library publications (Slough is currently second in our most similar group of councils) but we will aim to align ourselves within the range of spend made by others within our Most Similar Group. Our choice of titles and formats will be carefully considered taking local data, assessments, and insight from residents into account.

We will offer residents a choice of accessing books and attending events in real life, and on-line. Our on-line offer will be available at all times, and the buildings from which we provide our library service will be open at times that suit you. We will publish and promote the times buildings providing library services are open and when dedicated staff will be available to help and support adults and children to develop a love and joy of reading.

## **Our key foundations: Affordable services available to all users**

We have to make sure that we can afford the services residents need. We also have to do all we can to make sure our library services are accessible and available to all of our residents, including those residents who may not currently use libraries.

Our commitment is to keep our core service free at the point of use for all users. For services where we can charge, we will ensure that our charges are reasonable and in line with what other councils who are most similar to us ask for. Where we offer services from buildings, we will make sure that they are accessible to people with reduced mobility or with prams and buggies and that our buildings are open at the times that suit the majority of residents.

As we develop our on-line resource it will be easy for residents to use and navigate through. This will also mean that an increasing amount of content (whether it is publications to borrow, advice or recordings of live events) will be available 24/7 and not restricted to the times buildings used to provide library services are staffed.

- ❖ **High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure.**
- ❖ **Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development.**

Access to books and publications will be free for all library users. Most of our events and activities will remain free to come to because we don't want cost to put people off developing a love of reading. Where there are opportunities for additional funding or resources through things like grant applications, private sector financial support or good quality book donations we will ensure we make full use of these over the next 5 years.

We will continue to offer face-to-face support for children and adults to encourage reading and literacy. However, both specialist support and informal guidance and help will be available at specific times in each building in which we provide library services throughout each week. We will have buildings used to provide our library service open at times when users really need them – this will allow us to offer flexible opening hours including evenings and weekends.

- ❖ **Make sure the right library services are delivered in the right way in the right locations.**

We will make sure we offer bespoke services to support specific community needs so we do not waste resources delivering un-popular services in locations with little take-up. Our library opening hours, and the times dedicated staff and volunteers are available will be regularly reviewed to make sure they meet local needs.

Staff from other organisations or council services will be able to support library services by helping us keep the buildings used to provide library services safe and carrying out some basic functions to help residents use our library service.

❖ Increased range and diversity of on-line resources and support for residents to use these virtual resources, making sure that no resident is excluded from accessing the on-line world.

In 2022 the cost of purchasing on-line e-publications is not cheaper per item than hard copy. However, over the course of the next 5-years we will be monitoring the costs of items across a range of formats to ensure that we are achieving best value for money and providing good levels of accessibility.

❖ A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services.

The library service already includes running a wide range of events and activities to encourage residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy reading and use the range of services on offer. We will work with local partners and volunteers to deliver relevant and enjoyable programmes of events which will always be free to use wherever possible. If specialist events are delivered where a charge can be made these costs will always be reasonable and transparent.

To make sure our library service remains affordable we will seek out more and more options about where we deliver our events programme from. We will bring our library events out into the community and use a range of buildings and locations including parks and open spaces, community centres, schools, health settings, retail, and leisure centres where we can.

❖ Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users.

Opening up further opportunities for volunteers may result in the overall library service being delivered more economically. However, volunteers need some management, supervision and support and will also have training needs that will have to be met. An increased cohort of engaged and supported volunteers will provide benefits directly to these residents (often those who are unemployed or under-employed) and give more flexibility to the library service about what services are offered to the community.

❖ Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence.

We will use the data we collect about borrowing and event attendance in Slough, and data from our Most Similar Group of councils to inform our decisions. This could be about what publications to buy and stock, what events to host or which partners to work with to deliver an increased level of literacy and love of reading. By understanding how our customers use our services we can better deliver what they need and not potentially waste resources by offering the wrong service to the wrong community or in the wrong location.

❖ Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources.

Library users are at the heart of the library service. So, it is important that the service we are offering reflects the diverse interests and needs of our residents. We will look at new ways for residents to share their views and get involved to help us ensure that our services are responsive to the needs of users and, therefore, delivering good value for money.

❖ We spend a similar amount of our budget on publications as councils in our most similar group and review our building opening times to ensure value for money.

Reducing our spending on publications and ensuring that it remains aligned to our most similar group of councils will mean more carefully planned choice of books and resources. In order to



maintain a service that meets the needs of all residents we will commit to regularly engaging with users and non-users about the choice and format of publications to ensure we are able to provide a good range of material for residents.

By offering flexibility around opening times we will be able to make sure our service is efficient. We want to make sure staff and volunteers are available in your community at times that are popular with you, so we don't have the costs of keeping services open at times when people don't want them.

## **Our key foundations: Levelling up opportunities for all residents**

Slough's library service is more than just a place to borrow books, it is a service which brings people and communities together to share culture and creativity. Our service will continue to help people to learn and develop lifelong skills, provide resources and support to help improve their health and wellbeing, and provide places where residents come to access information and support from a range of other organisations.

