South Gloucestershire Council

Library service changes

11 October 2023

South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Frequently Asked Questions

Proposed changes

How much would the library budget be reduced by?

It is proposed that the current budget of £1.82million is reduced by £473,000.

Why does the council need to make cost savings?

Like councils up and down the country, South Gloucestershire Council is facing significant financial pressures. Funding from Central Government continues to be cut at a time when demand is growing for some of our most expensive services, especially social care costs to look after the increasing numbers of older people in our society. Additionally, inflation has increased the costs of providing services.

We have a legal responsibility to deliver a balanced budget each year, covering our costs with our income and so, to minimise council tax increases, we need to reduce what we spend across all our services, including library provision.

How are you proposing to save money and what will you do to mitigate the impact of changes?

We have focused on changes which use open access technology to retain access to base library services locally. The specific proposals include:

Measure	Potential savings
Annual budget for books and other materials reduced by 25%	£50,000
Restructure to reduce management costs	£103,000
Reduction in third party costs for the Enquiry Service	£25,000
Reduce staffed hours. Library services would continue to be available via Open Access	£295,000

To minimise impact on users, we are recommending prioritising staffed hours at the locations and times when libraries are most well used. We also recognise how important libraries are in supporting children and young people with their learning, so we are

proposing to keep the libraries staffed at those key times after school when so many schoolchildren visit their local library.

We are proposing to reduce our costs by over £100,000 through a restructure of our management team. To deliver these cuts, we need to remove support from some of our least frequently used services, including the community collection services in Marshfield, Hawkesbury Upton, Severn Beach and Stoke Gifford.

What are the proposed staffed library hours going forward?

In drawing up our proposals, we have analysed use of different libraries at different times of day. To minimise impact on users, especially those with special equality characteristics, we are recommending prioritising staffed hours at the locations and times when libraries are most well used. This would mean:

- Removing staffed access over lunch time in eight of the 12 libraries; Cadbury Heath, Downend, Filton, Hanham, Kingswood, Patchway, Staple Hill, Winterbourne.
- Staffed access ending across all libraries at 5.00pm.
- A further one day reduction in staffed access at three libraries - Cadbury Heath, Patchway and Winterbourne.
- A half day reduction in staffed access at five libraries – Downend, Filton, Hanham, Kingswood and Staple Hill.

Open access opening hours would be extended to cover the periods when libraries would no longer be staffed. Click here for details of proposed opening hours for each of our libraries.

We are seeking feedback on these timings and welcome alternative suggestions.

How much are you proposing to reduce staffed hours by?

The proposals would reduce staffed library open hours from 351 to 285, a reduction of 19%.

Why are the hours in some libraries being reduced by more than others?

To minimise impact on users, we are recommending prioritising staffed hours at the locations and times when libraries are most well used. Smaller changes are proposed for our busiest libraries in Thornbury, Yate and Bradley Stoke.

Will any libraries close?

No. When we consulted in 2017 ahead of the introduction of open access technology, local people's top priority was to keep their local library open. In looking for savings opportunities, we are therefore not proposing an option to close any libraries. Instead, we have focused on changes which use open access technology to retain access to key library services locally.

What is the Enquiry Service?
We financially supported a service which allowed members of the public to call a telephone number to ask questions, for example “Who is the CEO of Waitrose and what are their contact details?”. The person answering the phone would find out and respond – either on the phone if that information was readily to hand, or by email or text if it was a more complex enquiry.

The ubiquitous use of search engines and widespread access to the internet has meant that this service was very infrequently used.

Will events held in libraries be affected?
We know the events we hold in libraries are extremely highly valued – especially the activities and events aimed at children and young people. We are especially proud of the role we play in improving children’s literacy. We are committed to ensuring every child has access to local library services and will continue to roll out library cards to all primary school children. We have ringfenced money to support provision of the Summer Reading Challenge and we will continue popular events like Rhymetime and Lego clubs.

We also plan to maintain author events and theatre productions.

Will library staff lose their jobs?
Staff wages make up the largest proportion of the cost of our library service, so it is difficult to make savings without impacting staff numbers and/or hours. If the proposals are supported and staffed opening hours are reduced, the council has a support package in place to help staff through any staffing restructure process and, where possible, staff who do not secure a position in the new structure will be offered redeployment.

