

TO: ACCESS GROUP
21st February 2018

BRACKNELL LIBRARIES: TECHNOLOGY ASSISTED OPENING
Directors of Environment, Culture and Communities

1 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To brief the Access Group on progress towards enabling extended access to Bracknell Forest Libraries through the use of Technology Assisted Opening and to seek its views on how this is implemented at Bracknell Library.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Access Group note the progress towards extended opening hours at all of Bracknell Libraries and gives its views on wheelchair access at Bracknell Library.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Implementing technology assisted opening in Bracknell Libraries greatly increases access to all residents in the borough including wheelchair users. In the absence of a secondary means of fire escape, the structure of Bracknell Library poses difficulties in ensuring the safety of wheelchair users during technology assisted opening when the facility is not staffed, and the views of the Access Group on how this may affect wheelchair users is sought.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The potential to ensure staff cover at Bracknell Library during all opening hours has been considered but is not financially viable in the current economic climate. A secondary means of fire escape is being examined but this is by no means straightforward.

5 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Access Group may recall that following a transformation review of Bracknell Libraries which sought to identify £400,000 savings over two years (£250,000 in 2017/18 and £150,000 saving in 2018/19), the agreed plan to make this saving was to make substantial efficiency savings mainly from how we manage library stock, to develop a stronger community role within our libraries through the use of volunteers, and to significantly improve access to libraries, something which was identified as needed through public consultation, by introducing Technology Assisted Opening and self-service. Critically all libraries would remain open.
- 5.2 The project is progressing well with the stock efficiency savings being realised, excellent levels of volunteering achieved and a supplier of the technology has been procured. There has been a slight delay in the works needed to install the technology resulting in the £400,000 saving now being profiled as £250,000 in 2017/18, £120,000 in 2018/19, and the final £30,000 in 2019/20. Otherwise the plan following the transformation review is being implemented well although in fact the potential for project slippage as a consequence of the technological procurement was always identified as a risk.

Unrestricted

- 5.3 In terms of opening, the basic plan was to retain the “core hours” where staff are present at all libraries broadly as is, although through transformation the potential to review this to ensure a more equitable approach at some stage in the future was identified. Outside these hours additional access would be made possible for those that wanted it through the use of technology. Essentially, access doors would be unlocked through the e+ card and a security code; lights, computers, self service kiosks and other equipment would be automatically switched on, and CCV cameras would offer a further level of security, and customers, who would have had an induction, can use the library as normal. They would self issue books through the new technology and leave the library.
- 5.4 Access for disabled users has been assessed at all libraries and with some modification 7 of 9 libraries are suitable for disabled access during technology assisted opening. With the plans to build a new library at Harmanswater, this will become 8 from 9. Consequently, access to Bracknell Libraries, whether staffed or not, is set to increase and is a positive additional opportunity for those that wish to avail themselves of it.
- 5.5 However, the structure of Bracknell Library itself creates some access issues for wheelchair users and it is on this matter that the views of the Access Group is sought.
- 5.6 There are three floors in Bracknell Library served by a lift and stairs. The lower ground floor has never operated effectively as part of the library offer and will now be used corporately as a training venue although there will still be community access for activities and meetings the scale of such access which will only fully be known once a detailed specification for corporate use is agreed. The basic library offer will therefore mainly come from the ground floor, which has the main entrance, and the first floor.
- 5.7 When there are no staff present (i.e. during technology assisted opening), the lift will be switched off and there will be no access to the first floor other than via the stairs at either side of Bracknell Library meaning that wheelchair users cannot access the first floor. Regrettable though this is, the risk to a member of the public being stuck in a failed lift in the event of a fire is so foreseeable that it simply cannot be allowed under any reasonable health and safety risk assessment. In isolation, this would not pose a serious detriment to wheelchair users since the library offer on the ground floor is extensive and most needs can be met most of the time.
- 5.8 More challenging is that the lack of a second fire escape route for wheelchair users on the ground cannot easily be accommodated given that the “ground floor” is in fact at a height of about 20 feet from ground level on the other three sides of the building away from the side the main entrance is on. Given the current position of the library, it is considered impractical, but potentially not impossible, to create a suitable ramp where a wheelchair user could safely manage their own escape from fire. The safety of wheelchair users in the event of a fire during the hours of technology assisted opening at Bracknell Library is therefore compromised under the current configuration and consideration must be given to this and the views of the group are sought.
- 5.9 While it is impractical to create a secondary fire exit, it may not be impossible. There is one potential solution being investigated which could create a new fire exit leading on to an elevated metal walkway leading back on to the large open space in front of the library. At the time of writing, it has not been confirmed whether this is feasible in

terms of building construction and the views of the Fire Officer is being sought to see if this is acceptable since the exit would be to the front of the building where the (theoretical) fire would be. Another important consideration is that the library potentially forms part of the wider development including Easthampstead House, Magistrates Court and potentially the Police Station. If development was to begin within say a two year period, the expense of creating another means of escape may be difficult to justify. While these issues crystalise over the next few months, it seems probable that Bracknell Library would be operating technology assisted opening prior to any secondary means of escape being created.

