

## Statement to B&NES Council re. Petition against closure of Mobile Library Service

I wish to present to Council this petition, signed by several hundred residents of Bath & North East Somerset which reads as follows:

*"We, the undersigned, call on the Council to abandon plans to axe the Mobile Library Service. We ask the Council to reconsider the impact withdrawing the mobile libraries will have on residents throughout the area, particularly elderly residents in isolated communities, and the Primary School children who regularly use this valued service. The service is about far more than just book lending, and removing it would disadvantage the many residents for whom the mobile library is a fortnightly lifeline, and we ask the council to recognise this"*

My neighbours in Wellow together with more than 60 communities served by our 2 Mobile Libraries are angered by the Cabinet's proposal to take away their valued Mobile Library Service. With over 2100 active users making over 20.000 visits annually it is actually the fourth most popular library of the nine in B&NES.

During the consultation process at the well-attended Public Meetings it has become crystal clear that the proposal has scant support and that the mitigations proposed by the Cabinet are in no way seen as genuine substitutes for the services provided by the 2 mobile units.

The vague and uncosted proposals to place mini-libraries in village halls and community centres are simply not seen as a real like-for-like replacement to the valued mobile library by its users. This is because those who use the mobile library value the wide range of regularly updated reading matter, the talking books, the DVD's which the mobiles provide together with access to Council Connect services and advice, all of which could be expanded and much more strongly promoted.

To date we are aware of only one firm offer to host one of the mini-libraries, and at the Public Meeting in Peasedown St. John it was clear that the idea was viewed with considerable scepticism, not least due to the possibility that the cost of rolling out the scheme across more than 60 communities may even outweigh any potential savings.

Furthermore the argument that the mobile units are in urgent need of replacement was exposed as a fallacy, especially as one of the vehicles is only 7 years into its 15 year design life, and the older unit still has at least 4 years to go. What work has been done to look into extending their operational lives?

While the idea of extending the Home Delivery service for those who are housebound is welcome, this again does not provide a replacement service for those elderly residents and families with young children who look forward to their trip to visit their mobile library once a fortnight, to say nothing of those who live in residential homes such as St. John's Hospital, Manor Close and the children in the many schools which use the Mobile Libraries.

We therefore call on the Cabinet to reconsider this proposal especially in view of the Council's statutory duty to provide accessible library services to the whole of Bath and Northeast Somerset.

*Mike Clarkson, Wellow, Bath 10.2.2012*