

# **Library Service Consultation**

**Have your say on a future library service  
for Oxfordshire**

**Public Consultation**

**27 May – 30 September 2011**



## Introduction

When we first started thinking about the future of our library service in Autumn 2010, we did so needing to make a significant saving from the library service. At that stage the only route available to us was to withdraw funding from a significant number of our libraries.

Understandably, there was significant public concern about the withdrawal of funding from libraries and we proactively listened and engaged with communities who were worried about the impact of losing the funding for their library.

In February 2011 we learnt that we would receive additional money from central government, and this eased our financial position. On this basis we wanted to pause and ensure that we had considered possible alternatives, and that any decision we made would be evidence-based.

Our proposal is to keep all of our libraries open, with some sustained by volunteers working alongside Oxfordshire County Council staff. This is a significantly different offer from that explored in Autumn 2010 and means that all of our libraries will be kept open and will receive substantial financial support.

Under our revised proposals all libraries will:

- Have a good book stock, public access computers and online resources
- Be cost-effective and efficient
- Have self-service as standard
- Have tailored opening hours
- Offer a broad range of supporting services tailored to the community e.g. bookclubs
- Work closely with a community support network (e.g. Friends Groups)
- Encourage use of library buildings as community space.

The county council and its voluntary sector partners have significant experience of working with volunteers to enhance and improve services. We want to extend this best practice to libraries, but have listened to the public who said that they would not want to volunteer without some support from library staff.

We will work with Friends Groups to develop the sustainability of some of our libraries by increasing the use of volunteers over a three-year period. We will work with each library's Friends Group to develop a sustainable business plan for individual libraries that reflects the needs and opportunities unique to that community.

This is a significantly different offer to that explored in the Autumn and we are confident that working with our communities we can deliver a library service that reflects the value that we and the people of Oxfordshire place on libraries.

The following proposals outline our vision for the library service, and what this will mean in practice. We want you to take an active role in its future, have your say and get involved.

### **Current approach to the library service**

Oxfordshire County Council's current approach to the library service was developed as a result of a Cultural Services fundamental service review in 2008 (Oxfordshire Libraries Strategy 2008-2018). Significant improvements in both customer service and performance have been secured over the past 8 years (since the Best Value Review in 2002) and we are now one of the highest performing library services outside of London.

Implementation of the Libraries Strategy to date has been achieved through the council's Library Strategy Transformation Programme. The Cabinet member for Safer and Stronger Communities sits on the Library Strategy Transformation Board, overseeing progress and development. This work, mainly through the capital programme has resulted in the refurbishment of a number of libraries such as Thame and Watlington and the implementation of self-service in 10 libraries.

The current library service aims to: 'Support and promote strong communities, so that people may live as successfully and independently as possible... by helping to create literate, knowledgeable, informed and lively-minded individuals, who make up a literate, knowledgeable and informed society'. We believe that this objective is still the right one.

The service provides access to books, information and knowledge, to support the recreational, cultural and educational needs of those who live, work and study in Oxfordshire. The service at the moment consists of:

- 43 library buildings
- 7 mobile library vehicles
- Countywide collection of books
- Online services including access to the library catalogue to reserve or renew items, to library membership and to reference and information resources
- Public access computers
- Targeted work to support and increase the literacy of children and adults, digital inclusion and employability
- Management of the Rural Children's Centre Mobile (on behalf of the council's Children, Education & Families directorate)

- Management of two prison libraries (on behalf of HM Prison Service at no cost to the county council)

An audit of current services and related activities has been undertaken.

The total library service gross budget for 2011/12 is £8.720 million and its net budget is £7.930 million; 9% of the service's costs are funded by the income it generates.

### **How the Oxfordshire library service currently performs**

When comparing against other authorities, Oxfordshire has more 'service points', more books overall and buys more stock (arguably a more generous 'offer' than most counties). The result is not surprisingly more visits to libraries and more issues per head of population (or reflecting a higher demand in Oxfordshire resulting in higher supply against the national picture). Costs are higher than the national average and income is below the national average. In particular, employee costs are higher than average, whilst property costs are relatively very low.

