

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS -
GENERAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 9 April 2018**

Question 1

Mr Milln – Hereford

Our excellent staff of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Services leverage volunteer support, good will and donation which are its life blood. Further budget cutting risks these benefits, the loss of which cannot be measured in financial terms alone. Whether or not a trust takes over museums, will the Council realise that supporting all three so they may grow brings richer rewards for well-being, pound for pound, than a bypass?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied that the support given by volunteers was strongly acknowledged and paragraph 12 of the report to the Committee outlines the range of contributions made. The plans for each service (published on the council website) demonstrate the contributions made by each service to the council's corporate objectives including aspects of well-being.

Supplementary Question

Will the council accept the public find it surprising these services are threatened, when money is found for costly road schemes?

Response

The council has a legal obligation to create a balanced budget. Savings have been sought across the board over a number of years to achieve that, whilst also seeking to protect the most vulnerable in the community and safeguard adults and children.

Question 2

Mr T Evans - Ledbury

How much does it cost to operate the library services currently and how much is HCC prepared to pay the contractor to ensure that they can operate the libraries?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: The cost of running the services is outlined in paragraph 31 of the report to the Committee. For the library service specifically the cost (net against income) is £1,031,656. An open procurement process would take place if the decision is made to outsource services which would set terms and conditions, including financial terms.

Question 3

Mr J Hillaby – Hollybush near Ledbury

Whilst acknowledging the Council's need to cut costs we are concerned at the proposals to further reduce opening, new books supplies etc. Our main concern however is the proposal to outsource the library service. How can this be cost effective when the subcontractor would need to make a profit, and how can the Council ensure that standards are maintained?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: If the decision is made to outsource services a tender specification will be produced with potential suppliers making submissions. Any contract would include specific standards, requirements and financial terms. Some of the savings can be through shared back office costs, opportunity for income generation, using supplier networks for marketing, and additional events (as outlined in the soft market test feedback). There is also potential for savings on rates if the organisation is a charity. All the submissions for the soft market test were from non-profit making organisations.

Question 4

Mr L Watson - Garway

How is it possible for the Council to outsource the LMA services without subsidy whilst also meeting their statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: Paragraph 22 of the report and the section on legal implications acknowledges there is a statutory duty to provide a library service - these requirements would be included in any specification/contract along with any other important elements relevant to the services. Also paragraph 4 of the report states the objective is to retain services important to the public, while making the services more efficient and self-funding where possible.

Question 5

Mr J Faulkner

Who will be ultimately accountable for the quality, delivery and development of library services following outsourcing?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: As through any contract the supplier will have certain standards to meet, and penalties will apply if not met and ultimately there is the option of contract termination. Herefordshire Council still holds the obligation of providing a comprehensive and efficient library service as a legal requirement.

Question 6

Mr J Hitchin

How will the Council make further progress with the integration of LMA services, as recommended by the LGA peer review and also central to the Rankin Centre (31 broad street) development, when service provision is outsourced?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: Following the LGA peer review and staff consultation a redesign of the services took place and from January 2018 museums, libraries and archives were bought under one management structure. If a decision is made

to outsource all the services in one procurement this will influence the retention of the service in one block, but will also depend on the returns from potential suppliers.

Question 7

Mr W McMorran – Tedstone Delamare, Bromyard

How will the concepts and forward thinking about the future of the broad street building evident in the Rankin Centre proposals (now the 31 broad street project) be carried forward once outsourcing takes place?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: Hereford Library User Group are able to continue with their project to fundraise for development of Hereford Library at any point. The report to cabinet on 9 May 2016 made clear in the alternative options section that it would not be Herefordshire Council leading this project.

Question 8

E Mayes

From the Hereford Library perspective it is crucial that the Broad Street building is improved from its current provision of 1500 square metres (housing both library and museum) to provide the 5,000 square metres that is the sector norm for a City/County Library. Who will be responsible for this development following outsourcing?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: Please see paragraphs 23 to 25 of the report which looks at making better use of the un-used area of the library, and she would welcome the committee's views on those points. There were no plans for further capital investment beyond the points in the report and as outlined in the previous question, if HLUG wish to pursue fundraising plans I am sure any new supplier would welcome that contribution.

Question 9

Mr H Porte

Currently there is a totally inadequate level of purchasing of new resources and the Hereford Library has a long history of stockholding deficiencies, as demonstrated by the CIPFA league tables which places Herefordshire in the bottom decile, where it has been for many years – How will this situation be improved post outsourcing?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: For explanation to the committee - the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy benchmarks information between libraries each year. It should be noted that the data was collected over the period when Hereford library was closed so some the figures are distorted. This data shows that the size and opening hours of our largest library (Hereford) is low compared to other local authority areas. Also the council's expenditure is lower than the average, partly because we are very efficiently operated service, income generating, fundraising etc. How this would be improved post outsourcing if that decision is made can be part of any terms. To note, Greenwich

library (outsourced to GLL), one of the contributors to the soft market test has the highest number of visitors per head of population for the second year running.

Question 10

Mr J Llewellyn-Perkins

What arrangements will be made to ensure that LMA user groups can input to developments and work with the new service provider?

Response

The Assistant Director Communities replied: As part of the specification community engagement is often a question depending on the nature of the services being contracted. Any supplier will want to make the most of working with user groups to contribute to the operation of the services and meet the wider needs of regular users and the wider community. I would have hoped that user groups would continue to support the services in a positive and productive way for the good of the services.