



COUNTY COUNCIL PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF OXFORDSHIRE'S LIBRARIES

ORCC BRIEFING PAPER NUMBER 2

Introduction: Revised County Council proposals

1. Further to our briefing dated January 2011, following feedback from communities affected by proposals to re-structure the library service around 24 hubs, the County Council has recently been issuing revised information about how in future a library service in the county might be delivered.
2. In March 2011 the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), Keith Mitchell, issued a personal statement indicating that his thoughts had moved on since the initial proposals for re-structuring were published in 2010.
3. His statement indicated the following:
 - a) communities will still need to work in partnership with the County Council to find ways of keeping libraries open, in cases where the future delivery of library services cannot be 100% funded by OCC. OCC wants to see libraries remain open but this can only happen if, in some places, volunteers step forward to help to run them.
 - b) OCC's aim is to create a modern library service that is comprehensive and efficient. In the coming year OCC wants to work with every community that does not yet have one to establish a Library Friends Group to work with OCC staff to agree the best way forward for their library.
 - c) In some places OCC will be able to provide a full library service but even here it is hoped that costs can be kept down by:
 - encouraging volunteers to supplement Council staff
 - increasing the use of self service
 - re-locating libraries into community buildings particularly where the current library building is not very suitable.
 - d) In other places OCC will not be able to afford to provide a full library service. If the community wishes work with OCC to ensure that a service can be continued, OCC will want to provide the community with free access to:
 - a suitable library building
 - OCC book stock
 - OCC library stock management system
 - expertise of qualified librarians.
 - e) A formal consultation on the future of library services in Oxfordshire will be taking place from mid-May to the end of September. As part of the consultation OCC wants to have a dialogue with local communities library by library.
 - f) OCC is looking at all the options and has an open mind about the outcome of the consultation. However, communities need to realize that some savings will still need to be made.

Background information about each library

4. Communities wanting background information about the usage of each library in the county and details of the property in which they are located can access this on the County Council website by using the link below:

[Background usage and property information for all libraries in Oxfordshire](#)

What opportunities is the County Council offering to communities?

5. The County Council has set up some “Big Society” web pages on their website, which outline the opportunities being offered to communities to take responsibility for the running of local services including some services currently provided by the Council. To access these web pages, go to www.oxfordshire.gov.uk and click on the “Big Society Fund” icon.
6. The Council has set up a Fund – the Big Society Fund – to provide some pump-priming grants to help with set-up costs.
7. In the Libraries section OCC invites communities to support and extend library services in Oxfordshire and offers them an opportunity to manage community services for themselves. OCC believes that if the Council and communities work together, “an inspiring and exciting future for library services in Oxfordshire” can be secured. Presumably this offer applies in cases where OCC does not feel able to provide a fully-funded library service itself.
8. OCC is currently proposing two different, flexible models for a community group to consider:
 - a) Operating a less comprehensive “standalone” library service independently of the County Council i.e. not as part of the Council’s overall library service. This would involve payment for some limited input from the Council. (We have called this Option 1)
 - b) Operating a more comprehensive library service in partnership with OCC – as part of the Council’s overall library service. This would involve “buying into” an OCC package of management and operational services. (We have called this Option 2)

Both options are set out in more detail below in Appendix A.

9. In the case of either of the above options, a community group would be invited to bid for a slice of the Big Society Fund. A group might wish to bid for the following types of service or resource:
 - Legal advice to support the constitution of an organisation that could run a library service.
 - Funding for an off-the-shelf library circulation system.
 - Funding to cover the costs of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for volunteers.
 - Funding to train volunteers.
 - Rent/rates/property costs for current building while the group secures another building and/or a lease agreement.
 - Decorating and furnishing costs for a new or existing building/space.
 - Repair or alteration costs for a new building/space.
 - Additional bookstock to supplement the transferred stock.
 - Funding to buy into a book delivery service (eg. for six or 12 months).
 - Funding to pay IT maintenance for Internet access (eg. for six or 12 months).
 - Additional IT equipment.
 - Additional furniture.

10. On receipt of a sound medium-term business plan, OCC say they would consider funding any or all of the above.
11. In the case of Option 2, the application could also include funding for the library service package, which could cost around £20,000 per annum (detailed estimates will be prepared by OCC).
12. OCC stress that the Option 2 service offer may not be viable if there is not an optimum number of community groups that wish to pursue this option. This is because there needs to be sufficient revenue to replace some of the infrastructure/services to be removed under current OCC proposals (e.g delivery van/driver, additional book stock, training and support etc).

How might communities respond?

13. Watch out for the opening of the public consultation on the library service proposals (see para.3e) above) and make a response, whether or not your community has its own local library. The views of library users all over the county will be useful.
14. If you have a local library and there is not already an established Friends of the Library Group, raise this issue with community members and start thinking of setting one up, in consultation with the County Council (see para.3b) above).
15. There are some questions that communities need to be asking themselves if they are thinking about developing a library service in their area. These include the following:
 - a) What kind of library service is needed – what is important to local people? What do local users value in their library?
 - b) For example:
 - Opportunity to get out of the house and be with other people
 - Access to books:
 - Reference material
 - Fiction
 - Non-fiction
 - Audio
 - Large print
 - Other
 - Access to:
 - DVDs and CDs
 - Language packs
 - Access to internet via library computer. Why is access wanted?
 - Another service/activity:
Give details
 - Help of a professional librarian:
Give details of help wanted/received e.g. suggestions for new reading? guide to reference material available?

- c) Is the existing kind of library service required in order to meet these needs? Or are there other ways to provide a book exchange point and bring people together to socialise and read? Could library services be accessed, where available electronically, using a home computer?
- d) What building could be used to provide a service? A County Council building that is no longer needed may be available for community transfer or there may be other opportunities available. There may be community facilities locally which could be hired/shared, e.g. the local shop or community hall.

Parish/town council powers to fund the provision of library services

16. Some communities have been asking whether it would be possible for parish/town councils to increase their precepts to pay for certain services which would help a community library to work. This will depend on whether a parish/town council has the legal power to support the kind of service being proposed and, if so, the level of funding potentially available under that power.

Section 19 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 provides parish/town councils with the ability to provide and equip buildings for the use of clubs having athletic, social or recreational objects (including staff). This could include the provision of reading rooms and books. They may also contribute by way of a grant to a voluntary group providing recreational facilities.

As ORCC understands it, this would allow a parish/town council to fund the provision of an informal “recreational” access-to-books service organized by a voluntary group but not a more formally provided library service within a statutory framework.

Parish/town councils also have another power to support activities they are not otherwise empowered to do but which they consider to be in the interests of their area or its inhabitants and which would produce a benefit commensurate with the expenditure involved. However there are limits on what can be spent under this power based on the number of electors.

What to do next?

17. Communities interested in talking to OCC about how they might work with the Council to deliver some form of library service locally should do the following:
- Look in detail at the content of OCC’s Big Society Fund web-pages
 - Get in touch with their local county councillor
 - Use the OCC’s [online contact form](#) to send an expression of interest

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18. ORCC would also be keen to hear from communities in order to see if we can provide information and other support which would be helpful.

Contact us as follows:
Tel: 01865 883488
E-mail: orcc@oxonrcc.org.uk

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APPENDIX A

	Option 1: Community organisation operates on a standalone basis	Option 2: Community operates as complementary partner for Oxfordshire County Council
County Council could:	Provide the community group with book shelving and library furniture.	Provide book shelving and library furniture.
	Provide the group with a start up collection of books taken from the library's existing stock.	Provide a collection of books comprising or taken from the library's existing stock.
	Provide the group with a PC for Internet access.	
		Provide a library service package on a traded basis, incorporating:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access to the Galaxy library management system (and therefore to the whole county library stock)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intensive Galaxy training with further advice and guidance during the transition period
	Provide a technical solution enabling drop off for requested stock and a delivery service (most likely this would be to issue stock to the group, so they would be responsible for the security and return of items).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a library delivery service
	Loan small collections of stock for up to three months (deposit collections).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new county library book stock in proportion to the scale of the service offered
	Provide training in managing a library service with further advice and guidance during the transition period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training in managing a library service with further advice and guidance during the transition period
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • income from overdue fines (but not from rental fees or any other core library service).
	Consider the transfer of property assets.	Consider the transfer of property assets.

	Option 1: Community organisation operates on a standalone basis	Option 2: Community operates as complementary partner for Oxfordshire County Council
Community would need to:	Secure a suitable community space.	Secure a suitable community space.
		Formally constitute a group/organisation to run the library and trade.
	Recruit volunteers to manage the service.	Recruit volunteers to manage the service.
		Ensure that volunteers work to an agreed job description, adhere to Data Protection guidelines and other key policies (e.g acceptable use of IT equipment).
		Ensure volunteers are trained and competent to use Galaxy library management system (a business critical system).
		Sustain opening hours in proportion to the size of stock maintained and supplied by Oxfordshire Library Services (this is to avoid county stock collections being held inaccessible for long periods of time).
	Manage their own circulation system.	
	Arrange internet access.	
	Be responsible for deposit collection loans.	
	Add to the stock through donations or purchase	
	Secure funding for running costs and book delivery service.	Secure funding for running costs. These would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lease or other property costs • utilities costs • staffing and/or volunteer costs • library service package i.e IT maintenance for Galaxy, supply of county book stock, delivery service, training, consultation and advice (Galaxy support is provided by the supplier Axiell and by Oxfordshire Library Services. The package would not include DVDs etc as this is a self-financing service).