

Extract from the draft Minutes of the meeting of the County Committee for Hambleton held on 9 March 2015

67. Petition - Stokesley Library

Considered -

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) inviting the Area Committee to hear from the organiser of a petition, campaigning against proposals for Stokesley Library to become a community library run by volunteers with no professional library staff.

The petition contained 2,047 signatures and called for Stokesley Library to remain within county provision and be a hybrid model library which meant that the County Council would continue to fund the cost of the premises and one paid member of staff.

The petition was in response to a consultation on proposals to change the existing library service arising from cuts totalling £1.6m to the County Council's library budget.

The petition organised by Eileen Driver a resident of Stokesley on behalf of the Save Stokesley Library Campaign Group was referred to the Area Committee for debate in accordance with the County Council's Petition Scheme.

The Area Committee was advised that following publication of the agenda papers a request for the petition to be presented by another member of the campaign group had been received and granted.

Mr A Dick a resident of Stokesley on behalf of the Save Stokesley Library Campaign Group addressed the area committee. Mr Dick outlined why the petitioners did not think it was a sustainable viable option for Stokesley library to be run solely on a voluntary basis. He described the adverse impact closure of the library would have on the local community and called for the County Council to reconsider its proposals and make Stokesley a hybrid model library. The work needed to run and manage a community library had he said been underestimated and he pointed out that a group of volunteers willing to take on the responsibility of a community managed library had yet to come forward. A full copy of the statement read out by Mr Dick is in the Minute Book.

In response Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director – Library and Community Services addressed the meeting. She said the enormous number of responses the consultation had attracted (in excess of 8,000) which included similar petitions for other libraries in the county reflected the intrinsic value with which libraries were held by their communities. She said that the public consultation had now closed and officers were in the process of going through the responses received. A report making final recommendations would be referred to the County Council's Executive committee at its meeting on 7 July 2015. She said the County Council wanted to ensure there was a 'level playing field' amongst libraries and in recognition of the relatively high building costs at Stokesley was looking to provide support in this regard. She emphasised the success of the community model in other parts of the county and gave assurances that the petition would be given serious consideration.

Members debated the petition and commented as follows:-

- That it would be wrong to pre-determine the outcome of the consultation
- That other libraries in Hambleton district and the remainder of the County were in the same position as Stokesley and it would therefore be unfair to give priority to Stokesley
- That the criteria for determining library status should be reviewed in order to make it fairer for all communities
- That the community model at Great Ayton despite initial objections had proved to be successful. Sufficient numbers of volunteers had come forward, funds had been raised by the parish council setting a precept and the library was now open for longer hours than it had been when under County provision.
- Contested the view that Stokesley was comparable to Great Ayton. As a market town Stokesley it was bigger and its population included a high percentage of older people.
- That volunteers were unable to access the library information service which made day to day operation of the service difficult

In summing up the debate County Council Leader John Weighell told the meeting that they had to consider what was fair for all communities in North Yorkshire. He proposed and it was seconded by County Councillor Peter Sowray that although the library consultation had closed on 8 February 2015 the petition for Stokesley library should nevertheless be referred as evidence. Julie Blaisdale confirmed that in view of the fact that the consultation responses were still in the process of being analysed she was happy to accept the petition as further evidence. Members voted in favour of this proposal

Resolved -

That the petition for Stokesley Library be submitted as evidence as part of the library consultation which ended on 8 February 2015

Extract from the draft Minutes of the meeting of the County Area Committee for the Harrogate District held on 12 March 2015

79. Petition - 'Help Knaresborough Library'

Considered -

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) inviting the Area Committee to hear from the organiser of a petition, campaigning against proposals to reduce the number of paid professional library staff at Knaresborough library.

The petition was in response to a consultation on proposals to restructure the existing library service arising from cuts totalling £1.6m to the County Council's library budget.

The petition contained 2,035 signatures and called for Knaresborough Library to have three full-time professional staff plus volunteers to work in the library. The Petition claimed that volunteers would not be able to run Knaresborough Library with only one member of staff.

The petition, organised by Ms Sonia Starbuck a resident of Knaresborough was referred to the Area Committee for debate in accordance with the County Council's Petition Scheme.