Discussion points

- 5.10 Bracknell Library has the longest staffed opening hours of all libraries and consequently wheelchair users have the greatest access to this library. The additional time where technology assisted opening would operate is therefore relatively minimal. In the absence of a secondary fire escape, access for wheelchair users may have to be prohibited for their own safety. If wheelchair users would like to access library services during those hours where the building is not staffed, they would of course have access to the other 8 libraries which would be fully accessible. Does the access group feel this is option is acceptable given the uncertainty of the library's long term future at its current location?
- 5.11 It was considered whether it might be possible to allow access for wheelchair users if they have some support from an able bodied person. Potentially, that person could have been trained to use the "evacu-chairs" situated in the stairwells that form the fire escapes such that in the unlikely event of a fire the safety of the wheel chair user could be better assured. Regrettably, our Insurance Team has confirmed this would not be considered an acceptable risk.
- 5.12 Clearly, the installation of a secondary fire escape is the ideal solution but there is likely to be a period when this is not in place. Some points for discussion have been raised, but if the Group has other observations these would be most welcome.
- 5.13 It is important to remember that access via technology assisted opening is in addition to existing service provision so this will not be compromised.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Not consulted.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 Not consulted.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Access to all libraries other than Bracknell Library is available to wheelchair users in exactly the same way as able bodied individuals. In the absence of a secondary fire escape at Bracknell Library there is differential access in favour of able bodied customers through the hours of technology assisted opening. Some mitigation exists in that all other libraries are accessible and the existing service at Bracknell Library offers the longest opening hours. Ideally, a secondary fire escape should be provided but this may not prove technically feasible and the long term future of

Bracknell Library may make any investment uneconomic in the short term.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 While the use of technology assisted opening greatly increases access to libraries for all users, the inability for wheelchair users to access the main library may bring reputational issues.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 Not applicable.

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Not applicable.

Representations Received

- 7.3 Not applicable.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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LIBRARY OPENING HOURS

Ascot Heath

Monday - 9:30am to 1pm and 2pm to 7pm
Tuesday - 2pm to 5pm
Wednesday - Closed
Thursday - 9:30am to 7pm
Friday - 2pm to 5pm
Saturday - 9:30am to 12:30pm
Sunday – Closed

Binfield

Monday - 2pm to 7pm
Tuesday - 2pm to 5pm
Wednesday - Closed
Thursday - 9:30am to 5pm
Friday - 2pm to 5pm
Saturday - 9:30am to 4pm
Sunday – Closed

Birch Hill

Monday - 2pm to 5pm
Tuesday - 10am to 5pm
Wednesday - Closed
Thursday - 10am to 5pm
Friday - 2pm to 7pm
Saturday - 9:30am to 12:30pm
Sunday – Closed

Bracknell Central

Monday - 9:30am to 5pm
Tuesday - 9:30am to 7pm
Wednesday - Closed
Thursday - 9:30am to 7pm
Friday - 9:30am to 7pm
Saturday - 9:30am to 4pm
Sunday – Closed

Crowthorne

Monday - 9:30am to 5pm
Tuesday - 9:30am to 5pm
Wednesday - 9:30am to 5pm
Thursday - 9:30am to 7pm
Friday - 9:30am to 5pm
Saturday - 9:30am to 4pm
Sunday – Closed

Great Hollands

Monday - Closed
Tuesday - Closed
Wednesday - 9:30am to 7pm
Thursday - Closed
Friday - 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2pm to 5pm
Saturday - 9:30am to 12:30pm
Sunday – Closed

Unrestricted

Harmans Water

Monday - 9:30am to 12:30pm and 2pm to 7pm

Tuesday - 9:30am to 12:30pm

Wednesday - Closed

Thursday - 2pm to 5pm

Friday - Closed

Saturday - 9:30am to 12:30pm

Sunday – Closed

Sandhurst

Monday - 9:30am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm

Tuesday - 9.30am to 7pm

Wednesday - Closed

Thursday - 9:30am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm

Friday - 9.30am to 5pm

Saturday - 9:30am to 4pm

Sunday – Closed

Whitegrove

Monday - 9:30am to 5pm

Tuesday - 9:30am to 5pm

Wednesday - 9:30am to 6pm

Thursday - 9:30am to 5pm

Friday - 9:30am to 5pm

Saturday - 9:30am to 4pm

Sunday - Closed