

CABINET**14 OCTOBER 2015****AGENDA ITEM 4 – PUBLIC QUESTIONS****QUESTION: Mr John Shone, Chairman, Friends of Ellesmere Library**

In the seven months leading up to the public consultation on the future of Ellesmere library, why have Shropshire Council, the Ellesmere Town Council and neighbouring community councils failed to have any meaningful discussions on finding a long-term, viable solution to retaining the library in its present building as a public asset: (for instance, by generating income from the upstairs bedsit accommodation, which remained unoccupied for approx seven years – in the midst of a housing crisis - before Stoneham Housing Assn gave up its lease); and, in light of this, what, if any, steps will the council now take to ensure that all feasible options are explored to maintain the library under local government control, (*without reducing opening hours*), by working in partnership with the town and community councils, especially when the option of a social care organisation running the library does not appear to be a firm and definite prospect?

RESPONSE:

Prior the recent launch on the 2nd October of a six week formal public consultation on the future of Ellesmere Library and Customer Service Point the Council has publicised and supported a number of opportunities for the public and potential stakeholders to contribute to discussions about the future of these services. These include:

- Open day held on 9 June 2015 at the Meres Day Centre for library users, Day Centre users and any organisations interested in taking on the day to day management of the Centre
- Regular meetings with the Friends of Ellesmere Library and the local member for Ellesmere
- Drop in event held at Ellesmere Library on 25 August 2015
- Presentation at the Ellesmere Area LJC on 22 September 2015
- Regular consultation with the service users, their parents, carers and families of the Meres day Centre. This has included consulting with adults with learning disabilities with the support of the advocacy organisation Taking Part as well as with older people who use the service

Alongside this the council has met with the Town Council, trustees of the Meres Day Centre and a number of potential future service providers to explore potential future management arrangements.

Within the context of the current formal consultation the council has clearly stated that while it has a preferred option (the relocation of the library to the Meres day Centre) no decision has been taken and is open to alternative proposals provided

that they meet the councils requirements for sustainable budget savings and on-going management support.

With regard to the day centre the Council will be seeking an alternative provider for this service and is committed to maintaining a day service at The Meres

A drop in event is being held at the library on the 13th October to provide further opportunities for local residents and stakeholders to engage with the consultation and to potentially support the development of alternative approaches to the libraries management.

The council continues to be proactive in approaching and supporting potential interested parties and to work with the friends of Ellesmere Library Group and Town Council. In this context the support of 'Locality' has been offered to provide help in developing new ideas and approaches.

Throughout the approach described above to finding new solutions to the management of the library and customer service point there has been regular publicity via the papers, Shropshire Radio and local posters.

QUESTION: Mr Richards

Have all alternatives been properly investigated re Shawbury Library including reducing the number of days it is open and renegotiating rent etc.

RESPONSE:

The Council has over several months worked with Shawbury Parish Council, the Village Hall Committee and others to consider options for the long term, sustainable future management of Shawbury Library. Alongside these discussions the matter has been considered at the Local Joint Committee and a drop in event was held (to which 16 people attended). To date no alternative proposals have been suggested for the ongoing management of the library at a significantly reduced cost to the Council.

The Council is now proposing to hold a formal public consultation on the future of the library and this will provide a further opportunity for alternative approaches to be suggested, developed with the council and considered accordingly.