

Cabinet – 19 May 2026

Councillor questions

Question from Cllr Richard Crabb, Sherborne West Ward

The library in Sherborne has been closed since 5th September 2025. The original intention was to provide new Extended Access to Sherborne Library and at the same time essential asbestos removal works would be completed. The Extended Access is to allow members to use facilities beyond staffed opening hours with access to WiFi, self-service and printing.

The library first closed on 5th September 2025 and was planned to re-open on the 18th October.

On 25th September we heard that the date to re-open would be extended to the 8th November. This was because of surveys needed by Building Control and the Dorset Fire Service. On 3rd November we heard that the re-opening would be extended again to the week beginning 15th December.

In January this year, we heard that both Building Control and Dorset Fire Service would need extensive surveys lasting 4-6 weeks for the approvals process. Since then, we have not received any further updates. Our residents understandably are concerned about what has happened to their library as to all practical intents and purposes it has closed completely.

Please could I therefore have an update on progress, and a commitment to complete the work to a given date that can be stuck to, preferably within the next month or two? Also, our residents would like an explanation of what caused the delays with the surveys. Clearly these have been postponed on multiple occasions.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Transformation, Customer & Workforce

Thank you for the question. We recognise that delays to reopening this valued community facility have caused concern locally.

Subject to final approvals being received within the next two weeks, the team is working towards reopening Sherborne Library by the end of July and will do all it can to bring this forward.

The project is currently awaiting formal sign-off of the revised design and fire strategy from Building Control and Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. All works that could proceed ahead of these approvals were completed by 13 May 2026.

Once approval is secured, the contractor will return to site, with up to eight weeks required to complete the remaining works. This programme includes contingency to support delivery within the stated timeframe.

Delays have been driven by the discovery of significant licensable asbestos and concerns regarding the structural integrity of the roof and frame. These required more extensive investigation and redesign to ensure full compliance with building regulations and fire safety requirements, as well as agreement with regulatory bodies before works could safely continue.

These issues have now been addressed, including asbestos removal, structural assessment, and development of an enhanced fire strategy incorporating additional protection, upgraded detection and emergency lighting, electrical works, and replacement fire doors. Approval of these measures is the final step before works can restart.

Project oversight has been strengthened, and the project is now in its final stage and progressing towards reopening.

In the meantime, residents can continue to access library services through:

- digital services are available 24/7, including e-books, audiobooks and online resources
- full access is available at other Dorset and Libraries West locations
- temporary local arrangements will continue where possible
- our library pages on our website provide the latest information on accessing services