

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CARE AND INDEPENDENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 16 November 2011 at 10.30 am at County Hall, Northallerton.

PRESENT:-

County Councillor Tony Hall in the Chair.

County Councillors: John Batt, John Fox, Bill Houlton, Brian Marshall, John McCartney, Dave Peart, John Savage, Melva Steckles, Helen Swiers

In attendance County Councillors: Keith Barnes, Heather Moorhouse, Andrew Goss.

Representatives of the Voluntary Sector: Alex Bird

County Councillor Chris Metcalfe, Portfolio Holder

Officers: Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director Library and Community Services, Ray Busby, Corporate Development Officer (Policy, Performance and Partnerships) Gary Fielding, Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Performance & Partnerships), Debbie Hogg, Assistant Director, Resources (Health and Adult Services),

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

111. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2011, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

112. PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS

The Committee was advised that no notice had been received of any public questions or statements to be made at the meeting.

113. FUTURE DELIVERY OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

CONSIDERED –

The covering report of the Scrutiny Team Leader which introduced the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Performance and Partnerships) on the future delivery of Library Services in North Yorkshire.

To inform Members of the progress to date on the agreed actions set out in the recommendations of the report of 14 June on the future delivery of library services in North Yorkshire.

To seek Members' approval for further decisions to be taken on

- opening hours for libraries in Categories 1 and 2,

- progress on community ownership models for libraries in Category 3
- a response to the petition from Great Ayton which was considered by Hambleton Area Committee on 5 September 2011.

In his introduction the Chairman reported that in June, the Committee supported further work with community groups in all Categories but especially Category 3. Back then Members concluded that business plans needed to be robust enough to ensure that whatever solution was arrived at, it would stand the test of time.

His view was that the object of this meeting was not to re-run the business of the last Committee. The Executive had decided to reconfigure the Library Service within a budget envelope, based on a number of factors including local need and usage, but on the premise the whole service would share the pain.

This set the context for the Committee's work which he aggregated into three broad areas:

1. The Committee should satisfy itself that the total package stands up in process terms ie all relevant aspects eg, legal and financial issues, TUPE and so on have been properly explored and accounted for.
2. The proposals are consistent with the Executive's decision that this is the shape of the service for the longer-term.
3. The report focuses particularly on discussions with Category 3 Libraries to reach community based solutions. Is there evidence -
 - That NYCC and other parties have been committed to this
 - Engagement has been meaningful
 - The council has responded well to community expressions of interest.

The proposals before the Committee however affect the whole service; they are an integrated package so the approach to scrutiny must be broader than just an assessment of the viability of Category 3 solutions.

The Chairman reiterated that changing library services is an integral part of the Council's budget setting, the exercise must therefore achieve the earmarked savings.

The Portfolio Holder, County Councillor Chris Metcalfe believed much had happened since the Committee had looked at the future of the service at its meeting in June. The new Supermobile Service had been successfully launched for example. He had also been impressed by the positive way communities had worked steadily and innovatively to find solutions.

The challenge ahead after today's discussions and after the Executive meeting would be to make the aspirations of these communities a reality. A tremendous amount of goodwill had been generated by this process and it was important to sustain the momentum created.

Julie Blaisdale thanked all the communities who had looked for solutions in conjunction with officers. She referred to Section 2.0 of the report, outlining the agreed recommendations to the Executive at its 14 June meeting. October had seen the use of the new Supermobile route, which was operating well. Increasing interest was being seen by people and groups wanting to take on improved and enhanced outlets for collection and reading rooms.

Julie Blaisdale highlighted the thinking behind each of the categories in the libraries. Those in Category 3 had justifiably received the most support because these Libraries

were due to close by 31 March 2012 unless sustainable solutions emerged. The report today documented the progress that had been made.

A resource had been made available through the Active Communities Project for voluntary sector organisations to work with those communities alongside County Council officers. Part of this exercise had been about helping community groups understand the extent of the commitment they were taking on.

In relation to Categories 1 and 2 much work had been done developing proposals on the basis of reduced opening hours. Overall the anticipated loss of available hours for public use of between 20 – 30%. Whilst the principle of sharing the pain had been observed, opening hours at some establishments had been reduced more than others. This was because analysis over a period of time had demonstrated relative over-provisioning in areas.

A library could only feasibly have opening hours extended beyond those in the recommendation, if community support bridged the gap. The alternative was to find savings from elsewhere within the service, with the consequential impact upon the opening hours of other libraries.

A Member asked whether the hours allocated were “set in stone”. Julie Blaisdale responded that with only so much resource to go round, an attempt had been made to be as fair as possible whilst ensuring hours were sensible and practical across all libraries. Again this was consistent with the notion of spreading the pain. Hours could, however, be supplemented by communities using the library beyond these core opening hours.

Julie Blaisdale explained how the legal and resource implications had been examined in detail. Assuming the proposals were adopted, it would be necessary to enter a 90 day consultation period with staff regarding changed staffing structures and working arrangements.

