

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 12 December 2011 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 3.43 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Keith R. Mitchell CBE – in the Chair
Councillor David Robertson (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Arash Fatemian
Councillor Louise Chapman
Councillor Jim Couchman
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Mrs J. Heathcoat
Councillor Melinda Tilley

Other Members in Attendance:

Officers:

Whole of meeting Sue Scane, Assistant Chief Executive & Chief Finance Officer
John Jackson, Director for Social & Community Services
Karen Warren, Acting County Librarian
Alexandra Bailey, Senior Performance & Improvement Manager

The Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting, and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

137/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Rodney Rose.

138/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda Item. 2)

Councillor Mitchell declared a personal interest as a member of the Friends of Adderbury Library.

Councillor Heathcoat indicated that as the relevant Cabinet Member she would not speak at all on Faringdon library which was in her Division.

139/11 MINUTES

(Agenda Item. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2011 were received. It was noted that they would be considered for approval at the next meeting on 20 December 2011.

140/11 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 5)

Cabinet noted that a petition had been received from the Friends of Benson Library and circulated in advance to Cabinet Members.

It was noted that Councillor Lawrie Stratford as Chairman of the Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee would address the meeting on the outcome of the Scrutiny meeting.

The following requests to address the meeting had been agreed:

Item 6 - Meryl Smith (ORCC)
Cllr John Goddard Shadow Cabinet Member
Lynne Pointer (Bampton)
Cllr Neil Owen (Charlbury)
Mrs Nicollette Lethbridge (Charlbury)
Cllr David Turner (Chalgrove)
Arthur Hollis (Goring)
Dr Reavill (Goring)
Cllr Zoe Patrick (Grove & Wantage)
Cllr Altaf-Khan (Headington & Marston)
Cllr Roy Darke (Headington & Marston)
Paula Coombs (Old Marston)
Sylvia Vetta (Kennington)
Mrs Caroline Ryan (Stonesfield)
Cllr Jean Fooks (Summertown & Wolvercote)
Phillip Pinney (Watlington)
Cllr Anne Purse (Wheatley)
Vicky Jordan, (OWL, Woodcote)
Cllr Ian Hudspeth (Woodstock)

Cabinet noted the following representations to Cabinet since the circulation of the papers:

1. Note from Dr L Clyne in respect of Grove library, Faringdon library and volunteers' travel expenses.
2. Questions received from Ms R. Crockett
3. Note from Mr Legge, Friends of Abingdon Civic Society

141/11 PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE

(Agenda Item. 6)

Cabinet considered the report on the outcomes of the public consultation on the future of the library service. The same report was considered by the Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Lawrie Stratford, Chairman of the Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee presented the views of that meeting. He commented that the Committee had heard from 6 members of the public and 2 councillors. Amongst the main points raised were the following:

Dependence on volunteers

- Fear there could be a lack of volunteers to be found
- Volunteers' skills, need for extensive training
- Lone working concerns
- Friends of libraries groups already stretched

Consultation

- Criteria based on need, current usage not taken into account
- Rural bias in the methodology used to assess the requirements of the library service
- Smaller libraries affected disproportionately
- Cuts should be evenly distributed across all libraries
- Not sufficient account taken of proposed housing growth

Costs and funding

- Benchmarking of service costs against other authorities
- Savings difficult to deliver

He noted that the Committee had heard a detailed case from the officers and the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities. The Committee had thanked officers and the Cabinet Member for their work throughout the consultation and were appreciative that local issues had been heard and responded to. The Scrutiny Committee welcomed that all libraries were to remain open and that in Community libraries the balance of paid staff to volunteers had been increased to half and half. The Scrutiny Committee had also welcomed the review in 4 years or earlier if appropriate as made clear in the recommendations. He concluded that at the end of the debate most members had been satisfied that concerns had been met and supported the recommendations before the Cabinet.

Ms Meryl Smith, ORCC, in welcoming the revised approach, which avoided library closures, commented that it would still be a significant challenge particularly for the rural areas. There would be a need for volunteers and for support for the local communities. Her organisation was available to support the efforts of the local Friends' Groups, local communities and the local authority. Responding to a statement from Councillor Couchman that the ORCC had particular skills in finding volunteers Ms Smith agreed that new volunteers would be needed.

