

Extract of Cabinet Minutes : 28 June 2017

CA.04 LIBRARY REVIEW – OUTCOME OF THIRD SURVEY ON PROPOSED OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet Member (Children and Families) submitted a report presenting:

- The summarised outcomes of the public consultation on the Library Review relating to the 2 proposed options:
Option 1 - Retain Bury, Ramsbottom and Prestwich Libraries plus a service-wide team.
Option 2 - Retain Bury, Ramsbottom, Prestwich and Radcliffe Libraries plus a smaller service-wide team.
- An overview of additional work carried out since the last report to Cabinet, and;
- A recommendation for option choice and next steps.

The Chair invited questions from members of the public present.

- Can an assurance be given that the Council will support the Friends of Tottington Library to keep their local library open?

The Council will listen to proposals of the Friends of Tottington Library and will support them where it is cost neutral to the Council.

- Tottington Library has the highest number of young readers in the Borough and the Council's proposal to close the library will discriminate against them. How has the Council included young readers in its consultation?

The Council undertook its consultation across all areas including children at school. The libraries at Tottington and Unsworth were well used by younger readers with the support of family members and the Library Service would continue to work with families in the future.

- Can the Council reconsider the proposal to close Bury libraries? There will be an impact on the lives of residents if their library is closed. There will also be implications for older people commuting and disabled people who will not be able to travel into Bury or find a disabled parking space close to the library. Safety is an issue for these people. Unemployed people also

rely on libraries and may not be able to afford the cost of travel to get access.

The Council is not in a financial position to be able to keep all the libraries in the Borough open and must take decisions to provide a sustainable, high quality library service for Bury residents.

- Why has Option 3 not been mentioned in the report regarding a possible reduction in the size a libraries? The more libraries there are the more efficient the access to facilities will be for residents. Community groups and clubs could be lost if the closures happen. The volunteers mentioned in the report are not coming forward as expected.

Option 3 was considered in the previous stage of the review process but was it not financially viable. Also, the arrangements for the libraries involved would not have provided a level of service and quality appropriate for the whole of the Borough. Work with the community will still continue including luncheon clubs and work to reduce social isolation. Unfortunately the Council still has to make further financial savings on services and cannot afford to maintain the service in its current form.

- What sort of resources will be made available for library volunteers to promote a community library service? Can the Council commit resources to maintain a community asset?

The Council welcomes the support of community groups and will offer advice and help to identify and access funding but is unable to provide direct financial resources.

- When the Council refers to 'cost neutral' can details be provided because it is important for a group that is interested in taking on an asset to know the costs involved in order to produce a costed business plan.

The Council is not able to provide specific details on every asset at this stage of the process.

- Why has the Council not built up funds from Council Tax for use to maintain library buildings?

The Council has to meet a number of service demands and prioritises its resources accordingly.

- The Council promised that the Seedfield Library was safe for twenty years after receiving lottery funding and now after eight years the service is going to be lost.

A twenty year period was given at the time however the present financial situation in which the Council if finds itself means that this position cannot be sustained. The Council will continue to work for and support the local community. The lottery funding provided was a capital grant and the Council provided the staffing resources for the library.

- The library in Tottington is the only community asset available to hold meetings and clubs. The local churches have been approached but are not able to help. There is no bus service to the other closest areas with a library.
- Can Councillors take a knock like the people of the borough are experiencing through cuts to services and use the money saved to help fund a library service?

The Boundary Commission is to be contacted and enquiries made regarding a change to the electoral cycle and numbers of Councillors. If this is taken forward the money saved would not be ring-fenced specifically for libraries provision but would be directed to other areas such as emergency and priority spending and increases in costs.

- If a community group can demonstrate that it could successfully maintain a building would the Council consider a community asset transfer?

The Council would consider the transfer of a community asset if this could be successfully demonstrated.

- Once the library buildings are no longer providing a library services will groups still be able to use the space for community related activities?

There will be transitional arrangement plans which will need to be developed but this would take place after a decision to close a library facility.

- The three month period for setting up a community group to take on a building and negotiate an operating framework with the Council is a relatively short period. Can the Council set up meetings on a weekly basis to take negotiations forward?

Where there are plans produced that demonstrate a community group could take on the running of a building it will be supported by Council and meetings will be arranged accordingly.

Written questions were also submitted as follows:

- Who are the members of the Service-Wide team and how can they be contacted?

The service wide-team is not yet established. We will not be embarking upon a staff consultation until the decision is taken at Cabinet to approve one of the two options. The service wide team will be implemented after this consultation.

- What has this team done so far to promote this possible new option across all libraries users and residents in their neighbourhoods?

During March 2017 a presentation updating communities about the Library Review was given at all Township Forums. Time was also allowed for questions and discussion. The presentation covered: The outcome of the first public consultation; impact of the Council budget; phase two consultation (including discussions with community groups) and next steps.

All groups currently or recently using libraries have been given the opportunity to have an informal discussion with senior library staff in order to help them plan for the future of their group. A mapping exercise has been carried out so we understand every group that currently meets in the existing libraries.

- What has been done to identify and provide adequate support to volunteers and further community groups who would be willing to develop such community led projects?

Several groups have expressed an interest in developing a model to run library buildings which are proposed to close at the end of the review either as libraries or as other community provision. Discussions with these groups will be ongoing over the coming months. It should be noted that any library service provided by these groups will be outside the Council's statutory library offer and must be cost neutral to the library service and the Council.

- When are you going to make available to the public, community groups, library users and volunteers detailed information about what the Council intends to do with each buildings, fittings, equipment and books likely to be closed due to the review of the Library service?

Until a decision is made at cabinet we are not in a position to look at potential building usage post library review. In the Cabinet report (January 2017) appendix 5 lists an Asset Management view of opportunities to achieve savings, giving early indications of possible future usage. The next Cabinet report will also update on this item on June 28th. Following a Cabinet decision there will be a full transition plan implemented to change the structures of the library service to the new chosen model.

Delegated decision:

That approval be given to Option 2, as presented in the report submitted, to retain Bury, Ramsbottom, Prestwich and Radcliffe Libraries and a smaller Service-Wide Team.

Reasons for the decision:

The Council is reviewing its services in order to deliver significant savings over the next four years. The Council also has a legal duty to provide Bury residents with a comprehensive and efficient library service.

Other option considered and rejected:

To retain Bury, Ramsbottom and Prestwich Libraries plus a service wide team.