

# Select Committee Review

**Monday 15 May 2017**

## **PRESENT:**

Councillor Bowie, in the Chair.

Councillor Churchill, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Bridgeman, Fletcher, Hendy, Kelly, Sam Leaves, Sparling, Jon Taylor and Winter.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Carson.

Also in attendance: Faye Batchelor-Hambleton (Assistant Director for Customer Services), Councillor Bowyer (Leader of the Council), Ross Jago (Senior Panel & Partnership Adviser), Councillor Jordan (Cabinet Member for Culture), Amanda Macdonald (Service Manager, Libraries), Dave Saunders (Strategic Development Manager, Customer Services) and Lynn Young (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 6.09 pm.

*Note: The full discussion [can be viewed on the webcast](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk) of the meeting at [www.plymouth.gov.uk](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk). At a future meeting, a relevant scrutiny committee will consider the accuracy of these minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

### 1. **Appointment of Vice Chair**

The Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Churchill as Vice Chair for this particular meeting.

### 2. **Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made in accordance with the Code of Conduct –

<b>Name</b>	<b>Minute Number and Item</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Councillor Churchill	4 - Witnesses	Member of the Plymouth Community Homes Board	Private
Councillor Sparling	4 - Witnesses	Member of UNITE Union	Private

### 3. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

#### 4. **Witnesses**

The Committee heard from the following witnesses –

Mrs Liz Dunstan, Principal of Tor Bridge High, presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. She advised the Committee that –

- she disagreed with the figures for the usage of Estover Library;
- the signage for the library is too small and insignificant. The signage should be larger and clearer, and the facility needs to be advertised - particularly to residents in new housing developments nearby;
- she was not aware of any suitable venue in the area for a pop-up library;
- Estover library offers a good sized meeting space in addition to a large office space;
- she considered Estover library to meet the criteria required for a library to remain open.

Mr Andrew Beasley, teacher at Stoke Damerel Primary School, presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. He advised the Committee that –

- a large number of children are avid readers and they prefer books and not an e-reader or electronic device;
- libraries are a good place for children to find information to increase their knowledge. Some children use a library as a quiet place to complete their homework, others see a library as a sanctuary away from the bustle of everyday life;
- Stoke community would be affected if the library is closed. Stoke library is always being used, the staff are passionate for working there and for helping people;
- libraries should not be ranked solely on the building (although disabled access is key). The heart of a library is the people who are there, and the passion, commitment, knowledge, expertise and willingness of staff to 'go the extra mile';
- a large number of books are not available electronically, and of those that are, some are self-published or have not been through the editing process;

- it is possible to increase the use of Stoke library - more community groups could to use it more frequently. A city-wide campaign would encourage more people to use libraries.

Sue Shaw, Director of Plymouth Homes (PCH), presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. She also provided further documentation at the meeting. She advised the Committee that –

- parents want more opportunities for their children, and want libraries to remain open – particularly in North Prospect;
- cross-agency working is successful in Plymouth. PCH provide some of the buildings for this, and partners could provide more events/activities to encourage more people in to the libraries;
- Plymouth needs to future-proof Council services. Community facilities need to be included in new housing developments, and the quality of life for tenants needs to be considered;
- more events need to take place in libraries - a café would provide another reason for going to the library and enable people to have a drink while their children/elderly relatives are getting books, meeting friends etc;
- a survey of opening hours needs to be undertaken and the opening hours reviewed as necessary.

Mr Kevin Treweeks, UNISON Trade Union representative, presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. He advised the Committee that –

- he would like to see all of the libraries remain open, and new ones opened if possible, although he acknowledged that this was unlikely;
- a lot of agency staff work in the libraries, and a job losses could occur if any are closed. It is unclear whether these agency staff would be entitled to redundancy pay;
- library staff are very knowledgeable and can help users with a range of Council queries, which reduces pressure on the call centre;
- many libraries are purpose built with disabled access;
- a lot of elderly people are not comfortable leaving their neighbourhood and going in to town, library closures could result in more elderly people becoming socially isolated;
- a number of small district shopping centres are struggling, and the presence of a library encourages people to use them.

Ms Diane Beale, UNITE Trade Union representative, presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. She advised the Committee that –

- the core service of libraries is lending books and computer access, however it needs to be determined if libraries are being used in the most appropriate way;
- the meeting rooms in libraries are under-used as they are not advertised or marketed;
- conversations need to take place with other agencies and community groups to look at how libraries can be better utilised, thereby preventing their closure;
- the research has only been based on the footfall of libraries, and not what they mean to the community as a whole.

Dr Jeremy Goslin presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. He advised the Committee that –

- the distance people are prepared to travel to visit a library depends on a variety of factors. Fewer libraries will disadvantage children from lower socio-economic backgrounds as their parents will be less likely to visit the nearest library;
- it is vital that children's literacy rate improves, however children will only benefit from libraries if they use them;
- there is low footfall at Eggbuckland Library as many people are not aware it is there or what is on offer;
- there is no evidence in the Plan for Libraries that any research has been undertaken.

Ms Val Woodward presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. She advised the Committee that –

- the Council should be looking at ways to improve libraries, not close them;
- Stoke library is a welcoming place and very well used;
- the consultation process needs to encourage people and break down barriers. A lot of people do not like questionnaires – they prefer to talk – or have the confidence to join in the consultation process;
- libraries are a public service and it is short sighted to shut them.