In terms of efficiency and value for money, it is clear that there is a wide range in the performance (in terms of volume of issues, services provided) of individual libraries. There are several ways in which their effectiveness can be compared, but the most straightforward compare input (cost or hours open) with output (visits or issues). These measures reveal a very wide range in cost-effectiveness of individual libraries.

There are a number of factors accounting for this disparity, such as the quality, accessibility and location of buildings and rent costs. Issues and visits tend to be greater in areas of higher population density, which in practice means that urban libraries tend to have higher issues and visits than rural libraries (with some exceptions). For historic reasons libraries in Oxfordshire are not distributed evenly geographically, with some relatively close to each other and again this impacts on performance and value for money.

### **Drivers for change**

Locally, we have acknowledged that times have changed since our current library network was established. Over the past few years, people have changed the ways they use our library service. At the same time, the difficult economic climate is demanding ever more effective and efficient ways of working. Meanwhile, new technologies offer opportunities to modernise, to distribute books more efficiently and to widen the scope of services provided such as access to information via the internet.

Over the next 4 years, Oxfordshire County Council has identified that it needs to find savings of £119 million a year by 2014/15 due to the reduction in the funding that it receives from central government.

The county council is determined to emerge from the difficulties arising from government grant cuts with modern, high-class services for future years - this very much includes our library service.

In March 2010, the then government issued 'The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries' policy statement. This brought a new focus for potential areas of library development including:

- 'Operating services with limited public resource'
- 'Becoming a 24/7 service'
- 'Maximising digitisation opportunities'
- 'Enabling libraries to demonstrate to citizens, commentators and politicians that they are still relevant and vital'.

More recently, Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, has set out a national vision of libraries as 'facilitators of a national passion for reading; supporting literacy and providing places where anyone can go to access information and entertainment, go online and find out about public services and citizenship'.

Most importantly we have listened to the people of Oxfordshire, who have written to us in their hundreds and who have come to meet with us, to tell us what they want from their library service.

### **Minimum requirements of a library service**

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places a statutory duty on Oxfordshire County Council to provide an 'efficient and comprehensive' library service. The Act outlines 4 key areas that a comprehensive library service must deliver:

- Securing and keeping a wide range of free resources, including books and other printed matter, sound recordings, films and other materials, to browse and borrow in sufficient number, range and quality
- Meet the general requirements (and any special requirements) of both adults and children living, working or studying in the local area
- Free independent information and advice
- Encouraging the use and participation of the service, for example, through clear and easy ways to join, access, shape and influence the service.

The precise scope and size of the service is not specified and the legislation does not set specific minimum service standards.

The most recent challenge to a library authority under the legislation (Wirral Inquiry 2009) indicated that to ensure it meets the general duty, an authority should identify the specific and local needs of adults, children, young people of all ages and demonstrate that having done so, it provides services to meet these needs in the best way possible, with the resources available.

What the public (both users and non-users) want from a library service is an important consideration. A research report conducted by MORI on behalf of the Museum and Library Archives ('What do the public want from libraries') conducted in November 2010, highlighted a number of important features to note. The research highlighted that the public value:

- A good book offer
- A pleasant (library) environment
- Friendly and knowledgeable staff.

The study also found that the public see libraries' core purpose as:

- Reading
- Learning (particularly children's education)
- Finding information.

The research also suggested that libraries could successfully broaden their appeal to non-users by:

- Providing some unique services beyond the core offer (activities, crafts, genealogy, learning)
- Communicating more proactively with both users and non-users about what they offer.

### **Analysis of Oxfordshire library service requirements**

With the legal and customer requirements in mind, a zero-based quantitative analysis of library requirements was undertaken based on where people live, work, study and shop. The results of this analysis were used to shape and assess the proposals to develop the library service.

