

SW8244 Unite Plymouth City Council Branch Submission for Plymouth Libraries Plan

Plymouth currently has seventeen Libraries that provide a number of services for local communities. Libraries are a place to meet, to access the Internet and make full use of computer services as well as the expected provision of lending books to the public. Libraries are an intrinsic element of our communities. The plan to cut this service to communities is without any tangible recognition of the potential impact on the poorest in society, older residents, the unemployed and those with learning needs not to mention families.

Most of us will remember going to the local library with their parents or with their school. The ability to have the freedom to borrow books of all genres has a demonstrative effect on a person's learning and education. Not all books are published in E book form and those that are usually come with a cost. Young children will be introduced to books through Reading Circles at the library, through Story Time at the library and through interactive play time at the library. Plymouth Central Library is the flagship but each of the local libraries has the potential to provide similar services.

At a time when funding is being cut to third sector organisations providing Toddler Groups, After School Clubs, Silver Surfer groups, Disability forums and Learning Centres the need for community hubs, such as libraries, becomes more important. Most libraries have meeting rooms that are under utilised. Instead of closing these buildings they need to be marketed properly.

As a branch, we support a number of local groups financially who attend various Courses at North Prospect Community Learning Centre. Situated next to the Devonport Job Centre, it is perfectly situated for job seekers to use the computer suite for job searches, write CVs and attend courses to gain qualifications. The funding for this group is uncertain and whilst there are no plans for NPCL to close, Should North Prospect Library and Stoke Library close, opportunities for this section of the community becomes diminished. Devonport library is not particularly big and serves a large community already. The use of NPCL is not restricted to learning. It is a place for the disenfranchised members of the community to meet. We pay for the Tea and Toast club. It meets each day and provides breakfast for some 60 members of the community who either cannot afford to buy food, are isolated in the community or elderly. Through this initiative these people are signposted to other organisations and/or given support. As a Council, you should be looking at each locality individually. Ascertain what community resources are operating in each locality and then put together a viable plan with the community leaders. The local library can provide the answer to the continuation of services where funding is either withdrawn or no longer forthcoming.

The planned closures take no account of the community demographics. For instance, closing Stoke Library will mean that a job seeker would need to access the same services at Devonport Library. This would be a bus ride away. If a jobseeker has to log on for job searches three times a week, the added bus fare expense would put extra pressure on an already squeezed budget. The Catch – 22 is not to job search and be sanctioned or pay the bus fare to travel to a library and not eat.

The information from the Council states that this initiative is not about saving money. It may not be but at a guess it could be about finding the money to invest in those libraries that you wish to keep open. Once closed these buildings remain closed. Since 1998, under respective Council Administrations, the plan has been to open up One Stop Shops and to provide community hubs. It has taken until now to put this on any agenda. Turn your plan on its head. Instead of closing buildings and using outreach services – bring those groups in to the library building. Use it as it was meant to be used. Don't take the simp,etc option.

I would like to attend Scrutiny as a witness.

What should the Council be doing?

1. Consider how the use of each library could be improved. The current consultation had focusses on potential closures rather than working communities and local groups on how to keep them open.
2. The meeting rooms can be used by Council staff. You have a meeting rooms in each building but at times these are full. With the current traffic chaos, travelling to a meeting at Windsor House is becoming nigh on impossible.
3. Make these buildings multi purpose.
4. Pull together representatives from Public Health, Children's and Adult Social Care and Education to consider how their aims and objectives will be affected by these proposed closures.
5. Utilise these buildings for the Workplace Learning Agreement courses.