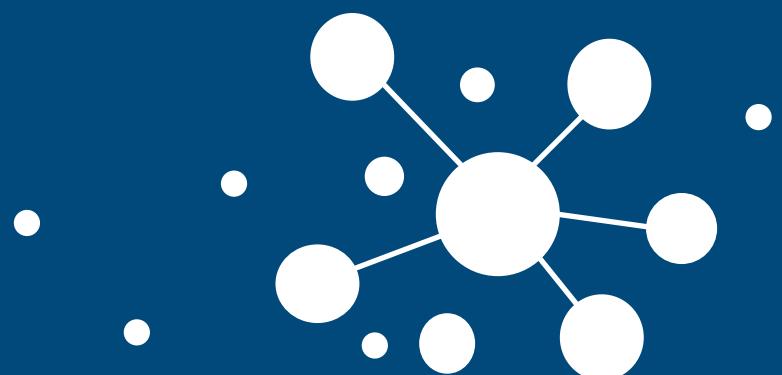


Modern, integrated library and
council services for Bath and
North East Somerset



This set of Q & As helps to set out the plans for the Council's Modern Libraries Programme, in particular the aspiration to integrate both Bath Central Library and Midsomer Norton Library with wider Council services. It answers commonly posed questions about the programmes and sets out next steps for public consultation and engagement.

Background

Like all local authorities, Bath & North East Somerset Council (B&NES) is working in an extremely challenging financial climate. It needs to cut £37 million from its budget over the next three years, which means there are tough choices to make about the way in which we provide services.

The Council is committed to protecting frontline services, particularly for the most vulnerable, and is therefore looking for other areas where imaginative thinking can help to make savings while continuing to meet the needs of customers.

Our library service is an area where there's opportunity to both save money and invigorate the service to meet modern-day customer lifestyles and preferences.

We know that people feel passionately about their libraries.

That's why we're committed to investing in and maintaining them, unlike other Councils, such as Swindon Borough Council, that have either closed or are currently threatening closure of their libraries.

What is being proposed?

One way of securing a sustainable future for our libraries is to integrate our library services with the Council's One Stop Shop services, including those provided by our partners and the voluntary sector, into one customer-focused service.

This proposal is in line with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Libraries Taskforce vision for Modern Libraries and, after initial investment, could save us up to £800,000 a year.

As part of a wider three-year programme of modernisation (which will also include transforming community libraries), we have recently consulted on the principle of integrating the services provided by our two main libraries in both Bath and Midsomer Norton with Council One Stop Shop services.

Is Bath Central Library closing?

The closure of a library in central Bath is not an option during this administration.

We don't just want to keep a library in the centre of Bath open, we want to invest in its services so that it remains relevant for today's customers and sustainable into the future, despite this challenging financial climate.

A modern, integrated service ensures that all key library services are available. Wider customer and voluntary services, supported by high speed WiFi and better digital technology will ensure the library remains a central, convenient hub for people from a wide range of backgrounds, focussing on those who need it most, such as those who don't have access to books and computers at home.

See also: *What does an integrated Library and One Stop Shop look like?*

Why does our library service need to change?

Library use is declining nationwide and in our area there are fewer people borrowing from Bath and Midsomer Norton libraries each year.

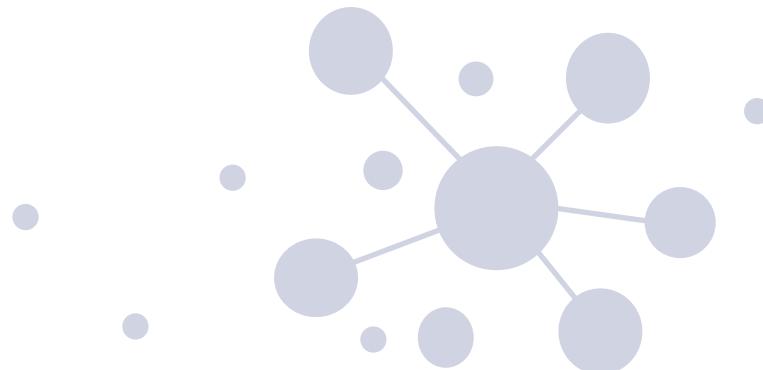
Alongside this, fewer people are using our One Stop Shops because of changes in Universal Credit and housing benefit.

We want our libraries and One Stop Shops to thrive, not just survive.