In addition to the zero-based analysis, the following information was also considered:

- Our current strategic approach to the library service (as set in 2008 and as revised in the Business Strategy December 2010)

- An audit of the current library service and activities
- Comparisons against other authorities
- Customer feedback (Children's Plus Survey October 2010; Public Library Users Survey October 2009 and feedback received from the council's library announcement 26 November 2010)
- Existing demand from current users
- Opening hours
- Timetable, location and duration of stops of the mobile libraries
- Use of technology
- National studies and reports, including:
  - Museum Libraries and Archives (MLA) MORI national research 'What do the public want from libraries' November 2010
  - Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 'Modernisation review of public libraries' March 2010
  - DCMS Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
- Dialogue with the MLA regarding our current service, review methodology and proposed changes
- Capacity to innovate and make service enhancements.

An initial Service and Community Impact Assessment has also been undertaken (and revised) as part of this process.

## **Our findings**

We carried out a zero-based quantitative analysis for the library service. By this, we simply mean that we tried to think about the criteria we would use for the service as if we were starting entirely from scratch – and then applied these criteria to our current network.

The criteria we used were these: ideal libraries would be located in the areas where the most people already (1) lived, (2) worked, (3) studied, (4) shopped (5) travelled. For each existing library site, we drew a circle around a half-mile radius, and looked for how many people lived, worked, studied or shopped in that area and how accessible the site was by public transport.

The analysis enabled us to give each library a score from 1 to 100 according to its potential usage.

This analysis was then sense checked to see if the results would significantly vary if we:

- Changed the criteria to a mile
- Tested it against current usage
- Took out shopping
- Ranked the values 1 to 43 rather than scaled them from 1 to 100.

This did not materially change our results.

The libraries fell into 5 groups, each group sharing similar scores and characteristics.

To assess which libraries form part of our 'comprehensive and efficient service' (our legal duty) we then tested the cumulative impact of removing each group(s) of libraries from our network.

We consider that the removal of groups 1 or 2 would have a significant impact on the comprehensiveness of our service. The libraries in groups 1 and 2 currently account for 82% of all issues, 88% of visits and 84% of users. The removal of either one of these groups would have a significant impact upon the service.

We consider that the removal of groups 4 and 5 would have a minimal impact upon the comprehensiveness of our service. The libraries in groups 4 and 5 currently account for 13% of issues, 8 % of visits and 10% of users. The removal of either one or both of these groups would not have a significant impact upon the comprehensiveness of our service.

We consider that the removal of group 3 would have a low impact on the comprehensiveness of our service. The libraries in group 3 currently account for 6% of issues, 4 % of visits and 5% of users. The removal of this group would not have a significant impact on the comprehensiveness of our service; however, it is worth noting that these libraries have a greater potential number of users than those in groups 4 and 5, and this is a challenge that we need to work with communities to address.

As a final stage we checked that groups with specific needs would not be adversely affected by our proposals. The service has strong targeted support for older people, for people with disabilities and for children. The service meets the needs of deprived communities through core library provision, so it was essential that all areas of deprivation had a library in them. When tested all of the areas of deprivation fell into either groups 1 or 2 with the exception of Berinsfield. The needs of deprived



communities must be met through our core service and so for this reason Berinsfield is included in our core offer.

The goal of this quantitative exercise was to provide an equitable and transparent way to think about our library service. By taking this analysis and sense-checking against other methodologies, the data supports, and gives evidence, for the proposed vision for the service.

## **Our proposal**

When we first started thinking about the future of our library service in Autumn 2010, we did so needing to make a significant saving from the library service. At that stage the only route available to us was to withdraw funding from a significant number of our libraries.

Understandably, there was significant public concern about the withdrawal of funding from libraries and we proactively listened and engaged with communities who were worried about the impact of losing the funding for their library.

In February 2011 we learnt that we would receive additional money from central government, and this eased our financial position. On this basis we wanted to pause and ensure that we had considered all possible alternatives, and that any decision we made would be evidence-based.

