

Community Libraries Consultation

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why is this happening?

The community library service in Birmingham needs to design a service fit for the 21st Century which is financially sustainable and operating within a £3.7m budget and in doing so address the £1.95m cumulative saving required in 2017/18.

Are you proposing to close libraries?

The proposal is that two of the 37 Community Libraries in the city should close and in each case a neighbouring library should have their service enhanced. In the proposed model Sutton Coldfield library would close, with investment being made to increase opening hours at Mere Green Library. Also Aston would close with Birchfield library increasing its hours and moving from Tier 2 to Tier 1 provision.

What will the library service in Birmingham look like?

There will be the Library of Birmingham, the Prison library service, the Mobile library service and the Library Service at Home. In addition we are proposing a Tiered model for Community Libraries:

Tier 1: Main Library - will be open for 35 hours a week, these are more likely to be delivered from the current library building and have other services delivered from the site too such as the benefit verification service. All will have investment in self-service equipment. The proposal is for 19 sites to be in this category.

Tier 2: Community Library – will be open for 21 hours, these are still likely to be delivered from the current library building although options may exist to increase hours of operation by working with partners or relocating the service. The proposal is for 10 sites to be in this category.

Tier 3: Supported Community Library – will be run by a community organisation, for either their own premises or via a transferred facility. The City Councils library service will work in partnership to support the organisation with 15 hours staff support, the provision of books and investment in self-service equipment. The proposal is for 6 sites to be in this category.

Tier 4: Community led libraries – any local schemes put forward that increase access to one of the Society of Chief Librarians Universal Offers (Digital, Learning, Information, Reading and Health) will be considered for support. This could be organisations wanting to loan books or provide free internet access etc. There is no fixed number in this Tier as this will depend on the ideas that come forward and the number that can be supported via the £20,000 small grant budget available. Castle Vale library already falls into this category.

How did you select which library is in each tier?

Sites have been placed in Tiers 1 to 3 based on data from 11 criteria drawn from library reviews that have taken place in other local authorities. The final tiering was modified to take account of the two sites proposed for closure and the subsequent increase in opening hours at neighbouring libraries.

What will happen to the staff in my library?

Consistent staffing levels are proposed at each site i.e. 3 full time equivalent staff in Tier 1 libraries and 1.8 full time equivalent staff in Tier 2 libraries, but it is not possible to say which individual staff will work where yet. We will work closely with staff that are affected and involve trade unions in the process.

Is the Tiered Model a done deal?

No, this consultation will last for 12 weeks so that people's views on the proposed changes can be considered and taken into account before any final decisions are made.

What if my community wants to set up a community led library?

Birmingham City Council wants to work with local people to find flexible and sustainable ways of providing a library service which can be used for years to come. We will continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service but we want to enhance this by working with local communities to offer additional services. If you think you or your community group want to get more involved then let us know.

You conduct surveys but do you take notice of what people say?

The city council recognises the high level of importance attached to the library service by the people of the city and wants to embark upon a 12 week extensive consultation to both engage on the concept of prioritising through a tiered model but also to explore in detail the full range of ideas that come forward from individuals, organisations and communities who want to engage in the provision of library services in their specific local area. As the Deputy Leader of BCC, Cllr Ian Ward said:

“This is one of the most difficult consultations we will have to run, but the funding pressures and restrictions we face mean that no change is simply not an option. We need to look at libraries and how they can best operate in 2016 and beyond with the reduced resources available. The time has come to acknowledge that a one size fits all model isn't the best way of delivering such a service. To do this, we are staging a genuine consultation based on plans that have been reviewed and verified by best practice councils that have faced the same issues...and if anyone has any ideas or offers to work with us, now is the time to let us know.”

Once we have analysed all of the responses we will publish our findings on Birmingham Be Heard at:

<https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/place/community-libraries>

How can I find out more and have my say?

This public consultation on the proposed changes to the library service in Birmingham is running from 25th October 2016 to 27th January 2017. More information and a consultation questionnaire are available in all Birmingham libraries and online at:

<https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/place/community-libraries>

In addition there will be public consultation sessions to be held around the city for face to face questions, answers and discussion. A full schedule is available at your local library or at <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/place/community-libraries>

What other options have been considered?

The savings target for community libraries was set in 2015/16. It was a three year target growing each year with a final cumulative figure to be achieved of £1.95m in 2017/18. During this period a number of different approaches to delivering the savings have been considered.

1. Closure of the lowest priority sites, whilst maintaining the level of budget, service provision and opening hours at all other sites. This approach would have closed 13 sites as many of the lower priority sites are already the least costly and therefore a considerable amount of sites would have closed.

Accessibility to the service would have been significantly reduced under this model.

2. Delivering the service via a staff led mutual. This option was considered as it has the potential to deliver cost reductions and increase income and therefore retain larger numbers of libraries. Cost reductions can be achieved in a number of ways but a significant element is the ability to achieve a reduction in business rates. The income increases were projected through charitable donations, increased income through coffee/vending sales and new fees such as reservations.

This model required the city council to invest in self service before the service was transferred, which it was unable to do at the time.

3. Using open plus to deliver libraries in unstaffed mode. This option would require significant investment but other local authorities such as Peterborough City Council has used this technology to reduce the hours in which libraries are open with staff but by operating in unstaffed mode the amount of hours libraries are actually open to the public is maintained or increased.

Birmingham City Council is looking to pilot this technology in one library, on the basis that it can increase hours from the 35 or 21 hours proposed in the model.