Is there an opportunity for town or parish councils to provide funding to keep staffed library hours?
Town or Parish Councils may wish to contribute funds towards additional staffed hours, if staffed hours are reduced. We will work with any parishes that would like to explore this opportunity.

Are there further opportunities to reduce management and back-office costs?
The proposals include a restructure, to reduce management costs. We have extremely efficient back-office functions, sharing resources across the Libraries West consortium.

What are the implications of the management cuts?
We are proposing to reduce our costs by over £100,000 through a restructure of our management team. To deliver these cuts, we need to remove support from some of our least frequently used services, including the community collection services in Marshfield, Hawkesbury Upton, Severn Beach and Stoke Gifford.

Can you charge for services?
We are not allowed to charge for entering a library or lending books. We do make charges for overdue items, hire of audio-visual items, lettings of libraries and printing. We could charge for use of the internet as other authorities do, but the council considers this a fundamental service, especially for people with no internet access, and so has chosen not to propose introducing charges.

Public libraries are a statutory service; do your proposals contravene the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964?
We know that library services are important to local communities, which is why the proposals prioritise maintaining local provision. Any proposed changes would see us maintain a strong network of libraries across South Gloucestershire, meeting our statutory requirements. We also have an increasing virtual library delivering services such as eBooks, e-audio, information and e-magazines and newspapers. This is in addition to enabling people to reserve and renew items online.

Open access

What is open access?
Library services including borrowing and returning books or accessing a computer can now be done without the need for staff support. Open access is used across libraries in South Gloucestershire whereby those who have registered can access libraries and borrow books, use computers and printers outside of staffed hours using a swipe card.

Many people are already using open access. 16% of those registered with their local library have also signed up for a card, extending the number of hours and the times of day and night when they can visit their library. We are keen to support more of our library users to take advantage of the service and are looking to understand through this consultation what are the opportunities for, and barriers to, wider use.

	All Users	Adults	Children & Teenagers
Staffed hours	92.5%	91.4%	95.0%
Open access	7.5%	8.6%	5.0%

How does open access work?
Registered library members use their existing library card with a PIN to ‘swipe in’ to the library. Their card will act as a key to release the door lock and the door will open. All the services – lights, heating, and computers – are activated upon entry.

Is open access safe?

Yes. We have been operating open access for five years without major incident. Each library is covered by CCTV which records both inside and outside the buildings, and everyone who enters or leaves.

15 minutes ahead of closing time an announcement warns people in the library that the building is closing. Once closed, if someone has not left the building, an alarm is activated and security staff are alerted.

How do I register for open access?
All library users over the age of 16 can register for open access. The registration process will include an induction session to learn how open access works. Visit the council website for details.

What services can I use in open access hours?
During open access you can use the quiet space to meet or study, borrow or return books and other items through the self-service kiosks and use the computers, printers and Wi-Fi.

When is my local library open for open access?
Opening hours for all libraries can be found on the council website

Can children and young people use open access?
You must be 16 or over to register for open access. However, under 16s are welcome to attend libraries during open access hours when accompanied by a parent or carer who is a registered user.

Are groups able to use the library during open access hours?
Yes. We continue to make libraries available for groups and encourage more groups to use them at times they are open to the public in order to make full use of buildings.

The consultation process

What happens if people disagree with the proposal or suggest alternatives?
The Council is keen to find ways to protect the library service as much as possible. We must make the savings, but we will actively consider alternative proposals from the consultation. We will then agree proposals which minimise disruption to services within the resources available.

Will the results of the consultation be published?

Yes, a report will be produced, which will be published on the council consultations website.

Volunteers

Is there an opportunity to maintain staffed library hours using volunteers?
We are grateful to the volunteers who give up their time to support delivery of library services. However, we do not believe this model has widespread application for delivering the service. We still need to employ paid staff to support volunteers, as many volunteers prefer shorter and irregular hours, and the turnover is high.

Other

What timeframes are you working to?
A consultation will launch in October 2023 and people will have until January 2024 to provide feedback. A report will be produced summarising comments and local councillors will make a decision on which options should be taken forward to deliver the required savings. Changes are not expected to be implemented until the 2024/25 financial year.

What will happen at the end of the consultation process?
Once the consultation period closes, we will collate all feedback and use this information to inform a decision.

Have we answered your question?

If not, then please email libraries@southglos.gov.uk.