

Councillor Karen Warrington (Cabinet Member for Transformation and Customer Services)
Statement to Cabinet 23rd November 2017

We meet today to consider the comments of the CTE Panel held on 13th November which are detailed in the accompanying documentation.

Broadly speaking there are 2 issues, consultation and certainty over the future of the Mobile Library.

An addendum to the 11th October Cabinet report is presented, which clarifies the public consultation and work towards the appetite for the approach to date and in the future. In addition, and after hearing the debate and concerns of members and the public, there is a recommendation of an amendment that should one of the current 5 branch libraries have no way forward then this will be referred back to Cabinet for a decision, taking into account the finances and the consultation.

To clarify, the decision made by Cabinet on 11th October was to approve an approach to community-run libraries and associated funding of the programme.

There are two distinct groups of libraries covered by this programme. Those that already exist in the current 5 branch libraries and those communities who wish to set up new community-run libraries.

In the case of the 5 currently Council supported libraries it was always intended that the initial engagement was to be through the November areas forums to advise local communities of the programme approach and the funding available.

The second stage of the consultation was to be any interested parties including residents.

The Council would work with any groups to look at the options for their particular area and requirements and assist the interested groups to draw up viable and sustainable business plans, together with any residents who wish to be involved. The plans could include income-generation which would not necessarily mean an increase in a precept where a Parish Council took over a library. This last point would be up to the Parish Council and the residents. Community Groups would have scope to initiate any funding raising ideas, how to apply for grants plus rental of the space through to cafes, clubs, parties, business meetings etc. Some groups would also have the scope to employ staff. Working closely with communities, the Council will look to overcome any challenges.

We are in contact with DCMS who also provide support both for Councils and the Libraries Taskforce have produced a toolkit on community managed libraries. They also have a community managed libraries peer network to connect with, sharing good practice and learning experiences.

Following this phase the interested groups would formally consult with their residents, with or without the assistance of the Council, and the groups would come to a conclusion as to how their individual community space would evolve, there might be more scope to provide services tailored to children and more mature residents.

It would be entirely up to the community group as to how the library space was run according to their business plan. Once the consultation was complete and the model decided upon the Council

would provide support in the form professional expertise, IT training and development and book rotation.

The whole programme was to be implemented in the financial year 19/20 in order to give enough preparation time for the community groups. The Council would also look at potentially tapering rents in existing library buildings and this would be incorporated into their business plan.

We have identified groups that have indicated an interest in investigating a way forward in Appendix 1. If the recommendation is approved today, and I hope it is, then officers will continue to identify and engage with groups which covers the Panel's point of undertaking more work to establish the appetite of communities to take over the library, or establish a new library in areas where they have none.

We have listened to the concerns of Ward members and the public regarding the currently funded 5 libraries and the amendment makes it clear that if any of the 5 current libraries cannot complete a viable & sustainable business plan and that the library could potentially close then the issue will come back to Cabinet for a decision.

The Addendum makes it clear that the Mobile Library service was not being stopped.

If the Communities Library Programme does not go ahead, it puts at risk £200,000 of savings will need to be found from elsewhere.

I move the recommendation as printed which complies with the constitution, confirming the original decision.