

Forwarded to Shropshire Town and Parish Councils for Information.

**Subject: Consultation launched into future of School Library Service**

Shropshire Council has now launched a consultation into the future of the School Library Service, with schools and members of the public invited to share their thoughts.

In Shropshire, the School Library Service (SLS) operates as a traded service, which schools can buy into, and around 65% of schools in Shropshire choose to do so.

Schools that subscribe to the service can borrow books and artefacts relating to school topics and receive training for staff and pupil librarians. Schools can use the service to supplement their own stocks of books and resources.

Schools receive funding provided directly through central Government grants to ensure children and young people have access to books and other suitable education materials necessary to support the curriculum. SLS does not sell books to schools, and schools run their own libraries independently. 35% of Shropshire schools choose not to use the service, using alternatives already.

The service has been operating at a loss for the last two financial years and the council cannot continue to fund any future deficits by SLS. Any future service, if retained, would require more schools to subscribe to the service and to pay more.

Like many other councils, we face a very challenging financial position and must find £62m of savings this year. This is due to ever rising demand for social care, which now accounts for almost £4 in every £5 the council spends, and rising costs from continuing high levels of inflation.

This means we now have some very difficult decisions to make, including reducing some services, particularly non-statutory ones. In some cases, this means stopping services altogether. SLS is one such service that councils do not have to provide by law and which many other councils have already stopped operating.

The scale of the financial challenge the council faces means there will be many decisions that we have never wanted to make, so that we can continue to prioritise statutory services that support the most vulnerable people.

As part of the council's savings plans, we propose to stop the SLS from the autumn if no other solution can be found.

We have invited schools to respond to a consultation to capture ideas, including whether they would be willing to pay more for the service, or start using the service if they don't already, to make it financially viable for the future.

Families and the public are also able to respond to a survey to share their thoughts on the plans. All possible options to continue the service will be explored and we welcome all suggestions.

Members of the public can share their feedback here: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/school-library-service/>

**Consultation closes on 7 June 2024.**