

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Full Council meeting 20 November 2025

Motion from Independents for B&NES Group: Sustaining and Supporting Community Libraries in Bath & North East Somerset

Proposer: Cllr Karen Walker

Seconder:

This Council notes:

- Bath & North East Somerset currently has **eleven community-run libraries** which provide vital access to books, information, digital services, and provide safe, inclusive spaces for residents. Providing warm spaces, the libraries serve a dual purpose, building on a previous Council commitment. ⁽¹⁾
- These community libraries are primarily managed by volunteers and local organisations, with limited funding and resources.
- Initial “invest to save” support was provided by B&NES to establish community libraries, but **no long-term dedicated funding stream** is in place for their sustainability. ⁽²⁾
- Community libraries align with the Council’s corporate priorities and ethical values by reducing inequalities, improving wellbeing, enhancing climate action (by promoting local hubs and reducing travel), and giving residents a stronger voice.
- Comparable councils across the country have provided small annual grants or partnership funds to sustain community library networks. ⁽³⁾

This Council recognises:

- Community libraries are a vital part of the universal library service in B&NES and should be supported as partners, not left at risk of closure due to unstable funding.
- Modest, ongoing investment from the Council can safeguard these libraries’ future, protect volunteer efforts, and ensure equal access to library services across the district.
- Providing a putative **£6,000 to each of the eleven community libraries (a total of £66,000)** would represent a small cost when contrasted with the **£2.885 million Customer Services (including central libraries) budget** but would deliver significant value in protecting and sustaining local services. ⁽⁴⁾
- Securing the sustainability of community libraries strengthens neighbourhood resilience, supports learning, reduces digital exclusion, and provides preventative health and wellbeing benefits.

- *Unless where specifically set out in the statute, motions approved at Council do not bind the Executive (Cabinet) but may influence their future decisions.*
- *Councillors are reminded of their public sector equality duty which requires the Council to consider or think about how their policies or decisions may affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.*

This Council therefore agrees:

1. To recognise community libraries as a valued and integral part of the Bath & North East Somerset library network.
2. To commit to exploring options for **future dedicated financial support**, including (but not limited to):
 - a. a suggested annual grant of £6,000 per community library.
 - b. a shared “Community Library Sustainability Fund” accessible through fair criteria.
 - c. using a proportion of local grant streams to support community libraries’ core functions, *whilst ensuring that the existing provision for the three central libraries is maintained.*
3. To ask that Cabinet brings forward proposals in the **2026/27 budget** for sustainable financial support to the network of eleven community libraries.
4. To ask officers to work with community library groups to identify additional external funding sources (for example the Arts Council Libraries Improvement Fund, Library On, and the National Lottery Community Fund) and provide coordination and support to maximise the opportunities.
5. To receive an annual report on the health and sustainability of community libraries across B&NES, ensuring transparency and accountability.

References.

- (1) <https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/b17597/Updated%20Motion%20and%20Amendment%2017th-Nov-2022%2018.30%20Council.pdf?T=9>
- (2) <http://vm-civ-mgov/documents/s48420/Minutes%20of%20Previous%20Meeting.pdf>
- (3) <https://www.devon.gov.uk/communities/community-library-support-fund/>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/community-libraries-in-buckinghamshire#>
- (4) <https://intranet.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Budget%20Book%2025-26%20by%20Portfolio.xlsx>

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