

Extending LibraryPlus to Kempston and Putnoe Libraries

The Council is consulting on a proposal to extend the LibraryPlus service model to Kempston and Putnoe libraries.

Background

The Council carried out a public consultation and review of its Library Service in 2016. This informed the development of a Library Strategy for the period 2017-22 and led to the introduction of a digital library model known as LibraryPlus at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries.

The introduction of LibraryPlus has been a success, allowing an increase in opening hours and providing a more flexible, convenient service for customers. We are now proposing to extend LibraryPlus to Kempston and Putnoe libraries.

Benefits of LibraryPlus

LibraryPlus provides a mixture of staffed hours as well as using technology to allow access for customers during unstaffed, self-service hours. During the self-service hours, LibraryPlus customers can enter the libraries to browse the shelves, borrow and return items, use the computers, study and work, and meet friends and family.

“LibraryPlus has proved to be a winner in Wootton. Access for more hours overall means it is far easier to return and select books from the library, plus the public access computers are also available in LibraryPlus. Staff are available to help during staffed hours and other services that the library provides (such as activities for families and small groups) still happen – so there is little inconvenience from the mainly self-service style operation.” **Wootton Resident**

The introduction of LibraryPlus at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries meant that the Council was able to make essential savings in the face of reduced government funding, by reducing staffing costs.

Over 12,000 library customers have registered for LibraryPlus, taking advantage of benefits that include:

- A more flexible and convenient service that is available at the times customers want to use it.
- An increase in overall opening hours from 87 to 150 hours per week – opening hours at Bedford Central Library have increased from 48 to 60 hours per week.
- Sunday and Bank Holiday opening at Bedford Central Library.

LibraryPlus customers can access these libraries during self-service hours by scanning their library card and entering their PIN. The technology further supports the use of self-service kiosks and public access computers during unstaffed hours.

Proposal to extend LibraryPlus to Kempston and Putnoe libraries

Library opening times were reduced at Kempston and Putnoe libraries in 2017 following public consultation. Following the success of LibraryPlus at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries, the Council is proposing to extend it to Kempston and Putnoe libraries.

The Council has to make savings of around £17 million by 2026, partly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes savings from the Library Service. The proposal to extend LibraryPlus would see a mixture of staffed hours and unstaffed, self-service hours. There would be a reduction in staffed hours and therefore staff numbers, while overall opening hours would increase. This would allow the Council to make an ongoing saving of approximately £49,000.

Extending LibraryPlus to Kempston and Putnoe libraries would enable increased, flexible opening hours at convenient times, whilst still providing core hours where service users could interact with library staff. It would enhance the service offer to customers and ensure a consistent service across all Bedford Borough libraries.

To ensure that libraries are used safely, LibraryPlus uses a range of systems to support customers during self-service hours, including CCTV monitoring, help points and public announcements.