



**ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6
SEPTEMBER 2016**

**FUTURE STRATEGY FOR THE DELIVERY OF LIBRARY SERVICES. OUTCOME
OF CONSULTATION ON KIRBY MUXLOE AND UPDATE ON DESFORD
LIBRARY**

DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities concerning the outcome of consultation with the Kirby Muxloe community regarding alternative library provision and providing an update on development with Desford Library. The matter was due to be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 16 September and any comments of the Committee would be forwarded to the Cabinet for its consideration. A copy of the report, marked “Agenda Item 13”, is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman drew members’ attention to a submission which had been received by the Desford Community Hub which included a number of questions concerning the future arrangements for the transfer of Desford Library. A copy of the submission is filed with these minutes. The Chairman emphasised that, given the length of the submission, she had agreed that the submission would not be covered under the “Question Time” procedure and that, instead, representatives from Desford Community Hub would be able to address the Committee after the Director had been given the opportunity to respond to the key issues raised in the submission as part of his introduction.

Accordingly, the Director made the following key points in introducing the item:

Kirby Muxloe Library

- Following the withdrawal of Kirby Muxloe Parish Council’s offer to run the Library a period of further consultation had been undertaken. Another group had now come forward and subsequently submitted an outline business plan that has been assessed as meeting the criteria to progress to transfer to community management. It was intended that a recommendation would be made to the Cabinet to enable this group to run the library;

Desford Library – current position

- The Desford Community Hub group had come forward with a successful business case to run Desford Library, however Officers and the group had to date been unable to resolve concerns raised by the group over the condition

of the fabric of the building. Officers had advised that the work outlined in the building's conditions survey as part of information supplied to Desford Community Hub was not viewed as being priority to merit funding prior to take up of any lease arrangement with the group and did not pose a risk to the health and safety of occupants or result in legislative non-compliance. The group felt that that they could not progress with their plan to manage the library unless the Council funded these repairs;

- Despite the stalemate, a timescale was required for the situation to reach a conclusion in order that any future decisions with respect to the running of the Library could be made. It was intended to hold further meetings between County Council officers and the group over the coming weeks in an effort to establish whether the situation could be resolved;
- It had been recommended to the Cabinet that, were no successful conclusion to be reached with the group by the end of September, a further three month period of consultation would be undertaken to give any other interested groups the opportunity to come forward with a business case and also to consult on alternative library provision through the mobile library service;

Desford Library – response to points raised by the Desford Community Hub

- No decisions had been pre-emptively made with regard to the future of the Library. Hope remained that any issues could be resolved with Desford Community Hub and that the Library could remain open;
- If the Cabinet agreed to a further period of consultation, a further report would be submitted to the Cabinet in the New Year making a recommendation on how best to progress the matter in light of any submissions received;
- The Council had been clear throughout the process that it was not in a position to invest in non-essential maintenance prior to the transfer of any library into community hands. The group had continued to contest that the County Council would need to pay the estimated £49,000 repair costs to the building's windows, roof and heating system before it could transfer;
- In a small number of cases the Council had been flexible in altering the leasing arrangements with community groups during the transition phase in cases where the elapsed time required for transition brought the life of the building within a close proximity of the 25 year life expectancy. The Desford Library building had a life expectancy of 60 years and was therefore designated a full repairing lease. No flexibility would therefore be offered;
- The case of Market Bosworth Library had proven different to Desford's case. A sum of c£45,000 had been allocated to enable the Library to be separated from the Academy by way of a separate entrance. Paying for the alterations on the Academy site was therefore a lease condition laid down by the Academy for allowing the County Council to transfer the Library to community stewardship with the premises then sub-leased to the group. Without these

measures, the County Council would not have been in a position to offer the Library to the community group and this was considered to be more cost effective than vacating the premises, withdrawing from the lease, and re-locating the Library. In the case of Desford, the County Council was able to offer the Library to the group, but the group had requested that the non-essential building costs be met first;

- If no agreement could ultimately be reached over Desford Library the County Council would consider the group's bid to manage the Library as withdrawn in an effort to find alternative solutions.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Ms. Margie Regan from the Desford Community Hub who was present to make representations on the future of the Library. Ms. Regan delivered a presentation lasting three minutes which covered the following key points:

- The Desford Library building had suffered from years of neglect which had resulted in the estimated £49,000 repair costs highlighted in the County Council's building conditions survey. This represented a significant financial risk for the group;
- There were some concerns around the cost of any associated works to enable full disabled access at the Library;
- The village had experienced a large rise in population and its requirement for a library and community facility had therefore grown;
- Instances were highlighted where other groups had been given internal repairing leases when originally they had fell outside of the 25 year threshold. An example was given of Kegworth Library which had been assessed as having a life expectancy of 27 years but had been granted an internal lease.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Regan for her contribution.

The Chairman then welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. A. Sprason CC, the local County Councillor for Desford, Markfield and Thornton, who had requested the opportunity to speak on the matter. Mr. Sprason circulated a document outlining the repair costs and life expectancy of some libraries, including Desford, and delivered a presentation lasting three minutes which covered the following key points:

- The building's slate roof was the principal concern. The Council's lack of maintenance of the building over a period of many years has resulted in a building which required significant repair and imminent works;
- The document circulated outlined that Kibworth Library had an estimated repair cost in the region of £90,000 yet had been granted an internal lease. It was felt that Desford Library should similarly be made a special case and that compromises would be needed on behalf of the County Council to enable the

Library to transfer to the group.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Sprason for his contribution.

The Chairman invited the Cabinet Lead Member for Heritage, Leisure and Arts, Mr. R. Blunt CC to comment. Accordingly, the Lead Member made the following points:

- The efforts of Kirby Muxloe to overcome any stumbling blocks and enable a successful transfer of the library into community hands should be celebrated. The Desford Community Hub group had produced an excellent business case and the skills and passion of the group was not in doubt;
- Further meetings were planned with the group to hopefully enable a successful transfer. The Council remained committed to the aim of having all libraries remain open and transfer into community hands. It was felt that the Council's £150,000 contingency fund for non-routine repairs could prove an avenue through which the repair of Desford Library building's slate roof could be achieved. This contingency fund was part of a wider support package which had been developed by a cross-party Scrutiny Review Panel which had received Cabinet support.

The Chairman invited the Cabinet Lead Member for property, Mr. B. L. Pain CC to comment. Accordingly, the Lead Member made the following points:

- The document circulated by Mr. Sprason CC was an internal officer document which had been obtained by the group at a meeting with the Lead Member and officers;
- The Council's Property Services section had a policy of regular upkeep of its assets to ensure they did not become a financial burden on the Authority;
- Were the Council to offer an internal repair lease to Desford, a change in policy would be required which would jeopardise all 27 existing library transfers to community management. It was felt that this would be unacceptable.

Arising from the Committee's debate on all the information received, the following points were noted:

- A view was expressed that the £45,000 provided to Market Bosworth was a deviation from Council policy and that Desford Library required a similar arrangement to enable it to successfully transfer to the community. Were the projected repair costs of libraries in the County likely to exceed the £150,000 contingency fund offer from the Council then the future of several libraries might be placed in jeopardy. In response, it was noted that the County Council's contingency fund offer was known to be significantly higher than other authorities who had pursued the "community management" library model;

- Only urgent repair work was known to have been carried out as required to the Desford Library building. No major refurbishment work had been carried out in recent years;
- The estimated £49,000 repair costs to Desford Library were regarded as “non-urgent” and low priority. Whilst it was difficult to know with any degree of certainty exactly when these works might be required, it was confirmed that the building was built to modern building standards, was well constructed and that it was likely that for this reason any projected repair costs would come at a higher cost;
- Though Desford Community Hub were being asked to take on liability for the building costs going forward, this was consistent with other community groups who had taken on the management of other libraries in the County.

A view was expressed that, whilst it was clear that further negotiations were needed with the group in order to bring the situation to a successful conclusion, it would be necessary for the Cabinet to consider further how long the £150,000 contingency fund would be made available to communities and whether it was sufficient to serve the full library portfolio.

Accordingly, it was moved by Mr. Sheahan CC and seconded by Mr. Mullaney CC:-

“That the Cabinet strongly be urged to consider replenishing the £150,000 contingency fund in future years should there prove to be a demand which warranted it.”

A view was expressed that the £150,000 contingency fund had been developed by the Scrutiny Review Panel to meet a specific need and that it had never been intended to provide this level of financial support in perpetuity. It was further noted that other grant funding was available from the Council in addition to the contingency fund.

Accordingly, an amendment was moved by Mrs. Camamile CC and seconded by Mr. Richardson CC:-

That the motion be amended to read as follows:-

“That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee is of the view that the period for which the £150,000 contingency fund is made available should be extended until such time as it is exhausted and that future provision be reviewed at that time.”

The amendment was put and carried, five members voting in favour and three against.

The substantive motion was then put and carried.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet be advised that the Committee is of the view that the period for which the £150,000 contingency fund is made available should be extended until such time as it is exhausted and that future provision be reviewed at that time.