Councillor John Goddard, Shadow Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities commended the work done over the past year and particularly the diligent, courteous and thoughtful approach of Councillor Judith Heathcoat. He recognised that the current position was a massive shift from the original proposals and outlined what he saw as the reasons for this including the outpouring of public support for libraries. He believed that the concern about the lack of volunteers was overstated and that sufficient people would come forward. He welcomed that the Council would work with each particular library. He still had concerns about lone working and stressed the need for instant access to advice and support. The report recommendations generally reflected a good position which he had supported at the Scrutiny Committee meeting. Councillor Judith Heathcoat replied that the library service already had lone workers and appropriate processes in place.

Lynne Pointer, speaking on behalf of residents of Bampton, spoke strongly in support of the continuation of the current service provision at Bampton library. She outlined the role the library played in supporting the young and elderly and those disadvantaged. She referred to the pockets of disadvantage in the area and the fact that there were hard to reach groups such as travellers in the area. As many as 1 in 3 local people did not have access to the internet and used the library. The library had strong links in the community and pointed to Rhyme time which was well attended. Responding to a question from Councillor Jim Couchman as to whether the library had a professional librarian, Ms Pointer replied that a professional service was provided.

Councillor Neil Owen, speaking as the local member for Charlbury and on behalf of his constituents stated that it appeared that the consultations had been mostly ignored and that the proposals were unfair to local residents. The methodology predetermined the outcome and did not acknowledge the importance of rural hubs. He also expressed concern that the model was unworkable with the training and hours involved intimidating to possible volunteers, with the practical matters not addressed for single person rural libraries and the costs not adding up. He was concerned that there was no contingency plan should there be insufficient volunteers and suggested that a pilot scheme before the decision was taken would have been helpful. Larger libraries were more likely to get volunteers to come forward. However he was assured that there would be support for Charlbury library to work out a solution and he thanked Councillor Heathcoat for her efforts.

Mrs Nicolette Lethbridge, as a Town Councillor spoke in support of Charlbury library and the important role it played at the hub of the town. She detailed practical issues such as the need for volunteers to stand for many hours; the older volunteer may not be computer literate and that volunteer cover was possible for only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the hours.

Cllr David Turner, speaking as the local member for Chalgrove, sought assurance that there were no planned reductions in the offering of the Mobile Library service. There were ten villages in his division, none of whom had library and he had heard references in the past year that the Service which was much valued, would reduce by one vehicle. Councillor Heathcoat replied that mobile library services would be reviewed to ensure better provision in stops and will be going to a single service.

Arthur Hollis (speaking also on behalf of Dr Reavill) speaking in support of Goring library, stated that there was no definition of what constituted a comprehensive and efficient library service. He queried how Cabinet could form a judgement without a definition. Government was launching a new enquiry the first element of which was the definition of a comprehensive and efficient service and it was suggested that any decision be delayed waiting for that definition. Mr Hollis queried the link between the quantitative analysis and need. He queried why volunteers could not be used at larger libraries. He queried whether all alternatives had been considered and commented that until all alternatives had been disclosed there was no assurance that the proposals provided a comprehensive and efficient service. He argued that the process had not been transparent and that alternatives had been provided and not referred to in the report. In response to a question from Councillor Couchman as to the options put forward, Mr Hollis indicated that some of the alternatives were:

- if using ranking to use usage based on active borrowers;
- Neithrop library and Banbury library could be combined;

Responding to a question from Councillor Fatemian that 80% of the visits were to core libraries and that this provided the definition of a comprehensive and efficient service, Mr Hollis replied that this did not take account of rural/urban differences. Dr Reavill referred to instances of inadequate data such as reference to no shops in Goring where there were in fact shops.

Cllr Zoe Patrick, speaking as a local member for Grove & Wantage, thanked officers and the Cabinet Member for their efforts but referred to the potential housing growth in the area. She would wish to see Grove library achieve core status but would work to see if a comprehensive service could be achieved using volunteers.

Cllr Altaf-Khan, speaking as a local member for Headington & Marston, welcomed the core status for Headington library but expressed unhappiness over the status of Old Marston library. He expressed concern that some of the data was out of date and did not address new developments.

