

**Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Date of Meeting:** 18 July 2017

**Present:** Councillor R Caserta (in the Chair)  
Councillors E Fitzgerald, M Hankey, J Harris, M James,  
Leach, S Smith, J Walker and S Wright

**Also in attendance:** Councillor S Briggs – Cabinet Member – Children & Families  
Councillor R Cathcart – Deputy Cabinet Member – Children & Families  
K Rufo – Assistant Director – Learning & Culture  
E Binns – Head of Libraries

**Public Attendance:** 24 members of the public were present at the meeting.

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillor T Cummings and Councillor R Skillen

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#### **OSC.64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S Wright declared a personal interest in any item relating to staffing issues in schools as his wife is employed in a Bury School.

#### **OSC.65 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

- Nicole Haydock, asked when the library users would be notified of what would happen?

It was explained that library users had been consulted in relation to the service provision and the proposals that had been put forward had come from the outcome of the consultations. The legal process would have to be signed off in relation to the library offer before the future of the library buildings could be considered.

- Gary Hardman referred to the consultation that had taken place and stated that those library users that had taken part had thought that the options would not affect the smaller community libraries and were only looking at the larger library provision across the borough.
- Councillor Walker asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider looking at the use and attendance of the sculpture centre since it had been opened in what used to be part of Bury Central Library.
- A representative from Friends of Tottington Library explained that at the last Cabinet meeting the group had been told that they could take over the running of Tottington Library and asked whether the Council would support them with this.

Councillor Briggs explained that the Council would support a group wanting to take over a library building but work would have to be done to provide a business case that was viable and at no cost to the Council.

- Mr Hardman referred to the library facilities being retained at central locations and stated that he thought that the Council was supporting neighbourhood working. Mr Hardman stated that a lot of neighbourhood services were provided in the libraries and these would be lost.

Councillor Briggs explained that the Council was committed to neighbourhood working but also needed to look at what was financially achievable. The Council do not have the finances to keep the smaller libraries open as it isn't cost effective.

- Rauf Saad, a pupil from Whitefield explained that he was due to start at Philips High School in September and was concerned that as a member and user of Whitefield Library he would not be able to go to the library to do his homework. Rauf explained that he and his sister use Whitefield Library regularly as it is close to home and easily accessible. They feel privileged to be able to go there. If this facility were to close it would be taking away the privilege from a lot of other users as well.

Klare Rufo, Assistant Director – Learning and Culture explained that the Council would work to ensure that library facilities available in high schools were fit for purpose and places that students want to go.

Klare also explained that the smaller libraries provide services to only 6% of the registered library users. The 4 library option allows over 90% (98% actually) can access a library within 30 mins.

- Ms Harvey stated that she was registered at Prestwich Library but used other libraries. If this was the case for a number of residents it may have flawed the figures.

Klare explained that the data used looked both at where people were registered and where they lived.

- A member of the public referred to the consultation and asked how thorough the consultation exercises had been and what publicity had been undertaken to promote them.

It was explained that there had been 10,000 paper surveys distributed to libraries, public buildings, community organisations, local businesses, schools and colleges; there had been an online survey available on the Council website; telephone survey to 500 households; publicity campaign including posters, social media and press reports and, informal meetings with community groups and other users as requested.

- Nicole Haydock asked what would happen to the buildings if the proposals go ahead as it would be a shame to lose vital community assets.

Councillor Briggs explained that each building would have to be looked at individually depending on what proposals were put forward.

- A member of Friends of Tottington Library asked whether the Council would strip the buildings of shelving, desks etc if the buildings were taken over by community groups.

It was explained that all of the books etc across the libraries would be split between the 4 remaining libraries to ensure that the remaining statutory service was the best service possible

**OSC.66 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION - LIBRARY REVIEW - OUTCOME OF THIRD PUBLIC SURVEY ON PROPOSED OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Scrutiny Committee considered a called-in decision of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 June 2017 in accordance with the Council Constitution.

The Cabinet had made the following decision:

That approval be given to Option 2, as presented in the report submitted, to retain Bury, Ramsbottom, Prestwich and Radcliffe Libraries and a smaller Service Wide Team.

A Call – In Notice had been submitted by Councillor Caserta, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, setting out the reasons for the Call In of the decision. The reasons are set out below:

Insufficient consideration given to:

- The discrimination against young people many from disadvantaged backgrounds who rely on the libraries as a place to do their homework after school. This especially applies to Tottington Library.
- It will discriminate against people with mobility problems who are unable to travel long distances.
- Insufficient notice of closure for applicant community groups to take-over operation of the buildings.