Our library service will look to work with partners over the next 5 years to provides residents with access to additional services like post-natal sessions, support for people with hearing impairments, programmes to support people's physical and mental health and wellbeing, and programmes to help reduce social isolation. We will forge relationships that allow library services to support and facilitate work with partners and volunteers to run work clubs and skills sessions to help people to improve their employability. Our relationship with Community Learning and other learning providers will mean we remain somewhere where digital skills courses and coding clubs (for young people with an interest in IT development) will be delivered from. Through this new plan for libraries, we will actively seek out opportunities to provide additional support to our most vulnerable communities and those residents in need of extra help.

Wherever possible, our library services will be delivered from buildings where other services are co-located. This will make it easier for those residents who need to work with support staff or advisors, or who have to attend appointments to come to a single location rather than trying to travel across the borough. This should help improve Library membership since those residents who are attending a building for advice or support in another service can have a soft introduction to what library services can offer.

Our library service will continue to play a crucial role in helping our communities to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. The library service helps our residents by improving access to a good quality education, training, and employment plus access to better health and wellbeing for Slough residents.

❖ **High quality support for adults and children to support literacy and encourage a love of reading for pleasure.**

❖ **Encourage residents of all ages to make use of our library service to improve their wellbeing and personal development.**

Our work with partners to support children to be school ready, develop their literacy skills, support education catch-up and continue to provide a safe space for young people to study and learn outside of the classroom helps prevent educational outcome discrepancies for children increase across the borough.

Supporting adults to develop a love of reading and increase literacy skills will break down this barrier to accessing training and employment. Our staff and volunteers will be able to offer informal guidance and training sessions, reading for pleasure sessions and information about more formal training for adults.

❖ **Make sure the right library services are delivered in the right way in the right locations.**

We will analyse data from a range of partners to help us design and deliver services that meet the needs identified in different localities. The library service will benefit from this shared knowledge and resource where co-location is possible. This means the activities and events offered by or facilitated by library staff and volunteers will be closely aligned to the needs of specific communities. This close working will increase the focus of all services on reducing health, social and economic inequalities across Slough.

❖ **Increased range and diversity of on-line resources and support for residents to use these virtual resources, making sure that no resident is excluded from accessing the on-line world.**

There is an acknowledged risk that the increased reliance on on-line service delivery could exclude or leave some residents behind. This could have serious consequences for them in terms of accessing health services, training, employment and benefits, and advice. Library staff and volunteers will provide support and guidance to residents who struggle to use the new digital world. They will promote the benefits of on-line resources (for example, access at times that suit residents), guide users to the most useful sites and help with using search engines and results.

❖ **A range of exciting, relevant and enjoyable events hosted by library services.**

The library service already runs a wide range of events and activities to encourage residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy reading and use the range of services on offer. Each of these events uses literacy, reading and writing as a vehicle to engage with residents. Through this engagement residents can pick up new technical skills and knowledge (e.g., skills to bond with pre-school children through reading or creative writing) or new social skills (e.g., interacting with others to reduce loneliness, reading to reduce mental ill-health). Picking up and practicing these skills form firm foundations from which to reduce inequality.

❖ **Increased opportunities for volunteering in our library service and highly professional volunteers working with all library users.**

Our commitment to increase volunteering opportunities will allow a larger group of residents to either experience the world of work for the first time (e.g., school leavers or long-term unemployed), improve skills and confidence (e.g., residents who are underemployed) and improve social interactions (e.g., residents concerned by loneliness or social anxiety). Volunteering can be an end in itself for those residents who are not looking for skills to improve their work CV but can also be an important step into paid work for those who may lack qualifications or experience.

❖ **Improved collection and use of data to make sure our decisions are based on evidence.**

Analysis of library usage data will help not only the library service make decisions based on evidence, but anonymised data can be combined with other data sets to help a range of council services understand the needs of their customers too.

❖ **Strong engagement with residents to help us shape the service and promote events, activities, and library resources.**

Library users will be encouraged to feedback to us about how the services offered by the service can help more residents have great life outcomes. But our library users will also be encouraged to work with us to promote throughout their local community the work that libraries deliver to drive up library use and membership.

- ❖ [We spend a similar amount of our budget on publications as councils in our most similar group and review our building opening times to ensure value for money.](#)

Reducing our spending on publications but ensuring that it remains aligned to our Most Similar Group of councils will mean more carefully planned choice of books and resources. In order to maintain a service that meets the needs of all residents we will commit to regularly engaging with users and non-users about the choice and format of publications to ensure we are able to provide a good range of material for residents.

By offering flexibility around opening times we will be able to make sure our service is available to help residents access information, support and guidance at times that suit them. We want to make sure staff and volunteers are available in your community at times that are popular with you, so we don't have the costs of keeping services open at times when people don't want them.