

STATEMENT TO CABINET: CAROLINE AMBROSE, FOUNDER THE BATH NOVEL AWARDS

I'm here to call upon the leadership to clarify where, when and how Bath's public library services will be provided from January 2019.

For a city with a population of 90,000 residents, Bath is already about to become one of the worst public library services in the country. By cutting back to just one library, our city's public library service is five times below the national level of one public library for every 18,000 residents.

Bath Central Library's role in delivering the council's legal obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library services has never been more essential.

Despite a decade of underfunding and backwards thinking about libraries, people use the city library as much as ever. Council has sacked the librarians, reduced the opening hours, cut bookstock and replaced almost half the workforce with unpaid volunteers but despite all of this, residents still use Bath Central Library to the tune of half a million physical visits every year.

And yet, with just 61 days of 2018 left, the leadership seems to have no plan or clear idea where, when and how people's needs will be met from January. Building works are planned to start in the New Year to turn most of our modest one floor library into an integrated council services hub at a public cost of £3.5million.

At Council's CTE Panel on September 17th resident Sophie Hooper Lea asked council to confirm the timings of the upcoming library integration, including work is expected to start, if and when the library would need to move to a temporary location, when work is expected to be complete and the when the new integrated library would open.

Council's response to this was "The preferred option is to secure a temporary location for the library for the duration of the works in order to minimise the construction period and therefore the disruption to the public. We are actively looking for a suitable central location. The current plan is that work will start on site early in the New Year and complete during July/August 2019."

When is the leadership going to announce the arrangements for 2019? Has a temporary location been secured? If not, what is the plan? Will cabinet put people before political pride and postpone the works? If not and the leadership is going have a go at pulling off a reduced service within the live building site how will that work legally? Spatially? Financially? Operationally? Legally? And from a public safety point of view?

Council has had well over a year to get arrangements in place and with time all but run out an announcement is considerably overdue. Will the leadership commit to making a proper public announcement within 5 days about where, when and how Bath's public library services will be delivered throughout 2019?