Ms Sonia Starbuck addressed the area committee and outlined the reasons why petitioners had objected to the proposals. Whilst accepting the need to make savings, the proposals for Knaresborough library were she said unrealistic and put at risk the future viability and sustainability of the library. The plans to reduce the number of paid professional library staff from five to just one were too radical. The criteria used to determine library status was based on geography and she contended that it would have been fairer to also include usage. Evidence showed that Knaresborough library was much busier than some of the other libraries identified for hybrid status. She pointed out that several new large housing developments were already underway in the locality and that this in time would lead to increased numbers of people wanting to use the library.

In response Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director – Library and Community Services addressed the meeting. She said the enormous number of responses the consultation had attracted (in excess of 8,000) which included petitions for other libraries in the county reflected the intrinsic value with which libraries were held by their communities. She said that the public consultation had now closed and officers were in the process of going through the responses received. A report making final recommendations would be referred to the County Council's Executive committee at its meeting on 7 July 2015. She said legislation required there to be a core library in each of the seven districts in the County. Unlike other districts two libraries had been awarded hybrid status in Harrogate namely Ripon and Knaresborough on account of how busy they both were. She stressed that the model for hybrid libraries was not restricted to having only one member of staff but a ratio of 25% paid and 75% volunteers in terms of opening hours. It was fair to say however that the role of paid staff was about to change and would in the future be very different from what they did currently. She concluded by encouraging people to come forward to act as volunteers.

A Member expressed concern that that response to the Petition given at the meeting suggested that the consultation was not open to alternative solutions being found and that it had already been decided to implement what had been put forward. It was also highlighted that the issues raised in the petition were equally applicable to Ripon library and that unlike hybrid libraries, community managed libraries faced the very difficult task of raising on an annual basis their own running costs. In the case of Boroughbridge this together with the age of the volunteers involved meant there was a real possibility the library would close in the next couple of years. Opposition was also voiced that this would lead to Council Tax Payers receiving a different level of service dependent upon where in the district they lived. On a more positive note Members acknowledged that the benefits of co-location of services in other buildings and with partners had yet to be fully explored and offered potential to achieve big savings.

In summing up the debate the Chairman said the petition raised some important issues and congratulated the organisers of the petition on their efforts. He suggested that although the library consultation had closed on 8 February 2015 the petition for Knaresborough library should nevertheless be referred as evidence. Julie Blaisdale confirmed that in view of the fact that the consultation responses were still in the process of being analysed she was happy to accept the petition as further evidence. Members voted in favour of this proposal

Resolved -

That the Area Committee recognises the concerns raised and congratulates the organisers of petition for Knaresborough Library on their efforts.

That the petition is accepted and is submitted by way of evidence to the consultation on the library service.

That the Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee is requested to consider the points raised and recorded in the minutes above when making recommendations to the Executive in July 2015.

Extract from the draft Minutes of the meeting Yorkshire Coast and Moors County Area Committee held on 25 March 2015

77. Petition – Against the changes/cut backs and proposed cut back of professional staff at Whitby Library

Considered -

The report of the Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Democratic Services to invite the Area Committee to hear from a representative of the organisers of this petition, debate the petition and agree an appropriate course of action.

Mr John Dean addressed the Area Committee in support of the petition, he spoke on behalf of Mrs Cath Chadwick who had been unable to attend. He explained that such was the strength of feeling in Whitby that two petitions had been generated one relating purely to Whitby Library and the second a significant contribution towards the countywide Save our Libraries petition. He articulated his concerns that if a library closes, staff can lose their jobs and he cited his knowledge of this from experiences in Leeds. He felt very strongly that any community loses when a library closes. He noted that this can lead to older people feeling isolated, and younger children can be less prepared for school as a result. Similarly students can find themselves without a place in which to study. In short all lose if a library closes. Turning specifically to the County Council's proposals, he noted that the sweeping cuts proposed across the county area would have an impact upon Whitby as a consequence of the hybrid proposal. He spoke of the inherent differences and unique characteristics of communities, and the challenges to be faced in understanding different levels of provision. He felt that to fully understand them and take them on, a community needed a retired 'captain of industry' in their midst. He also expressed concerns about losing volunteers as people retire and move to different areas; he felt that the volunteer model could not always be sustained. Equally volunteers were not librarians and libraries were not simply rooms with books. He expressed concern regarding the inequitable spread of resources across communities and asked Members to think very hard about the issue.

