

Report to Hockley Parish Council
Full Council Meeting 18th March 2019
ECC Libraries Services Strategy Consultation

The purpose of this report is to provide members with background information so the Parish Council can discuss the ECC Consultation at their Full Council Meeting on the 18th March 2019. At no time was Hockley Parish Council committed to any course of action.

The ECC Cabinet will make a decision on the status of Hockley Library which at the time of this report is awaited.

- On the 29th January 2019 the Parish Clerk received a response to the council's letter sent to County Cllr Sue Barker, Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services on 24th January 2019 (copies already circulated to members). Our MP Mark Francois replied on 28th January 2019 (copy attached).
- Cllr Barker informed the Clerk that she would not visit Hockley for a public meeting but invited our County Councillor Carole Weston, Chairman of the Parish Council and our Clerk to County Hall to discuss our concerns and those received from the community.
- Several dates were offered and on Friday 15th February 2019 a meeting was arranged at short notice for 9am on Monday 18th February. The Clerk was unable to attend due to holiday commitments but the Parish Chairman was asked to accompany County Cllr Weston so he could report back to the Parish Council.
- On arrival we were informed that ECC had a cabinet meeting later that morning and Cllr Barker wished to pass on Cllr Weston's representations to their members on Hockley and Hullbridge Libraries, so there was a degree of urgency.
- The purpose of the meeting was to give our County Councillor an opportunity to challenge the statistics and database used to support the decision to downgrade Hockley Library to Tier 3 and Hullbridge Library to Tier 4 as they were considered to be fundamentally flawed. Cllr Weston had prepared a comprehensive report and also took a copy of the summary produced by Megan Hemmings from the Hockley Community Group (attached).

What was learned:

- County Cllr Weston's challenge to the interpretation of the statistics will be presented to the Cabinet. However ECC have been legally advised that uniformity of interpretation of the results must be maintained across the county.
- ECC's statutory responsibility is to provide books free of charge – nothing else. Therefore the consultation is primarily concerned with book lending which in the last decade has fallen by just under 50%.
- The social benefits of providing free facilities to the community had a low weighting in the ECC calculations and will need to be addressed separately if a social hub is required by community groups in the future.

- ECC will be looking at all approaches from Parish Councils or community groups who wish to submit non-binding Expressions of Interest (EOI) to manage libraries which will enable them to open negotiations with ECC on a way forward. The deadline for submitting an EOI is 19th June 2019. Friends of Hullbridge Library have already submitted an EOI. If there are no expressions of interest in Tier 4 Libraries they will be closed.
- Derbyshire County Council has moved into Community Managed Libraries and they are recommended as a model for reference.
- Petitions objecting to the library strategy have been received from across the county and will be assessed by ECC to extract potential methods of managing proposed changes in the library services. Opposition to the ECC Library Services Strategy is countywide.
- Should the Parish Council have any comments or questions to raise these can be sent direct to Cllr Barker through the Clerk.

Development of the Library Site

As the Parish Council are already aware from our dealings with RDC on the Hockley Toilets, development of the library site has been under consideration by ECC for several years. Should this be scheduled within the next 5 years then the County Council may consider leaving the library as it stands, fully funded and managed by ECC, until such time as the site is re-developed.

Libraries Strategy Workshop Great Dunmow 14th February 2019

The Parish Chairman attended the ECC workshop offered by EALC, along with the Chairman of our Communities Committee, where parish and town councils with libraries in Tiers 3 and 4 were given information on the ECC proposals for Community Libraries. It was evident that those present were very dissatisfied with the County Council's Strategy and the structure of the Consultation. As at the 12th February 2019 ECC had received 17000 consultation responses and 25 Expressions of Interest in running Community Libraries from across Essex. When the consultation has been evaluated, ECC propose to hold further consultations based on their findings. Due to the diversity of the properties and community needs it was apparent that one size did not fit all. The Workshop also enabled councils to feed back to the County Council what they needed to take into consideration for Community Managed Libraries to succeed. ECC will produce more information in due course.

EALC have sent all Clerks a copy of the information pack produced for the workshop along with legal advice to Parish and Town Clerks on councils' powers to run libraries. This is attached for information should the council be in a position to consider this option at a later stage.

Cllr Roy Martin
Chairman Hockley Parish Council
20TH February 2019

Mrs Kelly Holland
Clerk to the Parish Council