

## **Statement to Scrutiny Panel about Community Libraries 13/11/17**

I'm Caroline Ambrose, resident and founder of the Bath Novel Award.

I hardly know where to start with the communities decision. The cabinet papers for Bath Central Library are shoddy but this decision paper reads like it was thrown together at short notice. It's pretty shocking.

The description of consultation in the cabinet papers for the vote is particularly woeful. A bit of waffle about "some consultation through generic Area Forum meetings" is deeply inadequate.

The cabinet papers are riddled with ambiguous language, particularly in the decision as to whether cabinet has in fact decided to shut these libraries if community support isn't viable.

It includes the line "we are not planning on closing or diminishing the library service in any way". I trust panel will press Cllr Warrington on this in some detail.

The plan would leave council provided services extremely thin. It's not clear whether Cllr Warrington has discussed a wide range of alternative options with the DCMS. It's not clear whether the DCMS are satisfied such widespread closures will meet council's legal obligations to provide a comprehensive library service. It certainly hasn't passed the whiff test with the lawyer who prepared the pre-litigation notice for Judicial Review for The Podium closure.

Cabinet has taken the laziest, least innovative and most damaging path possible. If cabinet embraced Library Ambition and the income available at Bath Central Library we could be looking at an innovative and ambitious library programme with the city library as the engine.

Volunteer libraries are not the answer any more than a few bookshelves in the Chew Stoke Inn is the Libraries Ambition I described in my first statement.

The last drop of public trust in council is going to be lost when people realise their hard earned council taxes have paid the cabinet's spin doctor to dress up closing down all but two branch libraries across B&NES "as an exciting new investment"

I'm not sure if arrogance or incompetence is behind the thinking communities should take on libraries for a one off £5k that won't go nearly far enough. New Oriel Hall in Larkhall has space for a library and is always open to the public which makes it very accessible but how other communities have the same?

The mobile library service has been a joke for years, out of service as much as it is on the road. Residents have been left standing around on a street waiting for a vehicle that doesn't show up. It used to be weekly and then fortnightly, people found it hard to remember when it due. The number of stops reduced so much that many people actually needed to drive to the library.

A mobile library service only works if you make it reliable and you promote it. B&NES does neither of these things so people whose lives would be improved by having access to a library.

As with Bath Central library, cabinet has made a damaging decision without consultation, engagement or consideration of alternatives which would deliver better services. It fails to support council strategy for economic growth, prevention, putting residents first and business sense and wasting public funds. The decision should be referred back to cabinet.