

**CABINET – 24 MAY 2024****IBSTOCK COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARY****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of the Registration of Interest (ROI) process for Ibstock Community Managed Library (CML) and associated consultation regarding alternative library provision in the event of the permanent closure of the Library.
2. Ibstock CML temporarily closed at the end of March 2024, since when, in accordance with the agreed process, the Council has sought to find a new group to run the library and consulted on alternative provision. More detail is given in Part B of this report.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - a) The outcome of the Registration of Interest process for Ibstock Community Managed Library (CML) and the associated consultation on alternative library provision be noted;
 - b) The closure of Ibstock CML be approved;
 - c) The Director of Adults and Communities, following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member and the Local Member, be authorised to put in place the alternative library provision for Ibstock.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. The existing community management library group has ceased to operate, and the ROI process has not resulted in a viable new group being identified.
5. The library temporarily closed at the end of March 2024 and it is desirable to put in place permanent alternative library provision as soon as possible. The proposals consulted on can be put in place by June 2024 and do not require any additional financial resources.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. Subject to the Cabinet's approval, the alternative library provision set out in paragraphs 37 to 40 below will be put in place by June 2024.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

7. In September 2014, the Cabinet approved the remodelling of the library service to include the provision of a number of community managed libraries.
8. On 6 July 2018, the Cabinet approved the process the Council would follow should a community managed library group no longer be able to run a library.

Resource Implications

9. The alternative library provision proposed utilises existing mobile library infrastructure, including existing routes, so there are no additional cost implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
10. In the event of closure, the community managed library group is responsible for removing items that belong to them from the premises and Leicestershire Library Service will remove any items belonging to the County Council. There is an up-to-date inventory in place. Any items of furniture or shelving in suitable condition belonging to the Council will be offered for use to other CMLs before being disposed of.
11. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Legal Implications

12. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 creates a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library service' for all persons who live, work or study in the area. The guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport confirms that the councils must meet the duty this in a way which meets the needs of local library users taking into account the resources available and in consultation with communities and through analysis of evidence around local needs.
13. Beyond this the guidance recognises that *'Councillors need to make decisions about how money is invested in the interests of the whole community. They will have competing priorities across a wide portfolio of local service provision and councillors and officers must reconcile these matters against the background of their legal requirements. Councils can take their available resources into account when deciding how to deliver their public library service'*.
14. The steps referred to in the report showing the analysis of library use, the consultation on alternative options address the requirements referred to above.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

Mr. Dan Harrison CC - Ibstock and Appleby division

Officers to Contact

Jon Wilson, Director of Adults and Communities
Adults and Communities Department
Tel: 0116 305 7541 Email: jon.wilson@leics.gov.uk

Inderjit Lahel, Assistant Director of Strategic Commissioning
Adults and Communities Department
Tel: 0116 305 7379 Email: inderjit.lahel@leics.gov.uk

Franne Wills, Head of Service, Communities and Wellbeing
Adults and Communities Department
Tel: 0116 305 0692 Email: franne.wills@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

lbstock Library

15. lbstock CML is located between lbstock Junior School and St. Denys CofE Infant School, Melbourne Road in lbstock and occupies part of a mobile classroom, under licence with the County Council. The other part of the building is used as changing rooms by the Junior School.
16. lbstock CML transferred to community management in 2019 and has since been open seven hours per week over three days. In 2023/24 it issued 3,371 books and had 145 active library users.
17. In September 2023 the Group running lbstock CML gave notice to the County Council of their intention to close the library. The Group had struggled to generate support and despite its best efforts and support from Leicestershire Library Service and Voluntary Action Leicestershire, the Group felt it was no longer sustainable.

Procedure in the event of possible closures

18. The Cabinet in July 2018 approved the procedure to be followed in the event of any CML Groups being unable to continue to provide a library service (Appendix C to this report). The outcome of the ROI process and associated consultation on alternative provision is set out below.

