

Minutes of a meeting of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Friday, 26 February 2016.

PRESENT

Mrs. R. Camamile CC (in the Chair)

Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC
Mr. S. J. Hampson CC
Mr. D. Jennings CC
Mr. M. T. Mullaney CC

Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mr. A. E. Pearson CC
Mr. T. J. Richardson CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC

In Attendance.

Mr. R. Blunt CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Heritage, Leisure and Arts (Minutes 74 and 75 refer).

66. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2016 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

67. Question Time.

The following questions were put to the Chairman of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Questions by Quorn Parish Councillor Olwen Jones:

- “(a) Is the Committee aware of the difficulties facing Quorn Parish Council and the proposed Quorn Community Library regarding their continued use of facilities at Rawlins Academy, and will the Committee instruct its officers to expedite matters in this regard and keep the Parish Council fully informed?”
- (b) Will the Committee recognise the hard work and commitment of both the volunteers and the Parish Council in agreeing a library business plan, and the risk that the continuing delays in establishing the community library will de-motivate them?
- (c) Will the Committee work to ensure that the Library Service in Quorn is able to continue without interruption and for the extended opening hours set out in the Library business plan agreed with the County Council?”

Reply by the Chairman:

- “(a) I have been informed by officers of the current status of Quorn Community Managed Library and the ongoing dialogue with Rawlins Academy. As stated in my response to the Parish Council (tabled for members of the Committee), I have asked that officers provide an update on the matter at a future meeting of this Committee. The matter has been provisionally scheduled for consideration at our meeting on 5 April;
- (b) I am aware of the work that has been undertaken to get to this stage and that this has been indicative of the commitment of the local community to sustain its library. Officers are currently working to resolve the legal issues that have arisen around

the use of the Rawlins Academy site;

- (c) Officers have been asked to do everything they can to expedite a resolution with the Academy to enable community plan for the Library to progress.”

Councillor Jones asked a supplementary question in respect of question (c) to the following effect:-

Would the County Council ensure that, in the event that alternative premises are required in Quorn as part of the transfer of the library to community management, its full support be provided to the Parish Council?

On behalf of the Chairman, the Director responded as follows:-

“The County Council will do as much as possible to enable the successful transfer of Quorn Library to community management as set out in their business plan and will ensure every effort is made to support the resolution of issues concerning the lease arrangements at Rawlins Academy.”

68. Questions asked by members.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

69. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

70. Declarations of Interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following declaration was made:-

Mr. T. J. Richardson CC declared a personal interest in the Future Strategy for Delivery of Library Services (minute 75 refers) as the Leader of Blaby District Council and a member of Narborough Parish Council.

71. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

72. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

73. Change to the Order of Business.

The Chairman, having sought and obtained the consent of the Committee, changed the order of business from that set out on the agenda.

74. Cabinet Report. Future Strategy for Delivery of Library Services.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities to be submitted to the Cabinet on 1 March, concerning the outcome of the public consultation and engagement held in four communities of Barwell, Braunstone Town, Mountsorrel and Narborough regarding alternative library provision. The report also set out the progress

made with regard to Kirby Muxloe library. A copy of the report, marked "Agenda Item 9", is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Lead Member for Heritage, Leisure and Arts, Mr. R. Blunt CC. In introducing the report the Cabinet Lead Member made reference to the issues faced in respect of the four libraries and stressed that, despite the good will and efforts of local people in Barwell it had unfortunately not yet been possible to find a way to keep the Library open. He did however stress that he would personally ask his colleagues on the Cabinet that the Council should remain open to any groups who wished to come forward to run the Library up until it was due to be closed in June and for a further year thereafter. The Cabinet Lead Member expressed his personal thanks to all communities who had committed their own time and skills to assist in running their local library.

The Director advised that a further report providing an update on the work currently being undertaken to achieve feasible business plans for Braunstone Town, Mountsorrel, and Narborough libraries would be provided at the Committee's meeting on 5 April 2016. An update on the legal issues encountered in the transfer of Kirby Muxloe Library, would also be provided at that meeting. The Director, in response to a request from members, indicated that every effort would be made to provide members with details regarding leasing arrangements for these libraries.

Arising from a discussion, the following points were noted:

- (a) The nearest alternative provision to Barwell were the libraries situated in Earl Shilton (7 minute journey time including a full cost bus fare of £4.20) and Hinckley (12 minute journey time including a full cost bus fare of £4.80). Bus services to these locations ran roughly every hour. It was recognised that this would mostly impact elderly and young people though it was noted that concessions and over 65 bus passes could be used on these bus routes;
- (b) It was difficult to capture the extent to which the Library in Barwell was used as a meeting venue, however it was noted that the George Ward Centre in the village was most commonly used for this purpose. Customers primarily used the Library for the loaning of books, however it was also used for accessing IT services and the education of young people;
- (c) A local group in Barwell had presented what was considered to be a good solution regarding the running of the Library at the George Ward Centre. However, a number of issues had meant that the group felt they could not ultimately guarantee the long term sustainability of the library and reluctantly withdrew its business plan. Despite this, it remained a possibility that the community's IT provision would be based there;
- (d) Deprivation in Barwell had been taken into account in drafting the proposals. Data had indicated that 44% of the community were not deprived, 33% were deprived in one dimension and 22% were deprived in two or more dimensions;
- (e) The current plan for alternative provision in Barwell was for a mobile library service. It was noted that this would be accessible to the community after school hours as this was deemed to be the most appropriate time. However this timing would be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure it remained as accessible as possible;

- (f) The selection of books in mobile libraries was smaller than at full-sized libraries. The Director indicated that the possibility of providing a free of charge book request service was being investigated;
- (g) In response to concerns expressed about the consultation process and the low level of response, the Director acknowledged that the Council would increasingly need to look at more innovative ways to obtain the views of local residents. It was however stressed that the local media had been involved in the consultation in an effort to broaden awareness amongst the public.

A view was expressed that, despite the community in Barwell having made a significant effort to overcome the issues, a lack of alternative premises in the village had meant that they had been unfairly disadvantaged over other communities in not being able to support their local library service. Members also pointed that the building of a significant sustainable urban extension (SUE) would add to the size of the community and therefore the demand for services. As a result, it was felt that an exception should be made, and in this case the Library should be allowed to remain open. The Cabinet Lead Member responded by stating that this would not be possible or fair to the other communities who had made a significant commitment to ensuring the future of their local library service. He suggested that S106 funds to supplement the mobile library service could be harnessed via the SUE, though it was recognised that these might not be available for some time.

The Chairman expressed a view that it was not in the spirit of the Council's policy to provide preferential treatment for any community over another and stated that each library had faced its own set of challenges in formulating a business plan.

It was proposed by Mr. Sheahan CC and seconded by Mr. Mullaney CC:-

“That the Cabinet be asked to make an exception with regard to Barwell Library and not put it forward for closure at the current time due to the unequal opportunity available for the community voluntary group as a result of a lack of alternative locations in the village within which to site it and formulate a feasible business plan.”

The motion was put and not carried, 3 members having voted for the motion and 5 against.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 1 March;
- (b) That the Committee expresses its support for the adoption of a free book request service for all mobile library services.

75. Draft Communities and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-20.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities which sought the Committee's views on the draft Communities and Wellbeing Strategy which was being consulted on up to 2 May. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 8”, is attached with these minutes.

In his opening remarks Mr. R. Blunt CC, Cabinet Lead Member for Heritage, Leisure and Arts, advised that the draft Strategy was based around a principle of “supporting more, providing less”, owing to the Council's resource pressures. He hoped that the consultation exercise would allow services to be mapped to ascertain which were used and valued most by customers, as well as how the services could be co-designed and co-delivered with the users where possible. He emphasised that the Council had no pre-

conceived plan in regard to how services would be delivered following the consultation process.

In response to questions raised, members were advised as follows:

- (a) By asking questions of consultees around value to the health, education, business and tourism sectors, it was hoped that a more responsive service could be provided addressing the needs of communities working in partnership with service users. It was recognised that the capacity of communities to run further services was an issue, though it was emphasised that it was not intended for all Council services to be run in this way;
- (b) The Adult Learning Service (ALS) was not included in the draft strategy as it received funding from the Skills Funding Agency, the level of which was not yet known for the upcoming academic year. In addition, it was noted that the Combined Authority had a remit for “skills” which made the issue more complex. It was noted that the costs provided on page 40 of the report took account of the exclusion of ALS;
- (c) The breakdown of staff cost and income by categories for each Communities and Wellbeing Service was not included in the consultation document, as the primary aim of the consultation was to seek views on which services were valued the most. The feedback received would inform a more detailed report;
- (d) The Department was aware of the importance of making the consultation process as inclusive and accessible as possible though it was noted that obtaining the views of all communities remained a challenge. The Committee was advised that the way in which the views of the public and stakeholders were gathered was continuously reviewed in an effort to improve response rates;
- (e) The net budget for the Communities and Wellbeing Service in 2010/11 was £10.7 million (expenditure of £18.3 million and income of £7.5 million). The net budget for the service in 2014/15 was £6.1 million (expenditure of £10.5 million and income of £4.3 million);

RESOLVED:

That the comments of the Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 17 June 2016.

76. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 5 April 2016 at 2.00 pm.

2.00 - 3.35 pm
26 February 2016

CHAIRMAN