

Councillor Dine Romero – statement for Special Cabinet on 23rd November 2017

In a nutshell, the main problem here is that the Cabinet member recommended that the council should adopt a new approach to library services without having any supporting evidence.

There was no financial breakdown, and no detail of how the community model might work.

In this financial climate it is clear that difficult decisions must be made, but these need to be based on real knowledge, with a real understanding of the users of the relevant services: there will be consequences, expected and unexpected, of such tough decisions especially when considered along with the wholesale hollowing out of the rest of the council.

The only thing I am pleased to see in the report is that the mobile library will continue to operate and is not to be subject to closure. But there are still some unanswered questions. Will the existing vehicle be repaired, or does it just now wait for an undefined time to be replaced?

Yesterday's report also suggests that the original paper should have been asking for a study on the users and likely volunteer groups to support each library. Perhaps asking for that and not moving straight to adopt the new approach would have saved all the confusion?

In addition to the points already made by Cllrs Samuel & Sandry, and others.

There remains a huge assumption that if the Council can't do something, then the community will sort it out. Maybe they can, but where is any evidence that there is the capacity in these communities to do this? Where have been the discussions with the communities?

Who are these volunteers who are going to run the libraries? Are they the same ones that man our CAB, and other advice services? Are they the same ones who are to take on the Youth Centres, or run the parks?

So far there has not been a meaningful consultation.

There is an acknowledgement that there is a need for a much more thorough piece of work. I hope that work will also consider why community groups, who are being asked to staff the library, why they would want to take on the building liabilities. And who will pay for these liabilities?

As has been pointed out Bath has no parish councils to fill this budget gap.

In my experience grants for on-going costs are hard to come by, but I am happy to learn from Cllr Warrington who has previously mentioned curry and quiz nights as a way of covering the costs. Hopefully she now knows what the costs are for each library. So how many events are needed for each library.

These cost are not in the papers so I am ready to make a note of them.

I have made a note of para 3.6 which says libraries will close unless the local communities take on the running of them. But to provide what?

I worry that the grandiosely named community library that I see at Southside will become the norm for all our libraries. Literally just a book swap, without access to other council run services. This simply is not fair on those living in the least advantaged areas. Cabinet, remember that these residents are losing out in every service, but are the most needing of those services. Youth services, face to face advice, all are being slashed as this council finances are slashed.

You have the chance now to rethink this decision, I urge you to do so.