Registration of Interest Process

19. Following notice being accepted a ROI process was launched on 9 November 2023, to seek a new group to take on the library. The process was promoted locally and on the County Council's website. Detailed information about the library, the ROI process and the ROI form was made available, and officers held an information event at the library on the 27 November 2023 for interested parties to find out more and ask questions.
20. The deadline for submission of ROIs was 22 December 2023 and two ROI were subsequently received. The information provided in the ROIs did not satisfy all the essential criteria and it was agreed to seek clarification on those areas. One of the ROI's was subsequently withdrawn, the submission having intended to show support for the library, rather than proposing to run the library.
21. The local Member for lbstock and Appleby, Mr. Harrison CC, chaired a meeting on 11 March 2024 for the interested parties to seek clarifications. The meeting was attended by the Cabinet Lead Member for Adults and Communities and Library Service Officers. This was a positive meeting with all parties expressing their desire to seek the best outcome for lbstock. As a result, it was agreed that

it was appropriate to give the group leading the remaining ROI additional time to update and amend their ROI following changes in circumstances.

22. The ROI was subsequently submitted on 5 April 2024. However, it has not been recommended to take forward to outline business case stage due to sustainability concerns. The principal concern related to the financial plan, which showed insufficient income to cover core operating costs, meaning the group would operate with a deficit. This position also meant that, even once established, the group would not hold the minimum three months of expenditure reserve which the County Council expects all CMLs to hold.

Consultation on alternative library provision

23. A concurrent seven-week public consultation took place from 9 November 2023 until 22 December 2023 to seek views on the County Council's proposals for alternative library provision in Ibstock, in the event the library closed. The options presented were to:

- implement a Mobile Library Service stop in Ibstock;
- signpost people to other libraries;
- signpost people to the free digital library offer.

24. The consultation survey was available in digital format and paper copies were provided in Ibstock CML and printed on request at any County Council managed library.
25. Stakeholder meetings were held with Ibstock Junior School and Ibstock CML trustees and volunteers.

Consultation responses

26. The survey sought to understand how people currently use Ibstock CML and other parts of the library service and people's views on the alternative library provision described. There were 21 responses to the survey. The full details are attached as Appendix A and a summary of the key findings is given below.
27. Most respondents (53%) stated that they used Ibstock CML and the majority (55%) visited the library on a weekly basis. Almost all visited to borrow books (99%), with research and study (76%) and attending events (64%) the next most common reasons.
28. Half of those consulted (50%) also used Coalville library and 31% did not use another library.
29. Over half (53%) were aware of the digital library offer and of those 56% had used it. Views were fairly evenly split between those who would (48%) and those who would not use (53%) the digital library in the future.

30. People were less certain about whether they would use a Mobile Library Service, with 44% being undecided, 33% stated they would and 22% would not. Views on a preferred day of the week for the mobile to visit was fairly evenly split, but an afternoon stop was a strong preference.
31. The majority of respondents (75%) said they would use another library if Ibstock CML closed.
32. Most respondents (70%) disagreed with the proposals for alternative provision, although responses to the questions show that most already use another library alongside Ibstock, with Coalville as the nearest library being most used.
33. The free text comments indicated that Ibstock CML is valued by those that use the library.
34. A separate proposal was submitted to establish a new CML library in nearby Ravenstone. As this was not a ROI to operate Ibstock CML, it could not be considered under the ROI process but has been recorded as consultation feedback. Ravenstone is a similar distance from Ibstock as Coalville or Measham and therefore does not offer any additional mitigation in the event that Ibstock CML closes.

