

NEWS

Have your say on future of county's libraries as consultation launches

A public consultation has been launched over a proposal to create an independent organisation to deliver Hertfordshire's library services on behalf of the cash-strapped county council, which is struggling to balance its books.

The Inspiring Libraries consultation opened last week and runs until February 18, seeking views on an independent organisation – such as a social enterprise, charity or co-operative – delivering library services on behalf of Herts County Council.

The local authority says this could achieve a potential saving in non-domestic rates, and may enable the service to access grants and other sources of funding that would not be available to the county council.

The proposal is part of the strategy 'Inspiring Libraries – The Next Phase', which was agreed by the county council in November and sets out the

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priorities for Hertfordshire libraries for 2018-2021.

It follows on from the original Inspiring Libraries strategy, which was launched in 2014 and saw the county's libraries ranked in tiers and services reduced from November 2015.

Under Tier 1, Stevenage Central and Hitchin libraries offer the broadest range of services and have the longest opening hours, with library staff on hand at all times.

Baldock and Letchworth both fall under Tier 2, which provides core services with the option to have extended hours through volunteer supervised self-service.

Stevenage Old Town and Knebworth libraries are ranked under Tier 3, with self-service facilities which can be added to with the help of volunteers.

The Inspiring Libraries strategy is on track to achieve the expected £2.5 million in savings, but continuing pressure on funding for public services means an additional £500,000 in savings needs to be found by 2019/20.

Councillor Terry Douris, Cabinet member for libraries, said: "Ongoing pressure on the county council budget means we have to consider how we can continue to save money across all services.

"In order to achieve our ambitions for Inspiring Libraries within a reduced budget and put ourselves in the best position to grasp future opportunities, we need to identify the most appropriate way of managing the library services in the years ahead, and we welcome your views."

You can complete the consultation survey by visiting www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/libraryconsultation.

School visit



Richard Mayers talks to the Year 2 children. Picture: SAMUEL LUCAS JMI SCHOOL

An author visited a Hitchin primary school on Tuesday to share his new book with the children.

Richard Mayers, author of the Spikez series, showed his latest hedgehog-themed picture book to kids from Years 1 and 2 at Samuel Lucas JMI – showing the illustrations on an interactive whiteboard and reading the story to them.

Samuel Lucas deputy head Lorraine Painter said the Year 1 group loved listening to the yet-to-be published story and hearing about how illustrations in

the book were created from collages of photos and drawings.

The Year 2 children also enjoyed the story, and asked questions such as when Richard first wrote a book.

Richard gave the children tips about writing, telling them to write about what they know and to look, listen and ask questions.

Miss Painter said: "All our pupils are going to be working on their 500-word stories for the Radio 2 competition, so it was really good for the Year 2 children to meet a real author and get some ideas."

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