LibraryPlus Consultation – Frequently Asked Questions

What is LibraryPlus?

LibraryPlus is the name for the digital library service introduced at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries in September 2017.

These libraries have core hours that are staffed as well as utilising technology to allow access for LibraryPlus customers during unstaffed, self-service hours. During the self-service hours, customers can enter the libraries to browse the shelves, borrow and return items, use the computers, study and work, and meet friends and family.

Introducing LibraryPlus at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries helped the Council to make vital savings and has made the service more flexible and convenient for users of these libraries. Opening hours across the three libraries have increased from a total of 87 to 150 hours per week, including Sunday and Bank Holiday opening at Bedford Central Library.

Why is Bedford Borough Council proposing to introduce LibraryPlus at Kempston and Putnoe libraries?

This consultation is being carried out in the context of the Council having to find savings of around £17 million by 2026. This includes savings from the Library Service.

The Council made changes to the Library Service in 2017 following public consultation. LibraryPlus was introduced at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries, whilst opening hours were reduced at Kempston and Putnoe in order to achieve necessary savings.

The current proposal to extend LibraryPlus to Kempston and Putnoe libraries would make it possible to increase overall opening hours whilst delivering savings from a decrease in staffed hours. This means there would be a reduction in the number of staffed hours and therefore staff numbers.

The LibraryPlus model is not just about making savings. It is also about attracting people who do not currently use the library service, by utilising technology to make the service more available and convenient to use, and encouraging more independent customer use.

How would LibraryPlus work at Kempston and Putnoe libraries?

LibraryPlus would work in the same way at Kempston and Putnoe libraries as it does at the three libraries that already operate in this way – with a mixture of staffed and unstaffed, self-service hours.

Once registered for LibraryPlus, customers would be able to use their existing library card with a PIN to 'swipe in' at the doors and enter the library during self-service hours. The libraries would be covered by CCTV, which would be monitored by the Council's CCTV team and out of hours service.

At closing time, an announcement would warn customers in advance that the library was closing, with announcements continuing up until the actual closure time.

Who would be able to access the libraries during self-service hours?

Customers wishing to use the library during self-service hours would need to register for LibraryPlus. This would be available to library members and there would be no charge. Customers would need to be aged 16 and over to join LibraryPlus. During self-service hours, children aged under 16 would be able to visit the libraries when accompanied by an adult who is a LibraryPlus member.

Customers would be asked to sign an agreement with the library service and there would be an induction process on how LibraryPlus works and the services available during self-service hours. After this, customers would be free to enter the library during both staffed and self-service hours.

Customers who have signed up for LibraryPlus at one of the three libraries already offering the service would automatically have their access extended to include Kempston and Putnoe libraries.

What services would I be able to use during self-service hours?

The same services that customers can use during staffed hours – browsing the shelves, borrowing and returning items and making payments through the self-service kiosks, using the computers and Wi-Fi, using quiet space to study and work, and meeting friends and family.

What changes would there be to opening hours?

Analysis of the requirements of each library would be undertaken before agreeing the hours. This would take into account patterns of customer activity to help ensure core staffed hours were delivered where most needed. If the proposal was to proceed, usage of the library would be kept under review and amendments would be made to the opening hours if necessary.

The staffed and self-service hours would be advertised and there would be staff on hand to help those who need it during staffed hours.

What safety and security measures would be in place during self-service hours?

There would be full CCTV coverage at Kempston and Putnoe libraries during both staffed and self-service hours. This would be monitored by the Council's CCTV team and out of hours service, who would be able to alert the Police or key staff should any incidents occur.

There would be help points or dedicated telephones in place for customers to use during self-service hours to call for emergency assistance if required. These would connect to key staff, the CCTV team and out of hours service.

Since introducing LibraryPlus at Bedford Central, Wootton and Bromham libraries in 2017, there has been no increase in reported criminal activity or anti-social behaviour at these sites. Of three instances of minor theft reported at Bedford Central Library during the first year of LibraryPlus, only one took place during self-service hours and on this occasion the CCTV system helped to apprehend the offender.

How would this proposal affect activities and events at libraries?

There would continue to be a wide range of activities taking place in libraries. In 2019/20, almost 1,500 events and activities were held in Bedford Borough libraries, including those where LibraryPlus has already been introduced, with 25,400 participants. The final pattern of staffed and self-service hours would be influenced by a review of times when the libraries are popular with attendees for family activities.

Would it be possible to use the public access computers during self-service hours? Would this create any additional security or safeguarding issues?

The public access computers would be available to LibraryPlus customers during self-service hours. Access to the internet would continue to be filtered in self-service hours, as it is at present.

How would the day to day transition between staffed hours and self-service hours be managed?

This would depend on the final pattern of staffed and self-service hours; the service would make sure customers were properly informed of any changes. At the libraries that currently have LibraryPlus, the transition is managed in a way that helps ensure that it is customers who have LibraryPlus membership who are able to access the library during self-service hours.

Is the use of volunteers possible with the LibraryPlus operating model?

Volunteers would continue to be able to support libraries in a variety of roles. The Council is committed to encouraging and supporting volunteering to maximise the delivery of services; in 2019/20, volunteers contributed 12,400 volunteer hours to Libraries & Culture services.