Councillor Caserta invited Councillor Briggs, Cabinet Member – Children and Families to respond to the reasons highlighted:

In response to the first reason Councillor Briggs explained that a 2011 survey by the National Literacy Trust found that children who use a library are twice as likely to be above average readers and organisations such as the Reading Agency and the Society of Chief Librarians confirm this is still the case. However use of libraries for school homework has markedly declined in the last 5-10 years; the formal homework clubs that many libraries established in the 90's have largely disappeared. There is evidence that children who continue to use libraries for homework would have been coming to the library in any case. The pattern seen in Bury's libraries is typical of that experienced by most library authorities.

Our libraries continue to provide children and older students with good resources including: study space; reference books; online reference materials; free access to the internet; free and/or low cost print-outs plus staff assistance. However all Bury's libraries, including Tottington, report a similar pattern of use:

- Formal homework clubs withdrawn due to lack of use and dedicated staff
- Typically no more than 3 or 4 children coming in each day in larger libraries, less or none in smaller libraries to do homework

- The internet is the primary source of information
- Books are seldom used other than for mainly history related projects e.g. The Romans

Some 10 plus years ago a partnership with Tottington High School established a Homework Centre at Tottington Library; this was well used for a couple of years but was closed 6 years ago due to lack of use. Similarly an attempt at creating a 'teen room' was short lived.

In response to the second reason stated for the Call in Councillor Briggs explained that the Mott McDonald report was discussed at some length in the report to cabinet of January 2017 and the full report included as an appendix. The report showed that for option 7 (which equates to option 2 of the Library Review i.e. Bury, Prestwich, Radcliffe and Ramsbottom libraries) 26% of the population of the borough live within 10 minutes travel time and 95% of the population are within 20 minutes of at least one library.

The report considered the impact of library closures and accessibility for the following groups:

- Older people (aged 65 and over)
- Younger people
- People with disabilities
- People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups
- People from deprived communities
- People without access to a car

Access by these modes of transport was looked at: car; public transport (bus) and foot. The walking speed used in all models was 3.5kmph; considerably less than an average walking speed of 4.8kmp to allow for older or disabled people.

The conclusion of the Mott McDonald report indicates that the level of provision given by the Library Review's option 2 is consistent with the council's statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museum Act (1964): *It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof...*

Furthermore the Council remains confident that the level of provision and access does not disproportionately affect any vulnerable group (whether or not they are covered by equality legislation).

Plans are being put into place to assist individuals and groups to access libraries in ways which may be new to them including:

- Guided tours for visually impaired service users in partnership with Bury Society for Blind and Partially Sighted People including transport and walking routes
- Resources and support for library and IT use for people with disabilities and/or special needs at all libraries
- Additional staff training e.g. use of specialist equipment
- Introductory/trial sessions for groups at different locations

- Identification of other meeting places for groups who wish to stay in their own locality
- Continuation of the Home Library Service

In response to the third reason stated for the Call-In it was explained that the first public consultation of the Library Review focused on 6 principles for the service and ran from June to September 2016. During this time the following actions were taken to ensure public awareness of the review:

- 10,000 paper surveys distributed to libraries, council departments, community organisations, local businesses, schools and colleges
- Online survey available via council website
- Telephone survey to 500 households
- Publicity campaign including posters, social media and press reports
- Informal meetings with community groups and other users as requested

The second part of the consultation engaged with library users, including community groups, on their priorities for the service provision. Workshop meetings were held in all libraries aimed at helping service users (and some non-users) develop realistic service provision in terms of need and budget.

Two separate sessions were held for staff.

As with all public consultations in the review, the result of the first and second survey plus overviews of the consultation meetings were included on the library web pages.

In January 2017 the second report to cabinet was made public, section 6.5 covered future use of library buildings and included the following information:

In both options we are suggesting a reduced number of buildings to be maintained as public libraries. The review of library buildings gave us some initial options for uses of the potentially redundant buildings. These are starter options and do not factor in all potential uses for the buildings. In line with the Councils commitment to neighbourhood, locality working we would be very keen to see appropriate community use of the buildings and encourage residents to explore this option with us. At this stage of the consultation it is not possible to give a definitive answer but some options may include:

- community management of some buildings to include a library service and community activities/meeting place. Community groups would be expected to provide a business plan including full financial details of how the building would be opened, maintained and developed. This is really important as no financial support for this is likely to be available from the Council.
- management by other agencies e.g. nurseries and playgroups. Again would require business and financial information
- establishment of a charitable trust to which some libraries are transferred.
- sale of buildings likely to be of market value or desirable.

Following on from this report a second survey was held between February and April 2017, the publicity and promotional methods for this were the same as listed

above for the first consultation. In this second survey the public was asked to decide between option 1 (retain 3 libraries) and option 2 (retain 4 libraries).

Presentations followed by question and answer sessions were held at all Township Forums during March 2017. Community use of buildings was discussed at several sessions.

From February 2017 Community Library Supervisors began to make contact with all community and other groups using libraries, whether that use was library related e.g. book and craft groups or a separate use e.g. community meetings. Leaders or nominated representative from these groups were then contacted and offered the opportunity to meet with the Head of Libraries to discuss their future use of the library service. Community groups connected e.g. Tenants and Residents Associations were also offered meetings to discuss the possibility of community management of buildings. 20 community meetings have been held since the end of February 2017 and more are booked.

Discussions regarding community management of library buildings have taken place at 4 libraries:

- Coronation Road – meeting with Abbey Close Tenants and Residents Association and (separately) with ROC (Redeeming our Communities) who manage the linked building (formerly the Y-Zone)
- Dumers Lane – informal discussion with TRA and over 50s followed by later meeting organised by the Green Party
- Moorside – 3 meetings with Seedfield TRA and (separately) the church
- Tottington – meetings with Friends of Tottington Library (FOTL) and local councillors

At these meetings the current budget for each building was gone through, liabilities (including repairs and maintenance) and responsibilities were discussed.

To date only FOTL has proceeded; finance and ongoing commitments are the limiting factor for the other groups.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions; the following points were raised:

- Councillor FitzGerald referred to the possibility of transferring the assets to community groups and asked what work needed to be done around this.

It was explained that each building would be looked at individually and a structured framework would need to be developed to ascertain how the assets would be transferred. Work had been carried out to map the community use of each building. It was explained that if a community group take over a building, the library and other council services would still be closed.

It was explained that the future plans of the buildings could not be worked on until the decision had been made in relation to the library provision.

- Councillor Hankey asked what rents the community groups would have to pay to keep the buildings open.

It was explained that each building would have to go through a costing analysis and all figures would need to be worked through with the interested groups to enable business plans to be produced. Each building would be different due to the individual upkeep requirements and needs. The plans would have to be cost neutral to the Council.

- Councillor James asked why downsizing of the existing library offer was not an option.

It was explained that keeping the buildings themselves would not be cost effective; they would still require services such as electricity and water and this wouldn't reduce the costs.

- Councillor Leach asked what work was planned to support families in the future.

It was explained that there were 2 assistant librarians that worked with families, children and schools to support literacy. Schools were supported in setting up homework clubs and the library offer within schools was extremely important.

- Councillor Smith stated that the Council had worked hard to maintain the provision up to now and the decisions being made were a last resort. Many local authorities had already made the decisions years ago that Bury Council was now facing.
- Councillor Smith asked what outreach work would be undertaken?

It was reported that there was a service wide team that promoted reader development and worked with community groups. The library buildings would be used as much as possible to engage and provide support. There is an online library which is available 24 hours a day. The library service would also be looking to secure as much external funding as possible by applying for grants and other funding streams.

- Councillor FitzGerald asked about transport and vulnerable and smaller groups that may not find it as easy to access public transport as others.

It was explained that the Library service worked with over 100 dedicated volunteers to help provide support. The library would be looking at how it worked with different groups and what it can provide on an individual basis. One of the main issues will be to make sure that all resources are used as proactively as possible.

- Councillor Caserta asked how much the Mott McDonald survey had cost.

It was reported that the surveys had been done in 3 parts at a cost of £21 thousand pounds overall.

- Councillor Caserta asked for assurances that no obstacles had been put in place regarding Tottington Library.

It was explained that Tottington Library had been dealt with in the same way as any other library facility during the consultation periods.

**Delegated decision:**

That, having considered the points raised in the Notice of Call-in, this Committee does not offer any comments to the Cabinet in respect of Minute CA.34 Library Review – Outcome of Third Public Survey on Proposed Options and Recommendations.

(5 Members voting in favour and 4 against)

**COUNCILLOR R CASERTA**  
**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.35 pm)**