Integrating the two will help us to adapt these overlapping services to better meet the needs of today's customer. Along with an excellent range of books and dedicated areas for families and quiet study, we can also provide better technology and a wider range of customer services all under one roof.

Given the challenging financial climate, we cannot afford to run the two services separately any more. But by combining the two, we can create a vibrant, modern hub, capable of meeting the library and customer service needs of everyone in the community.

See also: [*What are the benefits of a joined-up service for customers?*](#)



Have any decisions on our libraries and customer services been made?

No decisions have been made and will not be made until after all of the consultations have been completed. Local people have recently been consulted on the proposals for integrating the overlapping customer facing services of our libraries and One Stop Shops in Bath and Midsomer Norton. There are no plans to close either library.

Later in the year, we will publish a summary of the business case with options for design, layout and location for the library in central Bath, and this will be subject to further consultation and engagement with users and the wider community. We are also reviewing the results of the consultation for Midsomer Norton, before taking any further steps.

Why can't things stay the same?

Looking at the wider financial challenge the Council faces, there isn't an affordable 'do nothing' option, as maintaining the status quo will inevitably lead to further cuts to essential services. Integrating the library services with One Stop Shop services in central Bath and Midsomer Norton will not only mean that key library services can be retained, but it also offers the potential for many exciting benefits and improvements, such as introducing library services to more people, access to more services under one roof and better technology. It will allow these Libraries and the One Stop Shops to be combined into one sustainable hub as part of a Modern Libraries Programme.

See also: [*What are the benefits of a joined-up service for customers?*](#)

What is the Modern Libraries Programme?

The Modern Libraries Programme was set up to transform B&NES' library services ensuring that – with investment – it can continue to best meet the needs of today's customer while delivering the required cost savings over the longer term.

In line with best practice, the programme is exploring and setting out ways that library services can be broadened to deliver many more services into communities, such as those provided by One Stop Shops. This will have the dual benefit of saving costs and simplifying access to vital services for local people.

The Council is also looking to work with local communities to ensure a sustainable future for branch and community libraries across the area. These libraries are seen as an important part of delivering a joined-up library service to everyone. More information on the Council's proposals to transform and support community libraries will be available in due course.

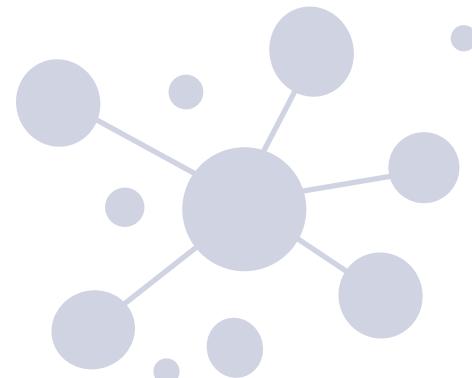
What are the benefits of a joined-up service for customers?

It is not proposed that any of the key library services will be lost. In fact, a priority is to ensure that libraries play an enhanced role in the community by:

- Helping more people to achieve their full potential through learning and access to knowledge and information
- Promoting literacy and reading to more people from diverse backgrounds
- Providing cultural and creative enrichment, such as children's and literacy events
- Improving digital access and digital literacy
- Supporting the business community
- Providing access to Council Connect services

Providing convenient access to representatives from our partner organisations, such as Citizens Advice, our housing provider, Curo and Dial a Ride also remains important to offer the best service to our customers.

Crucially, we still propose plenty of books on shelves for borrowing and great spaces for children's activities, cultural events and exhibitions.



What does an integrated Library and One Stop Shop look like?