We have challenged the way we currently run our library service to ensure we deliver a cost-effective, high-quality service that is fit for the 21st century.

We are proposing to:

- Rationalise our management support
- Expand the use of volunteers
- Assess our current procurement arrangements
- Continue to exploit existing and new opportunities to generate income
- Work collaboratively with other service providers such as Oxford University, voluntary and community organisations
- Work collaboratively with private sector developers and businesses to address changes in future population
- Continue to work with other library authorities to ensure that we benefit from best practice and opportunities to review and develop services.

This is a significantly different offer from that explored in Autumn 2011. Under our revised proposals all libraries will remain open and will:

- Have a good book stock, public access computers and online resources
- Be cost-effective and efficient
- Have self-service as standard
- Have tailored opening hours
- Offer a broad range of supporting services tailored to the community e.g. bookclubs
- Work closely with a community support network (e.g. Friends Group)
- Encourage use of library buildings as community space.

We will fully fund and resource all of the libraries that form part of our comprehensive and efficient library service. These core libraries are:

Abingdon, Banbury, Berinsfield, Bicester, Blackbird Leys, Botley, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Cowley, Didcot, Eynsham, Headington, Henley, Kidlington, Littlemore, Neithrop, Oxford Central, Summertown, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Witney

For those libraries which fall into groups 3, 4 and 5 we would propose to provide a fully supported infrastructure (building, ICT, book stock and the installation of self-service). We will also work with each library to establish a Friends Group to enable us to shift the balance of staffing in these libraries towards volunteers over a three-year period

For group 3, this would mean one third volunteers and two thirds paid staff.

These community plus libraries are:

Chinnor, Faringdon, Grove, Wheatley and Woodstock

For groups 4 and 5 this would mean two thirds volunteers and one third paid staff.

These libraries are:

Adderbury, Bampton, Benson, Burford, Charlbury, Deddington, Goring, Hook Norton, Kennington, North Leigh, Old Marston, Sonning Common, Stonesfield, Watlington, Woodcote and Wychwood.

There are some libraries in all five groups where we know there are opportunities to use the buildings in a different way and to work with the community and other

partners in a more effective way. We are committed to exploring these opportunities in all of our libraries.

