

## Councillor Liz Harman – Special Cabinet statement 23<sup>rd</sup> No 2017

Chair

I am here to support the Panel's decision to refer the decision on Branch Libraries back to Cabinet.

The main reason is because of the lack of any open public consultation. For all the 5 branch libraries, there was no web consultation, no leaflets given to library users, no organised means by which users could be consulted on the impending decision. The only consultation mentioned was at the Area Forums almost 2 years ago, where possible changes to the branch libraries were mentioned only in generic terms. No analysis was made of any of the comments made. No one was made aware of the magnitude of the cuts. Little consideration has been given as to how local community groups or Parish Councils could take over the running their local library. The first residents in my ward of Paulton knew about these proposed changes was when it was brought to their notice by my fellow Ward Councillor John Bull and myself challenging the Cabinet decision that had been made.

The Cabinet decision on October 11<sup>th</sup> failed to demonstrate that adequate consideration had been given as to how sustainable it is to expect local groups to take on the running of libraries. Paulton Library and its Bombero Café, known as The Hub, is a thriving Community Library in the centre of Paulton. Recent B&NES figures show that there are 1000 active borrowers. Of the 16,566 books borrowed, 64% (10,602 books) were borrowed by children and 36% (5,964) by adults. As well as borrowing books and DVDs, free WIFI and access to computers is provided, along with printing and photocopying facilities. There is a thriving café, providing a much needed coffee bar and meeting place for residents. All of this adds up to a much needed local community asset.

The truth is local communities, such as Parish Councils will have to pay almost all the costs of running their libraries. The model drawn up by B&NES for Community Run Libraries shows that **Running And staffing costs will be funded by the local community**. This also includes utility and cleaning costs, rent and rates. The running costs for Paulton Library, according to B&NES figures, are predicted to be £23,700 for 2017/18 and this is without any staffing costs. Paulton already has the second highest precept in B&NES, so where will this money come from to run its library? Paulton raised £224,250 in

its precept last year. It couldn't afford to spend 10% of this on running the library every year. If no extra money is available, sadly and this is not scaremongering, misleading or inaccurate, Paulton Library would have to close. The Addendum to the Cabinet Report states if local agreement is not possible, Cabinet may need to make decisions about the need for closures.

We are lucky in Paulton to have an outstanding team of volunteers, who help staff the library but they are on top of 19.5 hours of professional librarian staff. These professionals will be withdrawn meaning more volunteers need to be found. This leads to the second recommendation in that more needs to be done to see if volunteers could run their local library. As I have said we have an amazing team of volunteers led by Kathleen here today, but these volunteers will have to do almost 50% more than they do at present. They will have to order stock, register new books and sort out returned borrowed books, issue books and note returns. The beloved Kiosk system making borrowing and returning books problem free, will be withdrawn. They will have to manage the IT equipment and sort out the utilities such as electricity and water; not to mention the finances. With a few exceptions, most volunteers are retired and would probably find these extra duties too onerous. This could lead to too few volunteers available, so a reduction in library opening hours.

So I urge you the Cabinet, please have a rethink on these proposals. The Community Library Model will not deliver a competent and efficient library service. Rather these Community Libraries will be run with the minimum of support from B&NES, both financial and professional resulting in a greatly diminished service.