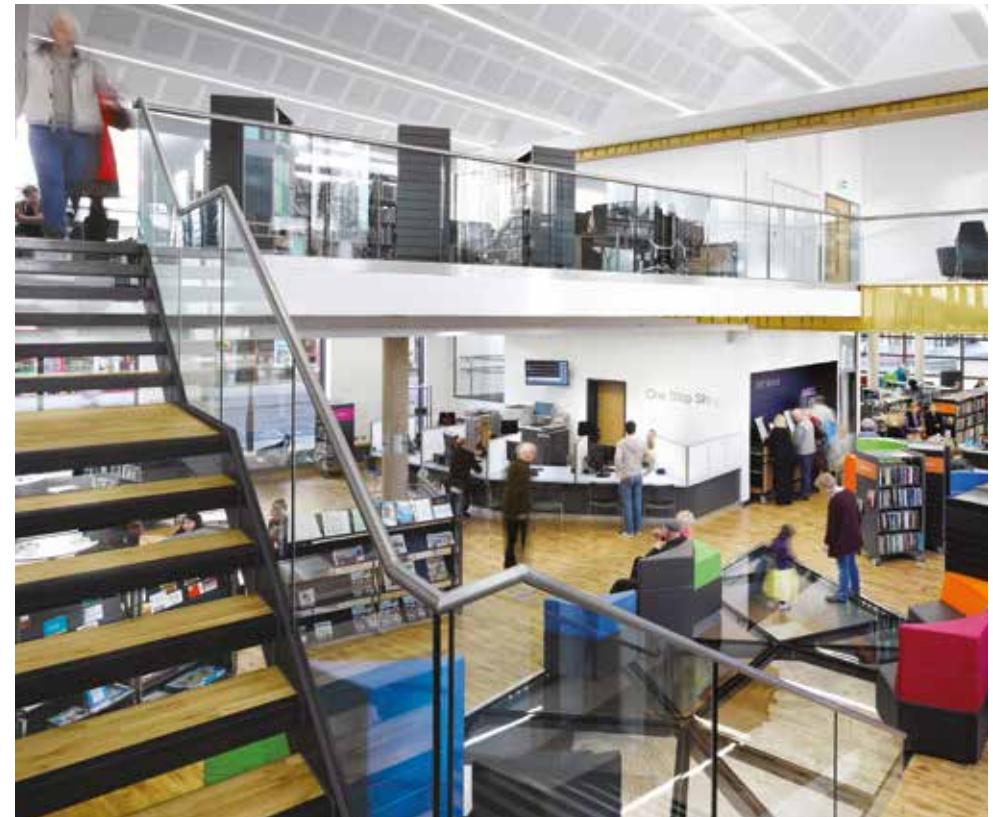
Our proposals for central Bath and Midsomer Norton are based on the successful integration of Keynsham's Library and One Stop Shop services.

A combined service gives visitors convenient access to a wide range of useful services, including library services, Council customer services, and the services provided by our partner and voluntary organisations, in one well-designed, modern space, supported by high-speed Wi-Fi and up-to-date PCs and technology.

Crucially, we still propose plenty of books on shelves for borrowing and great spaces for children's activities, cultural events and exhibitions.

The final design will depend on the outcome of the consultations but our vision for the integration of services is both physical and cultural:

- Library and customer services are integrated into the same space (i.e. they will not be in separate areas)
- Book shelves, plenty of books and other items for borrowing, and exhibition spaces feature throughout this space
- Council Connect self-service payment kiosks sit side-by-side with library self-service kiosks (for borrowing, renewing and paying library fines)
- Staff are on hand to help people find the services they need
- Experienced library staff and customer services staff work next to each other, readily available so customers can seek help and advice
- A safe area is dedicated to children and families (for reading, events and play)
- An extensive suite of up-to-date computers and quiet open study areas are available for all customers



Keynsham Library and One Stop Shop

- Our partner, voluntary and third-sector organisations will share the space to meet with the public on scheduled days e.g. Citizen's advice, Curo and Age UK
- Comfortable areas are available for reading groups, workshops and cultural events
- A wide selection of newspapers and journals is available, as usual, for all customers.

Will combining services work?

Building on success – Keynsham’s Library and One Stop Shop

The Council modernised Keynsham’s library in October 2014, moving it from its original location near the Town Hall to fully integrate it with the town’s One Stop Shop services located at Keynsham’s new Civic Centre on Market Walk.

The move, integration and modernisation of the service, including improved IT and WiFi services, has revitalised library use in the community bucking the national downward trend.

The number of active users (people taking out at least one item) in Keynsham Library rose from 3,099 in March 2014 to 4,630 in March 2016, while the number of borrowers in other libraries continued to decline – reflecting the national picture of falling library use.

Will valued library services be lost as a result of modernisation?

It is not proposed that any of our library services will be lost during the proposed modernisation but there will be changes to the way that they’re delivered, as described in this Q&A.

The way these services are designed, and their layout, will depend on the outcome of the public consultations as part of a thorough business case and options analysis.

Will books and other library items be disposed of as a result of modernisation?

It is not proposed that any books and other items i.e. DVDs and audio books are sold as a direct result of integrating and modernising the service.