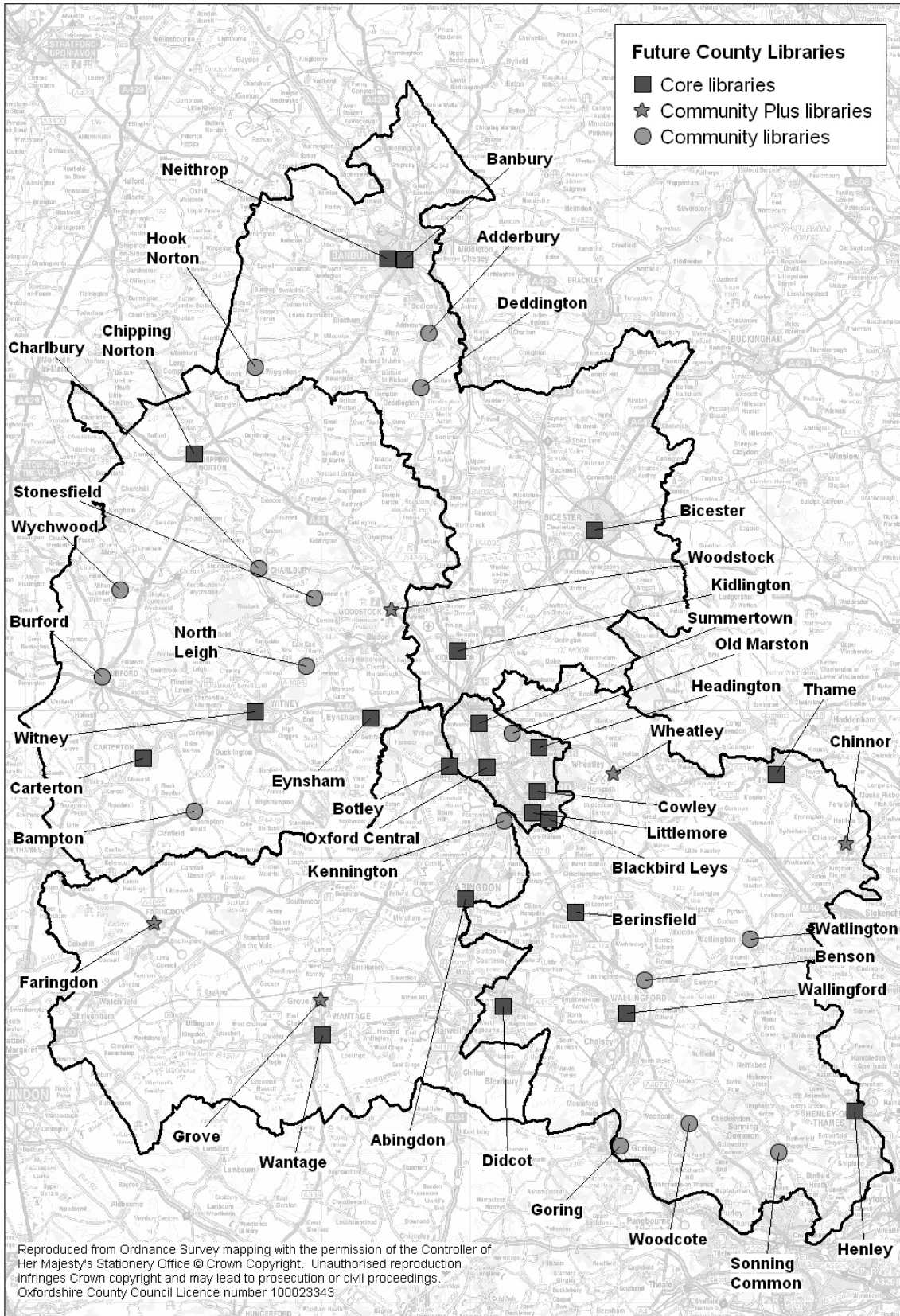
As part of our comprehensive and efficient library service we will continue to provide services to groups and people who may struggle to get to a library such as young people and their parents or carers, older people and those with disabilities. We will provide tailored support that best meets the needs of these groups by:

- Ensuring the cost-effective and efficient use of our mobile library service
- Developing and extending our home library service for those with limited mobility
- Developing and extending our current book deposit scheme to allow us to provide access in areas where there is currently no service.

### **Future service enhancements – our aspirations**

We want to make sure that this valuable service is sustainable – one that is relevant and available to future generations. We will continue to challenge the way that the service is delivered to ensure it is fit for the 21st Century. In particular, we will continue to explore opportunities to further improve and extend the service by:

- investigating the provision of free WiFi across the network
- re-designing our website to make sure people can easily access the library service online
- facilitating direct communication with the public and library customers through social media
- delivering eBook and eAudio downloads via our website
- incorporating complementary services (such as coffee shops) into our library buildings
- develop the use of our libraries as community resources
- working collaboratively with community groups and other service providers to target hard to reach groups, e.g. locating and resourcing the library service in other ways, using other community buildings (such as Children’s Centre, Adult Learning Centres, Early Intervention Hubs) where people already access services.



### **How to have your say**

The consultation will run for 4 months and close on 30 September 2011.

You can have your say by:

- Completing the online feedback form on the county council website (<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraryserviceconsultation>)
- Sending back the FREEPOST feedback form at the back of this consultation document
- Coming along to a library service consultation event.

### **What happens next?**

All consultation responses and other feedback (e.g. notes of the consultation events) received by the closing date of 30 September 2011 will be collated and analysed.

The results of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet in late Autumn 2011. In light of all the evidence Cabinet will decide whether or not to take the proposal forward. If agreed, implementation would start from April 2012.

