

# Information

for County Councillors

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From:	Oliver Woodhams, Strategic Manager, Community and Traded Services
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To:	All County Councillors

## Library Service Redesign Project update

### Background

Somerset's Libraries Service is modernising and evolving. Since 2011 it has refocused its service delivery to meet a new, wider range of objectives.

Successes include:

- introduction of free wi-fi in all libraries and a new online portal and app
- developing new and innovative services like the Taunton Library Glass Box, healthy library zones and code clubs for older children
- implementation of a community library at Porlock
- development of a dynamic range of events and activities within the library service

### A three year plan

Thriving, modern library services are very much a part of the future of Somerset County Council. A three-year plan is being developed to redesign the service and put it on a sustainable financial footing for the long-term. We will do this in a structured way that minimises impacts on services and staff, and maximises integration and optimisation of library resources with other customer facing services. This will ensure we continue to fulfil our statutory duty to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service.

We value our libraries and libraries' staff. We must live within our means at a time when our finances are under considerable pressure. All services have had to find substantial savings and libraries have a part to play in this process.

The overall objective is to keep libraries open and ensure that a diverse range of library services are available across the county. To help us achieve this we expect that in some cases community involvement will be needed and we know costs will have to be reduced.

The pattern of library use varies across the county and it is challenging to sustain the current model at a time when all services are changing and required to find savings. We need to be looking at community involvement and how library services could be delivered in venues beyond library buildings.

We expect to be able to consult with the public on proposals for the service later this year or early next.

## Next steps

- **Engagement meetings**

We already have a considerable amount of information about our libraries and how they are used, but would welcome stakeholders engaging and influencing plans and proposals. During September and October the service is holding meetings to gather more information from our key stakeholder groups. Local knowledge from staff and the wider public will be an important factor in helping to shape proposals for the longer-term.

These are not open public meetings, however local members and other key community representatives and stakeholders are being invited.

We wish to share our approach to assessing need (based on deprivation, social isolation, digital exclusion and other factors), demand (use) and access (how easy it is for people to access library services). It's important that we make sure we are capturing all relevant information and applying the approach fairly and robustly.

We will be discussing what options there may be for community involvement. It's important that communities speak to us and seriously consider what role they may be able to play. Community involvement could take many forms and has been successfully pursued in other areas.

- **Scrutiny Committee**

A paper will be taken to Scrutiny Committee (Policies and Places) on 3 October to help shape a strategy for re-designing the service. A Key Decision on the strategy by the Cabinet member for Resources and Economic Development will follow later in October, this will set out a proposed process and time table for developing and consulting on proposals.

- **Consultation**

Proposals will be the subject of public consultation late this year or early next. Details of this will be shared once they have been agreed.

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