Every year the Council buys and sells books and other items to ensure an up-to-date selection that reflects demand, maintaining roughly the same number of books either available on the shelves or from the store. Last year more books were bought than sold.

Items not used in over 10 years, duplicates and worn out local items from our main libraries are either donated to community libraries and children’s centres, sent to Book Barn (who sell the books on our behalf or send them on to educational projects), or sold to library customers. If stock is damaged or unable to be sold it is pulped and recycled. Money made from sales go back into the general library book fund.

Will the number of books on library shelves be reduced?

The number of books available on display to browse after modernisation and integration with One Stop Shop services will depend on the final design and layout of the services and the feedback we receive during consultation.

Books on display and available for browsing will continue to be central to any modernised library service. Should we need to reduce the number of books on shelves within any of our libraries, we will only remove books and items that are rarely, if ever, taken out or used. This will be done in accordance with our policy guidelines, available online. These items will still be available from the library’s own stores

and from LibrariesWest to order or collect after browsing the library's catalogues.

We will prioritise displaying our most popular books and items, and more of the books that you want.

LibrariesWest is a consortium of seven public library services across the south west which offers our members access to around 3 million items, including books, e-books, e-audio books, spoken word CDs, and DVDs. Members can borrow, return, renew and reserve items at any one of the 145 libraries within the consortium, as well as access the service by phone, online and via the LibrariesWest app.

What are the financial considerations for the Council and implications for taxpayers?

The financial climate for Bath & North East Somerset Council, like all local authorities is extremely challenging. It needs to cut £37 million from its budget, over the next three years.

The proposal to modernise our library service and integrate our two main libraries with One Stop Shop services will contribute to this target, and the annual revenue savings generated by the Programme have an £800,000 target to be delivered by 2019/20. These savings will help us to protect frontline services.

How will you make the saving?

The integration of the library and front-facing customer services is part of a wider three year programme of work that will realise significant long-term cost savings of up to £800,000 a year. This is not going to be easy as it involves investing in the service at a challenging time when many other councils, such as Swindon, are cutting investment in libraries. Integrating both services means that savings can be made without diminishing either service. It will improve efficiency and create the opportunity to lease space to other organisations, raising additional income which protects other services.

No decision has yet been made, or business case put forward on design and location of any of the services, so it remains possible that the proposals could change.

It's important to note that what was agreed in the February 2017 budget is not an estimate for agreed work. It is provision for funding that will enable the investment should it be required. This provision is a demonstration of our commitment to the library service.

What happens if you don't make the savings?

If the Modern Libraries programme does not deliver the required savings, then savings of £800,000 per year will still have to be made elsewhere. For example, other Councils have reduced their library's opening hours. Some have closed their libraries. We are not closing ours.

In this tough climate, our key objective is to avoid both our library service and One Stop Shops becoming unsustainable. An integration of One Stop Shop Services with our two main Library Services in central Bath and in Midsomer Norton is a sensible way forward. Our figures indicate that savings can be made regardless of location.

Will jobs be lost as a result of the modernisation?

We don't plan to make any redundancies as a result of this modernisation programme, and we're committed to maintaining skilled library staff within the service.

Over the next three years it's expected that 25 customer service and library staff will leave the service across the whole area, and they will not be replaced. This will be achieved by natural annual turnover of staff, leaving on their own accord.

Staff within the proposed new service will be trained to handle a wider range of enquiries i.e. both library and customer service enquiries.

An investment will be made in training and supporting volunteers across all services and in particular for community libraries.

Will Bath Central Library be moving?

No decision has been made, and no business case has yet been put forward on the design or the location of the service.

We will be investing in a library in the centre of Bath that will play an enhanced role in the community, helping more people to achieve their potential through learning and access to knowledge and information.

Pooling resources from the library and the One Stop Shop enables us to focus support and advice on the people who need it most (such as those without access to books and computers at home), without diminishing either service.

We understand that with libraries there is no one-size-fits-all design. While Keynsham is an excellent model of integration, the service in Bath – regardless of final location – will be designed to reflect the city's unique needs, the wider population it serves and its significant cultural standing as a UNESCO World Heritage City.

We have recently consulted the public on what services they might like from a combined Library and One Stop Shop. The feedback from this will form part of a wider business case, including options for location based on a wide range of data and statistical analysis.