Gary Fielding reported discussions on who might bear the expense of Criminal Records Bureau checks. He referred to para. 6.6 of the report, advising that the County Council would be looking to support community groups in terms of additional assistance which might ensure a smooth transition to community lead ownership.

In response to a question, Julie Blaisdale replied that individuals staffing the frontline at a library might not always be professionally qualified, but would have the appropriate level of skill, training and expertise.

County Councillor Bill Hoults agreed that the proposals before the Committee now were a significant step forward from those received in June. He was aware of the difficulties some community groups faced financing CRB checks, so was pleased to hear the Council is exploring options. He expressed a view that a definite clear statement of what volunteer and paid staff can and can't do was required, especially for those community groups who are assembling a business plan. A point echoed by County Councillor Helen Swiers.

The Chairman invited members of the public to make statements and ask questions.

Jennifer Roberts, on behalf of Save Great Ayton Library Group, detailed the events and negotiations that had taken place between the community group and officers since the last Committee meeting considered the initial set of proposals. The enhanced project for a community hub had received support from the parish precept and this would prove to be critical to its success.

Gary Fielding thanked Jennifer for the update and paid credit to the work the Save Great Ayton Library Group had undertaken, particularly the fair but robust challenge they had presented to officers. In his view the group had prepared an imaginative and sound

business plan. There were still issues to be worked through, but to the Group's credit their proposals envisaged a community facing service that included more than a traditional library facility.

The Chairman referred to the e-mailed question from Sian Barber. Julie Blaisdale explained that the decisions regarding this library had been based on previous performance over recent years.

Alison Jarvis from 'Keep it Public' addressed the meeting. Her concerns related to children and young people. Her opinion was that the consultation process was flawed on the basis that children and young people had not been consulted directly as a separate, distinct user group. She referred to the Somerset and Gloucestershire judgement whereby the verdict had been found for the campaigners on the grounds of the Councils failing to appropriately consider its equalities duty.

In her response Julie Blaisdale referred to the answer she had given when this had arisen at Hambleton Area Committee. Consultation had been carried out with the aim of reaching the population at large. The process had therefore been extensive but made as accessible as possible. Children had been encouraged to respond, schools had debated the issue, children had written individually and at length. The percentage of responses returned from children had arguably vindicated this decision and level of engagement.

Gary Fielding emphasised the commitment to transparency. Officers and the Portfolio Holder had been held to account for their proposals by the community, the Scrutiny Committee and the wider Council membership; Equalities Impact Assessments were a part of that process.

Gary Fielding advised the Committee that the review of the Library Service had now been in progress for about a year and there had been significant consultation. Now though there was a need to reach firm recommendations so that staff, who were understandably anxious, could learn the way forward and future planning could be implemented.

County Councillor Andrew Goss addressed the meeting and congratulated the Friends of Bilton Library Group on their work to secure a community led solution. They had worked tirelessly, consulted with officers and come up with what was believed to be a viable conclusion. The anticipated number of volunteers of 60+ was impressive. The expectation was the plan would be agreed as sustainable by early 2012.

County Councillor Keith Barnes addressed the issue raised by Alison Jarvis earlier in the meeting advising that it was open to anybody to make representation to the Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee during public question time.

Gary Fielding added that the Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not been consulted directly because all the Scrutiny Committees, in this instance Care and Independence Overview and Scrutiny Committee, had a responsibility to take a holistic view.

In response to a question from County Councillor Helen Swiers, Gary Fielding advised that information being prepared for groups would include advice on using income generated locally. This would address how to demarcate between the money raised within communities for enhancements the community wished to see and resources allocated by the County Council.

County Councillor John Batt commented upon the change in library provision, whereby hours from Knaresborough had been made available to Harrogate. County Councillor Batt commented that the service needed to respond to the challenge of new digital forms of communication and delivery. Julie Blaisdale advised that the hours for Knaresborough

reflected the same approach as all others and that historical arrangements were now superseded by both this review and the opening of the new Central Harrogate Library.

With the exception of County Councillor John Savage there was unanimity on the following:

- There has clearly been meaningful dialogue and engagement with communities and all parties have responded well to expressions of community interest.
- The proposals are consistent with the decision to reconfigure the service for the long term within the budget envelope, based on the principle of “sharing the pain”.
- The total package stands up in process terms; that is all relevant aspects, eg, legal and financial issues, TUPE and so on, have been properly explored and accounted for.

RESOLVED –

The Committee supports the recommendations in the report but would advise the Executive:

- a) Recommendation 10.2 be amended by substituting the words “proposed opening hours” for “paid support hours supplemented by resources provided from within communities”.
- b) With reference to paragraph 6.6 of the report, to help some community groups in this initial transition phase, a recommendation be added that further consideration be given to local “pump priming” measures which will assist in the successful launch of community led libraries.
- c) The addition of a clear statement, which confirms the commitment to develop services such as the home delivery service, local collections and outlets (para. 3.4 refers).
- d) As part of ongoing monitoring, local members be informed directly on the impact of changes in their divisions.

The meeting concluded at 12:30 pm.

RB/ALJ