Proposals

35. As the ROI process has not identified another group to run Ibstock CML approval is sought to close the Library and put in alternative provision.
36. Ibstock CML temporarily closed at the end of March 2024 and in April a temporary weekly mobile library service was instated to serve the community. This stop is receiving an average of eight users a week.
37. If the closure of Ibstock CML is agreed, it is recommended that alternative library provision is confirmed as soon as possible. This would see a regular three-weekly mobile stop established. Usage would be reviewed after six months to see if any improvements could be made.
38. Staff at Coalville Library, the nearest County Council managed library, can support customers that previously used Ibstock CML. Coalville Library is open 56 hours per week and is approximately four miles from Ibstock. There is an hourly bus service to Coalville which takes around 22 minutes.
39. The Council's digital library offer is a free offer available to all library members who have a suitable digital device and internet access.
40. Anyone who is temporarily or permanently housebound and wishes to use the library service can access the Home Library Service. This service will arrange for a volunteer to deliver books to their home every three weeks and can also provide support in accessing the digital library offer, where people have access to a digital device.

41. If Ibstock CML is closed the current library space will be emptied (Ibstock Junior School will continue to use the other half of the building, in line with the lease arrangements) and future usage of the building will be considered as part of the County Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan.

Conclusion

42. The approved procedure in the event of possible closure of a CML has been followed. The ROI process has not identified a group in a position to enter into a support agreement with the County Council to operate the library. Therefore, in line with the procedure approval is sought to close Ibstock CML and put in alternative library provision.
43. This report will be circulated to members of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information.

Equality Implications

44. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out and is attached to this report as Appendix B.
45. The EIA identifies a potential adverse impact to children and young families that currently use the library after school. Where families are unable to travel to Coalville or Measham to access the library service, and/or are unable to access digital library resources, the alternative provision is unlikely to meet their needs.
46. It is recommended that the mobile provision is reviewed at six months and one year, before moving to business as usual. This will provide an opportunity to respond to user demand, for example adjusting the length of stop, time or day of the week, subject to the capacity of the wider mobile library service timetable.

Human Rights Implications

47. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Health Implications

48. The following potential health implications have been identified:
- a) Social Cohesion and Community - The library provides a community space and this would be lost if the library were to close. The impact is likely to be small given the library is only open seven hours per week and there are other community spaces in the village. Promotion of the alternative library provision and other community spaces will help mitigate any negative impact if the library were to close.

- b) Employment and the Economy - Libraries provide free access to advice and information and free use of public access PCs, these facilities can support those seeking employment and wishing to develop skills. The impact is likely to be small; the library has 145 active users. Residents that would benefit from these facilities and resource will be directed to nearby Coalville Library, which offers a wider range of resources and support for job seekers, including public access PCs and free Wi-Fi.
- c) Education and Skills - Libraries provide access to a range of resources which support learning and development for all ages and developing reading skills is proven to be a key for a child's development. Closure of the library would reduce access to these resources, but the impact will be limited. The library is available for seven hours per week, nearby libraries, in particular offer a good range of learning resources and activities that support the development of reading for young children, including under 5's. For those users with access to a digital device there is a comprehensive digital offer, including newspapers and magazines, as well as fiction and non-fiction publications.
- d) Access to Public Services - The local authority has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. If Ibstock library were to close there are two other local libraries within four miles, a regular mobile library stop would be introduced, and the digital library offer is freely available to those with a digital device. In addition, individuals that are temporarily or permanently housebound can access the Home Library Service which delivers books to people's homes. These measures would help to mitigate any negative impact resulting from closure.

Background Papers

Leicestershire County Council - Corporate Asset Management Plan 2022-2026

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s178212/Appendix%20-%20CA%20Annual%20Performance%20and%20Strategy%20Update%202022-23.pdf>

Report to the Cabinet: 19 September 2014 - Outcome of Consultation on Proposals for Changes in the Delivery of Library Services

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=4190>

Report to the Cabinet: 6 July 2018 - Community Managed Libraries

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=5412>

Appendices

Appendix A - Results of the Consultation on Alternative Library provision in the event of closure

Appendix B - EIA

Appendix C - Procedure in the event of possible closure of a CML