

Communities to get big say in the future of their libraries

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Local communities are to be asked if they want to get involved with supporting and helping develop their local libraries from April next year.

Nottinghamshire County Council will begin asking community groups right across the county how they might want to actively help enhance the core library service in its 28 smaller libraries which will be subject to a reduction of opening hours from April 2011 onwards.

Council budget proposals announced last month to prioritise the needs of children at risk and vulnerable people have meant that 28 libraries, which already have limited weekly opening times, will be reduced to between eight to ten hours a week.

'Developing partnerships'

The Council's cabinet member for culture and community John Cottee said: "We're looking to develop new community library partnerships with parish councils and voluntary bodies in these areas to encourage greater community involvement with these valuable assets. It's not a case of replacing existing library staff, but working to improve the proposed service using community resources which already exist.

"We don't have a specific 'one-size-fits-all' model in mind at all for these partnerships – quite the reverse. We want the library service to work for the individual communities it serves. We're eager to hear what ideas communities have got for supporting our professional library staff to increase the benefits the library brings to our communities beyond the new core offer."

Possibilities include:

- The formation of local library support groups
- Community volunteers, managed by the library service, increasing the service offer and/or opening hours beyond the core
- Fundraising driven by community volunteers for additional services such as increasing book purchases and opening hours
- A specific library support group to partner the County Council to make significant changes in service or building such as co-locating to other community facilities
- Community volunteers provided by a partner to increase the service offer
- Local community groups volunteering to take responsibility for the library building for the duration of their meetings, so customers can borrow and return books on a self-service basis
- Volunteers offering IT training at the library using existing computer facilities meaning that the library could open while their session was on.

Councillor Cottee is also writing to parish councils with details of the community groups it's seeking views and ideas from in supporting the development of new partnerships.

The County Council will then hold meetings with key organisations to work out the right way forward for each situation.

Proposals for reducing opening hours at these libraries are currently scheduled for implementation in April 2011.

The 28 Community Partnership Libraries will be:

Annesley	Balmoral	Bilsthorpe	Blidworth
Burton Joyce	Carlton Hill	Carlton in Lindrick	Clipstone
Collingham	Edgewood	Farnsfield	Gedling

Gotham	Huthwaite	Inham Nook	Jacksdale
Ladybrook	Langold	Lowdham	Misterton
Rainworth	Selston	Skegby	Sutton Bonington
Sutton on Trent	Toton	Tuxford	Woodthorpe