Cllr Roy Darke, speaking as a local member for Headington & Marston welcomed that all libraries were to remain open. He was working closely with Friends of Old Marston library which was a small library only open 17 hours per week. The Friends of Old Marston library objected in principle to the use of volunteers for paid staff. They also felt that the proposals were unworkable and difficult to implement. He referred to difficulties in the area and that the

library was a core part of the community providing the opportunity for youngsters to do homework. Given the small number of hours involved there was only a marginal cost to provide a full service. He set this against the expense of using consultants. He also referred to the need for a contingency plan should volunteers not come forward. Responding to questions, he commented that of the 128 responding to the consultation they overwhelmingly said either that they were not prepared to volunteer or not skilled enough to offer. Many people were already busy and it was his experience that it was difficult to get volunteers.

As a point of correction Councillor Robertson noted that the Council was reducing consultancy use.

Paula Coombs, speaking for Old Marston library stated that the library was small but essential for the community being accessible for local school children and with good access. IT support was available. She feared that without continued professional support usage would fall and the library would fail. Councillor Heathcoat replied that Old Marston library was not closing; she had attended a number of meetings and it had not been easy to engage with users of Old Marston library.

Sylvia Vetta, for Kennington library, referred to the efforts of the Friends Group during the consultation process that she felt had not been recognised. The library was penalised by its geography and would result in greater cost with an inferior service to that put forward by the Friends Group. It was important to deal with each library individually.

Mrs Caroline Ryan, speaking for Friends of Stonesfield library indicated that Stonesfield was a small village but that there was a shop within ½ mile. In terms of volunteers she was aware that the library had produced a form that many people had signed but had been unable to pass it on the Friends Group as they had given no indication on the form that the names would be passed on.

Cllr Jean Fooks, speaking as a local member for Summertown & Wolvercote, welcomed the revised proposals. The Friends of Summertown looked forward to working with the Council. Volunteers had come forward and she believed they would be able to help elsewhere.

Phillip Pinney, Chairman of Friends of Watlington library explained that Friends of Watlington Library had been set up to save the library from closure. It had raised funds to have the building restored, extended and self-service introduced from October last year. He referred to the strength of local feeling, concerns about proposed reductions in staff and argued that the parameters used produced an outcome biased against rural areas. He commented that they had legal concerns but noted that the report contained legal advice on the process and proposals.

Cllr Anne Purse, speaking as a local member for Wheatley expressed disappointment that originally Wheatley library was safe but now faced staff

reductions and a need for volunteers at a time when the community was already stretched in responding to the needs of the youth centre. She raised a query over the figures used commenting that most of Wheatley Park School campus was within ½ mile but not included, nor was the Brookes University. Taking both sites into consideration it was possible that the library would move into the core group: if there was any doubt then she suggested that leeway should be given to the Cabinet Member to reconsider. Responding to a question from the Cabinet Member she regretted that she had only recently become aware of the details and realised the possible error.

Vicky Jordan, OWL, Woodcote, expressed concern over the future of libraries such as Woodcote that were outside the core group and referred to the overwhelming view that savings should be made across the board. She referred to concerns about the potential impact of the proposed changes on the agreement with Langtree School where Woodcote Library is based.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, speaking as a local member for Woodstock, expressed concerns about the methodology, in particular in defining the catchment area for libraries and its impact on rural communities like Woodstock, and pointed out the infrequency of public transport to places other than central Oxford. He felt that developing a 21st century library service required a “can do” approach, such as looking more closely into working with others such as the universities.

In moving the recommendations Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities referred to the extensive consultation exercise and stressed that local views had been heard and listened to. The proposals were to keep all 43 libraries open. No library would be closed and this gave possibilities for the future should circumstances allow. It was proposed that the Council would work with every library where volunteers were needed and she pointed out that volunteers already played a significant part in many areas such as adult services and youth activities. Councillor Heathcoat thanked the officers involved in the process and in particular: Karen Warren, Carole Stow, Alexandra Bailey and Nick Graham.

John Jackson gave a lengthy presentation of the Cabinet report referring to the extensive consultation process and explaining the proposals in the context of the rationale applied to the definition of a comprehensive and efficient network. During the presentation the following were amongst the main points made:

- (1) It was not true to say that larger libraries were not making savings as they were introducing self service. However the proposals were based on the 22 core libraries being fully resourced.
- (2) It was proposed to fully fund and staff the core libraries and it was appropriate to use volunteers for additional activities. For libraries outside of the core libraries local people must be prepared to help as happened in other services.

