

To Mr. Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services
By: Des Crilley, Director of Community Cultural Services
Subject: **AYLESFORD LIBRARY– replacement of service**
Classification: Unrestricted
File Ref: 08/01137

Summary:

This reports sets out proposals to replace Aylesford Library with alternative library service provision to meet the needs of the local community.

1. Background:

Levels of use of Aylesford Library have been decreasing over the last seven years, fewer people are visiting the library and the number of books and other items being borrowed has declined. The number of people registered as borrowers has also dropped.

Year	Total Issues	Visitor Figures	Active Borrowers
2001/02	4,612	2,548	1072
2002/03	4,025	3,068	1099
2003/04	4,365	2,548	1130
2004/05	4,280	2,250	1011
2005/06	4,047	2,121	295
2006/07	4,741	2,229	445
<i>Projected for 2007/08</i>	<i>4066</i>	<i>1507</i>	<i>snapshot check on 22 January 2008 showed 68 people had items on loan from the library</i>

More detailed statistics are attached in Appendix 1.

The Public Library is in the Community Centre.

The Mobile Library also visits the Aylesford area on Wednesdays at the following times and places:

Royal British Legion Village	weekly	9.40 – 10.20am
Teapot Lane	fortnightly	10.25 – 10.50am
Priory Grove	fortnightly	11.00 – 11.25am
Woodlands Road, Holtwood	fortnightly	5.45 - 6.10pm
Woodlands Road, Ditton	fortnightly	5.45 – 6.10pm

The Library operates on:

- Tuesdays 3 – 7pm
- Thursdays 2 – 5pm

The nearest libraries are in Allington and Larkfield (less than 2 miles away and popular shopping destinations), Maidstone and Snodland (less than 3 miles away) West Malling (less than 4 miles away.)

2. Policy Context

In April 2004 Cabinet endorsed the “**Library and Archive Strategy: 2004 to 2014**” this document set out the vision for Libraries and Archives and set out the broad strategy to deliver the transformed service, which commits us to:

“Provide a network of welcoming and attractive libraries which are centres for local communities, open at convenient times.”

These were key priorities for the members of the public we consulted in developing the mission and core objectives.

We will provide a network of facilities that:

- are welcoming and vibrant community spaces;
- enable all our customers, current or potential, to access the full range of services, whether directly or remotely;
- are tailor made to meet the needs of the local community

The 2006/07 Business Plan for Libraries and Archives includes a target to:

Review and develop further the work already undertaken to implement a 10 year Infrastructure Plan

- Plans agreed for reviewing services in at least 16 communities

3. Process

Consultation

Two Phases of customer consultation have been carried out during Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007

- The first survey resulted in 31 responses. The survey was sent to all regular (people who had borrowed at least one item in previous year) users
- Additional copies of the survey were made available to the wider community and occasional library users in local venues (on the mobile library, St Peter’s Primary School, the Post Office, Doctor’s surgery, local coffee shop and shop.)
- The survey was promoted by posters displayed in local venues and through articles in the local press.

There were **31** returns from the survey out of **600** distributed. This represents **less than 1%** of the catchment population.

- A Drop-In discussion was held on 26 July 2006 with local library managers and the local KCC member (Mr Rowe).
- Aylesford and Eccles WI also carried out a survey of their members – 14 people completed the survey – 7 were members of Aylesford Library, 5 said they would not be affected by the closure of Aylesford Library
- The second survey was distributed to every household (**2,000** leaflets delivered) and **36** responses were received

Further detail from the surveys can be found in Appendix 2

Other stakeholder involvement

The Parish Council has been consulted throughout the consultation and they have been briefed about the proposals. The council would regret the loss of the library but they understand the issues of low levels of use.

The Aylesford Village Community Centre committee have also been briefed and involved throughout the consultation work.

Local Member Consultation

The local KCC Member Mr Geoff Rowe has been involved in discussions from an early stage. Mr Rowe was keen to get involved in the consultation and was instrumental in setting up the Drop- In session. Mr Rowe was keen to see a second phase of consultation set up, as he felt it was important to give the community further opportunities to comment on the future of library services. Mr Rowe understands the issues of low levels of use of the current library and is keen to ensure that local people are fully aware of the alternative service offer. Mr Rowe believes that this offer can deliver an enhanced library service for the Aylesford community. In addition, by working in partnership with Aylesford School Sports College, Mr Rowe feels there is a real opportunity for the School's community role to be developed further.

4. Resource Implications

There are no resource implications resulting from the closure of Aylesford Library. Any savings on premises costs will be reinvested in alternative service provision.

The impact on staff is minimal as individuals who currently work at Aylesford are part of a pool of staff who work at other libraries in Tonbridge District. If Aylesford Library does close they will be re-deployed at other libraries in the District. - no member of staff will be made redundant as a result of the proposed closure.

The books and other resources will be reallocated to nearby libraries.

5. Recommendation

Taking into account the reasons detailed in this report, the Cabinet Member for Community Services is asked to agree the following recommendations:

- Close down the service offered from the existing library building.
- Adjust the mobile library schedule to establish a village location - using the feedback from the consultation and involving the local community in further discussions. Promote the new service widely to the local community. The Mobile Library is fully accessible to wheelchair users and carries approximately 2,500 books and other items of stock. The stock is exchanged regularly.
- Promote the Home Library Delivery Service to local people for whom this is the most appropriate alternative library service. This will offer customers an enhanced personal service - with books and other library items being delivered by a volunteer to the customers in their home
- Plan and implement an innovative and exciting programme of events and activities promoting reading designed to meet local needs using the feedback received during the consultation. Make use of local venues, in partnership with Aylesford School Sports

College and other community groups, for example to host Baby Bounce and Rhyme Time Sessions and Reading Groups.

- Explore the potential to relocate the public access computers to Larkfield Library
- Raise public awareness of the alternative ways to access library services, focussing on the better quality of service available at the nearest libraries and our wide range of remotely accessible services available through the Internet.

Sue Sparks

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Background Document:

1. Library and Archive Strategy 2004-2014