Members commented as follows:

- ◆ A local Member supported the petitioners in their action and agreed it was important to recognise the needs of Whitby. Reference was made to the 1964 Act and the duty to provide a comprehensive service - it was accepted that a balance had to be achieved and that one size would not fit all.
- ◆ There was agreement that the issue concerned everyone and that all had different needs. It was noted that there was considerable development underway in Scarborough which would be on-going for four years, and it was felt that services needed to be shaped for the future in recognition of this. Whilst general support for the petition was noted, it was felt there was a long way to go in terms of resolving the overall debate.
- ◆ The importance of initiatives such as Extra Care in helping re-position library provision was noted. It was felt that a true consultation exercise had been undertaken, and time was now being taken to analyse the feedback received, and the results would come to the Executive in due course. With changes not being implemented until 2017, this provided a very long lead time and

hopefully an agreeable course of action could be negotiated in the intervening period.

- ◆ Sympathy for the petitioners cause was expressed and it was acknowledged that it was important to hear these views and seek to keep the risk of closure at bay.
- ◆ With so many County Council libraries in existence it was accepted that change was inevitable, and that libraries must further evolve and become community hubs to be sustainable in the longer term. It was recognised that areas such as Eastfield had pockets of deprivation, and the use of libraries was particularly important to those households who may need to use the library to gain access to the internet. Whilst the library facilities may endure in the longer term it was accepted that this would undoubtedly be in a very different format.
- ◆ It was noted that this was a relatively early stage in the debate and that there was much ground to cover to reach a final conclusion regarding proposals. Libraries such as Whitby were extremely busy and has good footfall, therefore proposal to go down to one paid member of staff plus a limited volunteer pool is a concern.
- ◆ It was accepted that common themes were emerging in all the library debates and the concerns of the public were acknowledged. Whilst the consultation process has been well run there was no getting away from the fact that hard decisions needed to be taken and a sustainable solution must be found.
- ◆ It was suggested that there should be liaison with Stronger Communities in addressing the volunteer question.
- ◆ It was felt that it would be a huge loss if Whitby Library were to operate on a reduced service or worse still if it closed.
- ◆ It was also highlighted that pockets of deprivation arose in some of the most rural areas and not just on housing estates.
- ◆ The initial results of the consultation showed the high regard in which the Library Service was held and every effort should be made to seek to save libraries.
- ◆ It was recognised that Whitby Library served a very wide area and concern was expressed how this would be managed if resources were reduced.
- ◆ It was noted that the County Council had had to save many millions of pounds since 2011 – these cuts, which when completed, will amount to almost a third of the County Council's overall budget. This has necessitated changes to many services with very severe cuts being made to many budget areas. These cuts were very real and it was noted that they will significantly change the way in which Local Government works forever. This was not just about libraries but many other services.

Responding Julie Blaisdale, Assistant Director - Library, Customer and Community Services commented that she was gratified by the comments made and very pleased to hear that the Service was held in such high regard. She commented that 8,300

individual responses had been received to the consultation which had ended on 8 February 2015. She noted that discussions were on-going with communities and the results of these were being added into the evidence already gathered from the consultation. She explained that report on the feedback would go to the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny on 5 June and then onto the Executive on 7 July 2015. She stressed that the Library Service had to contribute to the savings targets of the County Council, they were not exempt from the process. She highlighted the fact that some new libraries were being created for example the facility at Extra Care in Settle and also Thirsk. Julie Blaisdale recognised the concerns expressed regarding volunteer fatigue and accepted the need for more creative solutions. She cited the example of learning and work experience placements for young people which had borne fruit. She accepted that that particular model might not work for the Scarborough area, and that locality by locality tailored solutions were needed. Julie Blaisdale was pleased to report that 20% of the responders to the consultation had said they would be prepared to volunteer. This represented some 1,500, which was a significant number. She felt that people were passionate in their wish to support this much loved service. She explained there was a need to look at what paid staff do and those things that others might be able to do, to free up some of the resources of the paid staff. She also spoke of WiFi enabled libraries - an issue that was currently under investigation and added that the County Council was always looking for other such opportunities. In response to a question regarding guarantees concerning paid jobs Julie Blaisdale restated that roles were being reviewed and added that there was a long lead time before the changes took effect. A long lead time was helpful in seeking resolution through natural movement, as people often find alternative employment in the intervening time. There was experience of this from the last round of library changes and the numbers of people who were displaced was therefore minimised.

Resolved -

That the Area Committee noted the report and the timetabling of consideration of the results of the library consultation at Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 June 2015 and the Executive on 7 July 2015.