

# **NEWS RELEASE**

**29 June 2020**

**For immediate release**

## **People's views sought on plans to reopen library services safely**

Wiltshire Council is seeking the views of residents and library users to help with its planning for reopening library services safely in the county during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The library service in Wiltshire was temporarily closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic on 20 March. The existing eBooks, eMagazines and eAudio service continues providing access to reading material, and on 27 March a new service launched via Facebook offering rhyme times, tea and chat, bedtime stories and online book groups. At the start of June, a Home Library service was launched, serving library members shielding and without digital access to download books; this service is currently used by approximately 100 people. The online library content produced since lockdown has so far generated more than 83,000 views.

To make sure the library services they provides meet the needs of people safely and are as innovative in their delivery as possible, the council would like to hear the ideas and feedback from the public on how to reopen the services.

During this challenging time the council has to manage its resources carefully and has put forward three possible options for how the service might operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. People are also being encouraged to provide their own ideas to help the council deliver the most appropriate service in the circumstances and within the council's current resources.

The possible options take into account COVID-19 guidelines and social distancing measures and the resources available – meaning that there will be a partial and phased reopening of library services.

The possible options being considered include:

### **Option 1**

An order and collect service

This involves customers contacting the library service by email/phone to request books or other materials that they wish to borrow. This might include specific authors

or topics such as crime or autobiographies. These would then be collected in person from a library.

This would operate from 10 August at some main library hubs in Wiltshire, and in each of the 18 community areas across the county by the end of September. This means that 20 libraries could potentially be open by the end of September, subject to staff and finances being available.

### **Option 2**

An order and collect service with bookable computer access

The order and collect service as detailed above and the ability to pre-book a computer session for those without access to the internet.

This would operate from 10 August at some main library hubs in Wiltshire and in each community area across the county by the end of September.

### **Option 3**

A socially distanced service offering the public some access to browse stock and use computers. This would operate in up to six libraries from the end of August and a maximum of a further four, subject to staff capacity and social distancing requirements.

A four-week [public consultation is now underway](#). Hard copies will be made available at County Hall, Trowbridge; Monkton Park, Chippenham; and Bourne Hill, Salisbury. The consultation closes on 26 July 2020.

Following analysis of the feedback received, the favoured option will likely be introduced initially for a six-month period from 10 August. Monthly reviews will also be carried out to assess how the impact of COVID-19 is changing, the financial impact of operating, lessons learnt and the opportunities for change.

Cllr Philip Whitehead, Leader of Wiltshire Council, said: "People are rightly passionate about their libraries and that's been evident in the astonishing take-up of our online services since lockdown in March. We're taking this opportunity to think about how we reopen the service safely, carefully and in a phased way during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have suggested some possible options on how we may reopen library services, but we really need people to share their thoughts and ideas on we can overcome the challenges we face at this time. We're looking forward to hearing what people think."

In the meantime, the Wiltshire Council libraries service has a range of online resources to keep people busy. They can be found at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/libraries-online-resources>.

For more information, please contact the communications team at [communications@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:communications@wiltshire.gov.uk)