Cabinet will consider these options and a summary of the case will be made available to the public to have their say as part of a second consultation later in the year.

Will enough floor space be available for an integrated service in central Bath?

Our proposal is to fully integrate two overlapping services under one roof, and this will require a complete redesign regardless of location.

Until a business case and options for the design, layout and locations are presented, it is difficult to provide an exact comparison of the floor space dedicated to library services in any new location.

We will be able to provide a better idea of comparable space, and the use of space, when the business case for integrating the services is developed. These options will be open for consultation.

Whatever the final location of the main library in Bath, there will be adequate room for all of the existing library services, including plenty books on shelves, quiet study areas, event rooms and a dedicated children's area.

An integrated service would be designed to enhance customer experience and make the most of any space.

See also: [*What does an integrated Library and One Stop Shop look like?*](#)

Why is the exhibition room in Bath Central Library closed?

The exhibition/meeting room at Bath Central Library is closed because the rolling stacks in the library's store are broken. The room will provide a temporary home for the books.

This is purely a current operational matter and not connected in any way to the library modernisation programme.

Why are we moving local history reference books to Bath Record Office in the Guildhall?

As part of a separate project in preparation since 2014, the Local Studies Reference Collection currently held in Bath Central Library will be combined with Bath Record Office in the Guildhall. The collection includes local history reference books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, microfilm and other historic items. Local history lending books will still be available to borrow from Bath Central Library and local branch libraries.

Bringing together our local studies and archive reference materials under one roof has been an aspiration long-held by staff and those who regularly use the service, such as local people, history researchers and academics. As early as 2002, those using the service were asking for this to happen.

Researchers will no longer need to visit multiple sites to gather all of the information they need. In addition, experienced, trained Archivists along with the Local Studies Librarian from Bath Central Library will be on hand to quickly locate relevant materials and assist in research across the whole collection.

The project includes a refurbishment of the research rooms to create additional public rooms where people will be able to browse local history reference books, conduct searches and study archive materials. High-speed WiFi will be made available in the Research Rooms for the first time, along with better PCs, desks and open access shelves showcasing many of our local history reference books. We will also take this opportunity to do much-needed damp proofing and to update fixtures and fittings so that the whole space is bright, clean and comfortable.

Opening hours will be extended to include Saturday mornings and the service will no longer close one week each month.

The Bath Record Office will close for this refurbishment from 14 April to 6 June 2017. During this time it will still be possible for Archive staff to respond to phone, email and postal enquiries but public access to the building will not be possible.

The Local Studies Collection will still be available at Bath Central Library until the materials are ready to be transferred. We will keep you informed of these dates.

You can find out more about these improvements at the Bath Record Office website at www.batharchives.co.uk.



How can residents have their say?

We have been holding a consultation on the principles of integrating library and customer services in Bath and the results of this are now available.

Residents in Midsomer Norton have recently completed the public consultation on their services and these results are also available. We'll be considering their feedback shortly.

Later in the year we will be holding a second consultation on the options for a combined library and One Stop Shop in the centre of Bath, following the presentation of a full business case to Cabinet. We would like as many people as possible to take part. The consultation is expected to take place over eight weeks in the summer and will be available online and in printed format in the library. It will also include further discussion and engagement with our partners and those who use the service.

See also: [What happens next in Bath?](#)

What happens next in Bath?

The Council will analyse feedback from the first consultation and this will form part of a wider business case, including statistical and options analysis produced from a wide range of data sources including library usage stats, information about local needs as well as data from the Office of National Statistics. This will be alongside a detailed Equality Impact and Needs Assessment.

We anticipate that the options appraisal and full needs analysis will be completed in early summer and the case will be put forward to Cabinet to consider after this time.

No final decision will be taken at this point. Cabinet will consider the options and a summary of the case will be put out for the public to have their say, as part of a second consultation for an eight-week period. This will be available online and in printed format at the library.

We'll also conduct further discussion and engagement with users and key stakeholders, such as our partner organisations.

A decision on the business case, taking into account both consultations and the Equality Impact and Needs Assessment, is expected to be made in the Autumn.

Why consult over the Summer?

During the Summer months, Bath Central Library sees many more visitors as a result of family events such as the Summer Reading Challenge. We want to give as many people as possible the chance to have their say on the proposals. The second phase of this consultation will be available online and in a printed format at the library for sufficient time to give everybody that wants to respond the opportunity to do so.

