

Dear Parents or Guardian

Why are we writing to you?

This letter is about the Council's proposals to move to community partnership libraries at its following branches: Bagshot, Bramley, Byfleet, Ewell Court, Lingfield, New Haw, Stoneleigh, Tattenhams, Virginia Water and Warlingham – and to seek your views on these proposals in relation to children and young people.

You may be aware that last year Surrey County Council (SCC) put forward proposals to change the way library services are delivered at the ten libraries in Surrey mentioned above and offered local community organisations the opportunity to take over the running of each library with volunteers. This arrangement is known as a community partnership.

Following a legal challenge in the High Court earlier this year, the Council has agreed to look at these proposals again. The High Court did not criticise the community partnered model nor the consultation already carried out. The High Court accepted that equalities were clearly embedded in the work of the County Council and the library service but that the Council's Cabinet should have had more specific information about the development of equalities training planned for volunteers before taking its decision to proceed with community partnered libraries.

The new Leader has decided that he wishes Surrey County Council's Cabinet to reconsider the proposal on Tuesday 19 June 2012. The Council's policy is that community partnerships are the right way of ensuring our residents can continue to access quality library services in the ten identified libraries including yours. However we need to make sure that we have understood the effect of this proposal on the different people who use those ten libraries. We are concerned to ensure these changes continue to meet the needs of people protected by the Equality Act 2010 duties and are aware of the effect on people with disabilities, those who are more elderly, and on children. The protected characteristics include age, disability, race, sex, religion and belief. We are seeking your views and concerns on how you feel these might affect children with protected characteristics and children in general.

What are we proposing?

All community partnered libraries will operate in a very similar way to Surrey's public libraries. We will continue to stock these libraries with the books and audio and visual recordings they currently enjoy. There will continue to be computers for public use and of course we will continue to provide library premises. The main difference will be that, in most of these libraries, volunteers instead of paid employees of Surrey County Council will operate the library, although some of the proposed community partnered libraries are looking to employ staff and pay them from money raised through local fundraising.

Our libraries already benefit from volunteers who deliver a range of services and activities, such as children's story and "rhymetime" sessions, and supporting people to go online. Our proposal takes this further, with trained and supported volunteers responsible for managing day-to-day library services at the ten libraries selected for community partnering.

The local organisations we are working with have already shown a great deal of energy, passion and ideas for improving their local library, and for making greater community use of the library buildings outside of library opening hours. We believe they will be able to bring many benefits to your community.

All our community partnered libraries will have two internet-connected computer terminals for public use, as well as wifi which will allow use of personal devices to access the internet. In line with our policy of introducing self-service kiosks across our library network most of these libraries have already had self-service kiosks installed. The kiosks and public access terminals will enable you and your child or children to access the same range of services as before.

How does this affect our library users?

Children will still be able to carry out the same activities at a community partnered library as they do now, although more use will need to be made of the self-service terminals and public access computers mentioned above. Children and young people will be able to issue or return books, use the computer terminals, search the catalogue for books online, seek recommendations for reading, or attend a storytime session. The arrangements for children and young people to join the library are unchanged.

In addition, a member of SCC staff, from the community partnered libraries support team, will also provide support at each of these libraries for 20% of their opening hours each week on an ongoing basis.

If children have a library query which the volunteers are unable to answer, they will be able to telephone the SCC libraries' Enquiries Direct service for them. This service is already used by paid staff at all our libraries for example to answer difficult reference enquiries.

Training for volunteers

The main issue that was identified in the legal challenge was how the Council was proposing to train volunteers to help all the different people who want to use the library. We are working closely with the people leading each community partnered library to provide comprehensive training to the steering group and its key volunteers. These people will then cascade the training to other volunteers, with our support team regularly updating and monitoring training.

This training will be modular and delivered by experienced Surrey library staff. Volunteers will attend sessions on key topics and be given both classroom and hands-on training on equalities issues to include our legal responsibilities and practical guidance on helping people protected under the Equality Act 2010.

As these libraries get up and running, our permanent dedicated support team will work with volunteers to regularly review performance and provide ongoing training in the future.

Opening hours

Most of the community groups wish to increase the opening hours of the libraries and the others do not currently intend to reduce them. Groups will not be able to reduce a library's opening hours by more than 15% without agreement from Surrey County Council's relevant Local Committee.

Tell us your views

We would like to invite you now to complete a short questionnaire on behalf of your child/ children which has been sent to the registered members of all the libraries designated for community partnership designed to ensure that we continue to meet our equalities duty. This will give us your views if you have any concerns about our plans, and what we can do to help you and your child or children to continue to enjoy their local library.

Please complete the survey and return in the pre-paid envelope provided as soon as possible. Consultation will close on 6 June 2012.

Yours sincerely
Peter Milton, Head of Cultural Services,
On behalf of Surrey County Council

If you would like this information in large print on tape in Braille, or in another language, please contact us on:

Tel 03456 009 009

Minicom 020 8541 9698

Fax 020 8541 9575

Email: contact.centre@surreycc.gov.uk

Nëse dëshironi që ky dokument të jetë me shkronja të mëdha, në kasetë ose në një gjuhë tjetër, ju lutemi n'a telefononi në një nga numrat e mësipërm.

إذا كنت ترغب بالحصول على هذه الوثيقة في طباعة مكبرة، أو على شريط مسجل أو في لغة أخرى، فنرجو الاتصال بنا على أحد الأرقام المدونة أعلاه.

আপনি যদি এই ডকুমেন্ট বা নথি বড় ছাপার অক্ষরে, টেপে বা অন্য কোন ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে উপরের যে কোন একটি নম্বরে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।

Si desea este documento impreso en letra grande, en casete o en otro idioma, rogamos que se ponga en contacto con nosotros llamando a uno de los números anteriores.

如您索取本文的大字體版本、錄音帶版本或另一語言版本，請撥以上任一電話號碼，與我們聯絡。

اگر آپ کو یہ دستاویز بڑے حروف کی چھپائی میں، ٹیپ پر یا کسی دوسری زبان میں درکار ہو، تو برائے مہربانی اوپر دیئے ہوئے کسی ایک نمبر پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