South Gloucestershire Council

Briefing note

13 October 2023

South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Background: The need for savings within our library services

Our libraries deliver an important service for the residents of South Gloucestershire, helping people of all ages and from all walks of life learn, develop new skills, make friends, and connect with their communities.

However, with the financial pressures the council faces, we must look at opportunities to reduce what we spend to minimise council tax increases. We continue to prioritise saving money and increasing what we earn in ways which do not impact on services, but with the money local authorities receive from central government having been cut every year since 2010, this now increasingly means considering how we can provide the most valued aspects of services as cost-effectively as possible. Included in the consultation on our council budget and finances conducted at the end of 2022, was a proposal to reduce the annual budget for our library service by £473,000.

Faced with similar financial pressures, from 2017 we introduced Open Access technology across all our libraries to allow people to continue to use their local library to borrow books, access computers and the internet and meet with friends outside of staffed hours. This helped us achieve financial savings by reducing the number of hours when libraries are staffed.

Staffing costs make up the highest proportion of the cost of delivering the library service. Therefore, to ensure we can maintain our current local library presence, we are again looking to save money by reducing the number of hours when libraries will be staffed. Under the proposals, those over the age of 16, and younger library users accompanied by an adult will continue to be able to access libraries outside of staffed hours by using swipe cards.

This consultation considers the best ways to deliver the reductions we need to, whilst minimising the impact on service delivery.

Why does the council need to save money?

Like councils up and down the country, over recent years, our finances have been stretched by rising costs and reduced funding, giving us less freedom to prioritise spending as we – and you – might like us to. Our forward planning has left us in a comparatively robust position in the short term, but we need to deliver significant savings over the coming years to enable us to continue to balance the books. We have looked for savings across all of the services we deliver.