- (3) He refuted that the data analysis was flawed referring to a full response to a critique of the figures that was made available on the website and included as Annex 6 of the report.
- (4) With regard to the suggestion that the proposals be based on usage he noted that the Wirral case suggested a comprehensive and efficient network should be based on need not current usage; a wide range of factors influenced usage figures of any given library. The proposals had been tested using usage figures and it would lead to very little change.
- (5) Referring to questions about areas such as Grove where there was potential housing growth he replied that it was unrealistic to plan on the basis of changes that might not happen. Instead it was right to rerun the analysis every 4 years or earlier if deemed appropriate and this was in the recommendations.
- (6) He noted the pleas for individual libraries and accepted the local value placed on libraries. However the specific arguments for any particular library did not have a significant impact on the core criteria. The Wirral enquiry made it clear that moving one library for reasons that could not be applied to all would be a cause for criticism.
- (7) He referred to the suggestion of rural bias and drew attention to the fact that this was dealt with at length in the report.
- (8) He accepted that the points raised about volunteering were valid but he did feel that the some of concern about not being able to find volunteers was over stated.
- (9) With regard to contingency arrangements he noted that the Scrutiny Committee had been reassured by the commitment to tailored solutions. They would go back to individual libraries.

Karen Warren, Acting County Librarian gave further details on the support available for volunteers and indicated that they were working on the roll out of self service but would work with the requirements of the Friends Groups and communities.

During discussion Cabinet thanked Councillor Heathcoat and officers for all their work and the following were amongst the points made:

- (1) Cabinet Members welcomed the improved proposals based on a clear rationale which it was felt met the need for a comprehensive and efficient network. No libraries were to close.
- (2) The proposals to fund non core libraries were welcomed particularly at a time when savings had to be made.
- (3) Concern was expressed about rural isolation in villages such as North Leigh. John Jackson responded that they were seeking to fund 81% of the costs of those libraries not in the comprehensive and efficient network. The reality was that most villages in Oxfordshire did not have their own library hence the importance of the mobile service and the home library service. The importance of the mobile service was supported.
- (4) It was hoped that as with youth activities the active involvement of volunteers could lead to some imaginative and exciting outcomes.

There was the possibility of the use of volunteers resulting in extended opening hours in some libraries that could improve footfall.

- (5) There was recognition of the possibility in some instances of a parish council precept instead of or in addition to growing the number of volunteers.

Officers responded to individual questions from Cabinet Members highlighting that the ½ mile radius had to be applied consistently to all libraries and that a different treatment could not be applied to one library such as Kennington. However assurances were given that the Council was looking to work with local communities to come up with the right solution. Cabinet heard an explanation of the duty of care that the Council would owe to volunteers in the same way as for staff. Cabinet received confirmation that the possibility for co-location would be considered where appropriate.

In conclusion Councillor Heathcoat stated that the options today that had come after hard work and speaking to people would deliver a comprehensive and efficient network of libraries.

RESOLVED: to accept the proposals outlined in this report:

- (a) The County Council will fully fund and resource all of the libraries that form part of our comprehensive and efficient library service. These core libraries are:

Abingdon, Banbury, Berinsfield, Bicester, Blackbird Leys, Botley, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Cowley, Didcot, Eynsham, Headington, Henley, Kidlington, Littlemore, Neithrop, Oxford Central, Summertown, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Witney

- (b) The County Council will continue to provide a fully supported infrastructure (building, ICT, book stock and the installation of self-service facilities) to those libraries which fall outside of our comprehensive and efficient library service. The Council will also work with each of these libraries to establish a Friends Group to enable a shift in the balance of staffing in these libraries towards volunteers over a three-year period.

- (1) For Community Plus libraries, this would mean one third volunteers and two thirds paid staff.

These libraries are:

Chinnor, Faringdon, Grove, Wheatley and Woodstock

- (2) For Community Libraries this would mean one half volunteers and one half paid staff.

These libraries are:

Adderbury, Bampton, Benson, Burford, Charlbury, Deddington, Goring, Hook Norton, Kennington, North Leigh, Old Marston, Sonning Common, Stonesfield, Watlington, Woodcote and Wychwood

- (c) The Council will review the Quantitative Analysis of Service Requirements every four years, or earlier if deemed appropriate.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing