

To: Mr Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities

By: Amanda Honey, Managing Director for Communities

Subject: **ST JOHN'S LIBRARY (SEVENOAKS) – replacement of service**

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary:

This reports sets out proposals to replace St John's Library (Sevenoaks) with alternative library service provision to meet the needs of the local community

1. Introduction

(1) The library is located in a second hand mobile unit within the grounds of **St John's C of E Primary School** (marked in blue on the map – **Appendix 1**).

(a) The service was relocated from the St John's Hospital site in 2001 (marked in red on the map – **Appendix 1**); the landlord redeveloped the site and could not provide space for the library.

(b) The Governors and staff of St John's Primary School are keen to develop and improve their building and the school grounds to create a modern and attractive learning environment. The school is seeing an increase in the number of pupils attending and they have submitted a planning application to KCC for changes to the site and some new build. The library is not only in the way but it is also a very unattractive building surrounded by high fencing. This impinges on the welcome that the school would like to give to visitors.

(b) The school has a modernised school library with good quality furniture and there has been a recent injection of new books which the children borrow and take home. In addition each classroom has a good selection of all types of books.

(2) **A mobile library service** was also introduced in 2001 to serve those users living further away from the school; there are several steep hills between Seal Road and the school site.

(a) The mobile library visits every Thursday as follows:

Chatham Hill Road 11.50 – 12.10
Wickenden Road 12.15 – 12.50

The two stops are marked in green on the map (**Appendix 1**).

(b) The mobile library is fully accessible and provides a shelf stock of 2800 books. Access to the entire stock of the library network including books, DVDs and other items is provided via the online catalogue on board the vehicle. The stock is changed regularly.

(3) St John's Library is relatively near to **other local libraries** (marked in yellow on the map - **Appendix 1**) as follows:

Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope	0.7 miles
Seal	1 mile
Riverhead	1.35 miles
Kemsing	2 miles
Otford	2.3 miles

(4) Use of Libraries:

(a) Analysis of the use of libraries by people living in the core catchment area for St John's shows that:

- 85% (1404 people) are registered members of Sevenoaks
- 8% (134 people) are registered members of other libraries in Kent
- 6% (102 people) are members of St John's Library

(b) Analysis of the 102 users of St John's Library shows that:

- 14% are children 0-4
- 25% are primary school aged children 5 -11 years
- 3% are aged 12-17
- 35.5% are aged 18-60
- 20% are over 60
- 3% do not specify age
- 75% of the 102 St John's members use another library, of whom 73% use Sevenoaks

(5) Opening Hours

The hours for St John's Library and other nearby libraries are at **Appendix 2**.

(6) Levels of use

(a) St John's Library has been poorly used for several years and although the service has been promoted, and different activities introduced, levels of use including the number of books being borrowed continues to decrease. The approaches deployed to attract more users have included:

- Book exchanges for Primary School children; these no longer happen following upgrading of the school library
- Parents Reading Group; this relocated as members preferred to meet at Sevenoaks Library
- Summer Reading Challenge, Book Crawl and other activities for children have not been well supported

(b) Use has fallen since first fully operational year on the school site (2002/2003).

	2010/2011	2009/2010	2002/2003
Average monthly visits	115	198	364
Average number of items issued per month	192	410	494
Average number of PC bookings per month	25	30	PCs not available at this time
Number of Library members	102	130	494

Figures for 10 months of each year April – January

(c) The following detailed statistics are attached in **Appendix 3** including:

- Issue figures
- Visitor figures
- Computer use

(7) Building maintenance issues

The condition of the second hand classroom is deteriorating rapidly. Minor repairs have been carried out but there are significant problems with leaks in the roof.

2. Relevant Priority Outcomes

(1) KCC's "Library and Archive Strategy: 2004 to 2014" states that we will provide a network of facilities that:

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

(2) The network of libraries including Sevenoaks and the mobile library enables KCC to fulfill this role. The Home Library Service reaches people unable to get to a library offering an enhanced personal service. Books and other library items are delivered by a volunteer to the customers in their home. Online services enable KCC to provide access to all its library services via the internet. For example, eBooks and public information can be provided 24/7. Books can also be ordered online and collected from any service point including the mobile library

3. Consultation and communication

(1) St John's has been in the **Forward Plan** since July 2010.

(2) **Letters (Appendix 4)** were sent to all 102 members of St Johns Library on 2nd February inviting responses by 18th February. During this period we received 3 responses:

- (a) An email from a lady expressing disappointment at the recommendation. She has valued access to books and computers at St John's. She has appreciated seeing children using the library too. She states that a mobile stop near St John's school would enable her to use the service at times when she is unable to get to Sevenoaks.
- (b) A phone call from a lady concerned that her Home Library Service would be affected. She was reassured that the service came from Sevenoaks and would continue.
- (c) A phone call from a local nursery concerned that it will no longer be able to take the children to the library to exchange books. St John's Primary School has agreed that it will continue to support the nursery including book loans. The nursery will also be able to access Libraries and Archives' Pre-school Loans Service.

(3) A **Drop-in** was arranged for Friday 11th February for library members to visit a mobile library near St John's school between 9.30 and 11.00 a.m. Seven people visited the mobile:

- (a) Most already use Sevenoaks and will carry on doing so.
- (b) Some were interested in using the mobile - 2 would prefer a stop near to the school.
- (c) 1 person uses the reservation system quite heavily; it was explained they could request items via the KCC website and collect them from the mobile or any other library.
- (d) 2 people use the computers at St John's and said that they would like the mobile library. to provide this service. In the meantime they would use Sevenoaks.

(4) **Other stakeholder involvement**

(a) Members of **Sevenoaks Town Council** were briefed and consulted on 28th February. There was full support for the new approach. Comments included:

- The recommendation that the mobile library stop near St John's School.
- The need for the library service to continue to support the school including child and adult literacy.
- An enquiry about the role of volunteers.
- There was also praise for the excellent public consultation.

(b) **St John's Primary School** also has been kept informed and involved throughout the consultation work

(c) **Local KCC Member** John London has been briefed and consulted along with Richard Parry and Nick Chard whose Wards are adjacent to St John's. Local members understand that the driver for the replacement of services at St John's is the school's need to develop the site. They understand the low levels of use and that the majority of local people already use Sevenoaks and other libraries. They have been reassured that every library users will receive a service, and that for some it will be an enhanced service including mobile and Home Library Service provision.

(d) **The Lodge Nursery School as referenced in 3(2) (c) above.**

4. Financial Implications

(1) There are no resource implications resulting from the closure of St John's Library. Any savings on premises costs will be reinvested in alternative service provision at libraries, including Sevenoaks and the mobile library.

(2) The impact on staff is minimal as individuals who currently work at St John's which is open for 15 hours per week are part of a pool of staff who work at other libraries in Sevenoaks District. If St John's Library closes they will continue to be deployed at Sevenoaks and other libraries. No member of staff will be made redundant as a result of the proposed closure.

(3) The books and other resources will be reallocated to Sevenoaks and other nearby libraries where they will be available to meet any increased use by for St Johns residents.

5. Legal implications

The primary legislative framework for the service is the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) which requires local authorities to deliver a comprehensive and efficient public library service.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has highlighted that there will not be any adverse impact on customers. Promotion of the network of local libraries including Sevenoaks and a mobile library stop near the school plus the use on online access will meet the diverse needs of the community and enable wider access to services by the individuals who currently use St John's.

7. Sustainability implications

There will be no adverse impact on proposals due to climate change. Community cohesion, along with literacy and reading and information and digital inclusion, will continue to be the priorities for Libraries and Archives. Libraries and Archives will also continue to play a key role in building a sustainable economy across Sevenoaks and beyond.

8. Alternatives and options

There is no opportunity to relocate the library at St John's School or elsewhere in the community. Promotion of the network of existing libraries including a mobile library stop near the school and the use on online access will enable wider access to services by the individuals who currently use St John's.

9. Risks and business continuity management

Consultation with every individual library user provides confidence that there are no strategic, operational or reputational risks.

10. Conclusion

Users of St John's Library are willing and able to access Sevenoaks and other libraries including the mobile library service, Home Library Service and other services for people with special needs.

11. Recommendation

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

- Close down the service offered from the existing library building by the end of June and vacate the site in July to enable the school's building programme to proceed.
- Adjust the mobile library schedule to establish locations which meet the needs of the majority of users using the feedback from the consultation and involving the local community in further discussions. This will include a stop near the school.
- Promote the new mobile service and explore opportunities to provide internet access on the vehicle.
- Promote other services e.g. Home Library Delivery, Spoken Word Service for people who are registered blind or partially sighted, Sevenoaks Kaleidoscope (the wide range of books and information including resources for researching family and local history) online resources, information and eBooks.
- Promote Time2Give volunteering opportunities in local libraries.
- Support literacy, including adult literacy, and reading at St John's School through the free School Book Loans service, class visits to Sevenoaks and reading activities in the school including book clubs, talks and family activities.
- Promote library services at community events.

12. Background documents

Library and Archive Strategy 2004-2014
Equality Impact Assessment
Risk assessment

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