

Cllr Carole Weston contacted the Parish Council after our Annual Meeting to invite the Chairman to County Hall Chelmsford to hear talks which Mark Francois MP had arranged to hold with County Councillor Susan Barker, the Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate, on the future of libraries in Essex and in particular the Hockley and Hullbridge Libraries. Mark wished to take a delegation of local councillors and community campaigners with him. This took place on Friday 7th June 2019. Mark was accompanied by County Councillor Carole Weston, our Ward Councillor for Rochford West; Carla Vaughan and Megan Hemmings, who led the Hockley Library Community Action Group; County Councillor and Leader of Rochford District Council Mike Steptoe; Councillor Roy Martin Chairman of Hockley Parish Council; Councillor Angelina Marriott, Chairman of Hullbridge Parish Council and Tony Pinnock, Secretary of the Friends of Hullbridge Library. Katie Chambers Community Libraries Work-Stream Lead was also present. Our Clerk was unable to attend due to another commitment but was consulted in advance and the Chairman agreed to attend so Hockley Parish Council had a representation.

Mark was very forthright in his opposition to the library proposals in Essex and in particular Hockley and Hullbridge and Cllr Barker was left in no doubt that he expected ECC to reconsider the policy. The responses from County Cllr Barker to the flawed criteria of the “consultation” and predetermination were unsatisfactory and inconsistent. Mark also had a separate discussion with David Finch Leader of the County Council and will be publishing a letter which he intends to send to ECC shortly.

Friends of Hullbridge Library have already submitted an interest but there is no appetite in Hockley for a community-led library as the Community Action Group and the Parish Council strongly supports retaining a fully funded library service. ECC have now extended the deadline for Expressions of Interest for a further year. The question of any future re-development of the Hockley site was raised and it is clear this could still be on the horizon but Cllr Barker would not be drawn on the matter. There was no guarantee that any library facility would be incorporated in new premises should the Hockley site be scheduled for re-development.

Carla and Meghan have been asked to produce an extended demographic of the area radiating from the library premises in Hockley. Cllr Steptoe has provided them with contact details for statistics and is strongly against any library closures.

The general feeling of the delegation around the table was that, in the face of all the opposition which had been generated across the county, and the minor financial savings, it would be an easy win for ECC to turn round and say they have listened to everyone and the proposals are cancelled as the resultant fall out was not justified. Publication of the consultation paper is now awaited and we can only hope that ECC rethinks their proposals. In the meantime the council will continue to work locally with our community where we can.

Anticipated Timeline:

- **7th June** - the Cabinet Paper looked at today. Final draft due to be signed by the Leader Monday week. An Impact Assessment will be part of the final paper
- **10th July** – paper in the public domain
- **18th July** – paper with the Scrutiny Panel (County Cllr Weston is a member of the panel and is to research the constitution rules).
- **23rd July** - the results of the consultation and Scrutiny Panel are not expected until July when the paper will be published before it goes to a closed ECC cabinet meeting. The paper will only go to Full Council if it is called in.