Ms Nichola Williams presented a written representation which had been submitted with the agenda papers. Along with her daughter Lucy, she advised the Committee that –

- the questionnaire was too long and intimidating for many people to complete;
- the questionnaire should have been sent to all Plymouth schools for children to complete;
- she disagreed with the scoring matrix for Efford Library;
- if the proposals go ahead a lot of children will be placed at risk as they will lose their 'safe place' and will not have access to literacy opportunities.

Written representation had also been received from Stoke Damerel Community College, however no representative attended the meeting.

## 5. **Councillor Representations**

The Committee heard representations from the following Councillors -

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, Ward Councillor for Sutton and Mount Gould, advised the Committee that –

- the Chair of PADAN had been contacted recently to distribute the consultation information;
- the library questionnaire was detailed and long, and an adult with average intelligence would have found it laborious to complete;
- she disagreed with the report stating that Central Library is a nine minute walk from Tothill Library, and advised it was more likely a 15-20 minute walk, which would prove difficult for people with pushchairs or those with mobility problems, and would discourage many people from visiting;
- she acknowledged that Tothill Library had always had restricted opening hours, however local residents were used to this. The library is well used and various events are held there;
- a survey needs to be conducted to determine when people want to use the libraries and what services they want to use;
- at least 25% of Plymouth residents do not have access to a computer. People want to use a library for computer access - not just books - and want it open at a time that is convenient for them.

Councillor Tuohy, Ward Councillor for Ham, advised the Committee that –

- North Prospect Library offers a range of activities and talks, in addition to being a safe haven for vulnerable people, and partially houses the North Prospect History Project;
- North Prospect Library has full disabled access and the entrance is on a main road, thereby making it accessible to all;
- there is sheltered accommodation located above North Prospect Library and there is a direct lift service from the accommodation to the library;
- North Prospect Library is located in the Beacon, which is the only building that serves the whole of the community;
- closure of the North Prospect Library would be a disaster. People are not happy that the library could be closing.
- most of the residents in North Prospect have never heard of a pop-up library – if these were to be successful they would need to be marketed and advertised.

Councillor Mavin, Ward Councillor for Moorview, advised the Committee that –

- Estover is an extremely difficult area of the city to reach but is growing very rapidly. It has an ageing population, many of whom do not have access to the internet;
- the nearest public library if Estover Library were to shut, is two bus rides away;
- local schools are vehemently opposed to the closure of Estover Library as it helps the education of children. Young people use a library for some solace and to get help with their homework;
- the use of libraries in Plymouth increased in 2000 when Plymouth became a Unitary Authority and took back control of the libraries from Devon County Council;
- more people would be interested in Estover Library if they knew what services were on offer there.

## 6. **Cabinet Member and Council Officers**

Councillor Bowyer (Leader of the Council), Councillor Jordan (Cabinet Member for Culture) and Dave Saunders (Strategic Development Manager, Customer Services) presented information on the Plan for Libraries. Members were reminded that this review was about modernising the library service, and no final decision had yet been made about which libraries were to be closed.

The key areas of questioning related to –

- the distribution of a leaflet by Peverell ward councillors advising local residents that Peverell Library would remain open;
- the level of research undertaken for the consultation;
- the suitability and cost of pop-up libraries;
- consideration for library facilities in new and developing residential areas in Plymouth;
- the engagement of vulnerable people in the consultation process;
- the engagement of schools in the consultation process;
- the scoring system used to rank the libraries;
- the benefits of libraries to their local communities;
- the financial impact on local communities if their library is closed;
- the marketing/advertising of libraries;
- how the usage of libraries is calculated;
- the low response to the consultation questionnaire.

## 7. **Recommendations**

Throughout the day, Members of the Select Committee raised significant concerns over the lack of weighting within criteria used to assess libraries. Members felt that where opening hours, number of computers etc. affected the criteria directly, so weighting should have been applied to provide a more accurate picture of library use.

Some Members of the committee expressed disappointment over the level of response to the consultation, in particular children and young people.

The Committee agreed –

- I. to note the statutory 12-week consultation and independent analysis of the results and that it has been carried out in line with, and has satisfied, the Public Sector Equalities Duty and guidance in relation to the Libraries Act 1964;

2. In future consultation exercises, the council aspires to greatly enhanced consultation activity, with simplified engagement with young people through schools and groups with protected characteristics;
3. Needs assessment criteria should be reassessed to reflect context in which the current library estate operates (e.g. opening times, number of computers available should be a consideration in ranking);
4. Needs assessment criteria should be weighted, with the greater weighting applied to criterion that reflect the aspiration for improved outcomes as a result of the Plan for Libraries;
5. All libraries currently subject to closure should be ranked to additional criteria which could include –
  - a. an assessment of accessibility for each building, paying regard to areas of growth within the city;
  - b. information from partner organisations gathered through the consultation;
  - c. the use of libraries by educational institutions and the impact of any closures on the education of Children and Young People and protected groups;
  - d. Sustainability and cost of building leaseholds, and previous investment committed to the estate;
6. When final proposals for changes to Library Services are presented to council they should be accompanied by;
  - a. a high level Equalities Impact Assessment for the entire Plan for Libraries;
  - b. draft performance measures for the new library service;
  - c. delivery plan, to include any transitional measures for customers impacted by proposed closures;
  - d. draft capital budget requirements for improvements to the library estate;
  - e. impact assessment for all staff, including temporary staff;
  - f. draft communications and marketing plan for the future of services.
7. The Plan for Libraries, subject to agreement by council, is scrutinised on an annual basis by the relevant committee.





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