### **Supporting information**

We have created a series of new pages on the county council website to support this library service consultation. These pages contain a wide range of information that may help you to consider your response such our detailed report on how we carried out our zero-based analysis, profiles of individual libraries and links to national policies and reports. To view this information go to <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraryserviceconsultation>

### **Contact us**

For help with taking part in this consultation or for further information:

Telephone: 01865 792 422

Email: [libraryserviceconsultation@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:libraryserviceconsultation@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Website: <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraryserviceconsultation>

## **FEEDBACK FORM – Please use this form to have your say**

- 1. Do you use the Oxfordshire library service?**  
(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

- Yes  
 No, but have done in the past  
 No

- 2. If so, which libraries do you use?**  
(Please tick ✓ ALL that apply)

- |                          |                  |                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Abingdon         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Headington             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Adderbury        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Henley                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bampton          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hook Norton            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Banbury          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Kennington             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Benson           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Kidlington             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Berinsfield      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Littlemore             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bicester         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Neithrop               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Blackbird Leys   | <input type="checkbox"/> | North Leigh            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Botley           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Old Marston            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Burford          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sonning Common         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Carterton        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Stonesfield            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Central (Oxford) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Summertown             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Charlbury        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Thame                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Chinnor          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wallingford            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Chipping Norton  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wantage                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Cowley           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Watlington             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Deddington       | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wheatley               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Didcot           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Witney                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Eynsham          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Woodcote               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Faringdon        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Woodstock              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Goring           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wychwood               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Grove            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Mobile Library Service |

3. What is your postcode?

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4. What are your views on the council's overall wish to keep all libraries in Oxfordshire open?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Don't know

Comments:

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5. What are your views on the council's proposal for a future library service as described in this document?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Don't know

Comments:

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6. Do you have an alternative proposal for the Oxfordshire Library Service?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Yes

No

Details:

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**7. Do you have any others comments you would like to make about your library or the council’s proposals for a future library service?**

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**8. Would you be interested in volunteering at one of Oxfordshire’s libraries?**

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Yes (please specify where)

\_\_\_\_\_

No

Not sure

**9. Would you be interested in joining a library Friends Group?**

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Yes (please specify where)

\_\_\_\_\_

No

Not sure

**10. Which of the following best describes you?**

(Please tick ✓ ONE box and specify as appropriate)

Library service customer

Friend, relative or carer of a library customer

Resident, with a library in your community



- Councillor
- Representative of a school (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Representative of a group or organisation (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Representative of a business (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_

### About You

It would be helpful to know a bit about you so we can check whether views differ across the communities we serve.

**11. What is your age?**  
(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Under<br>16              | 16-24                    | 25-34                    | 35-44                    | 45-54                    | 55-64                    | 65-74                    | 75+                      | Prefer<br>not to<br>say  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**12. Are you male or female?**  
(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

- Male                       Female                       Prefer not to say

**13. Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?**

(By a long-standing illness we mean anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time)

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

- Yes                       No                       Prefer not to say

**14. To which of these groups do you consider you belong?**  
(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

**A. White**

- British
- Irish
- Any other White background (Please tick ✓ box and specify below)

**B. Black or Black British**

- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black background (Please tick ✓ box and specify below)

**C. Mixed**

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed background (Please tick ✓ box and specify below)

**D. Asian or Asian British**

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Any other Asian background (Please tick ✓ box and specify below)

**E. Chinese and other ethnic groups**

- Chinese
- Other (Please tick ✓ box and specify below)

- Prefer not to say

## Your contact details

If you have indicated that you would be interested in volunteering or joining a library Friends Group and want to be contacted, please add your details below.

Please be assured that we will hold your details in compliance with the Data Protection Act. In addition, to maintain your confidentiality we will also store this information separately from your consultation response.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return your form to:

LIBRARY SERVICE CONSULTATION  
FREEPOST OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL