

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL



LIBRARIES SERVICE RE-DESIGN: SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY LIBRARY PARTNERSHIPS

October 2018

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1. The process for agreeing Community Library Partnerships

- 1.1. The process for agreeing Community Library Partnerships was determined through a decision by the Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure Commissioning, taken on 1st October.
- 1.2. On 16th October (the publication date of this report), community groups in the 15 affected communities were invited to express an interest in forming a Community Library Partnership. The invitations enclosed guidance and various supporting information and follow a long period of dialogue with these community groups stretching back to autumn 2017. A deadline for submitting Expressions of Interest was set for 15th November. If no viable Expression of Interest is received by this due date, alternative library service provision will be arranged as set out in Appendix 1 (mobile library and/or outreach library services) and the library building will close. This could happen from January 2019.
- 1.3. If a viable Expression of Interest is received in November, the County Council will continue to manage and fully fund the library until 31st March 2019, to allow time for further discussions and agreement to take place. If discussions progress successfully, an agreement would be drawn up in the form of a contract which, if it is acceptable to both parties, we would aim to sign by 31 January 2019 or as soon as possible after that date. Training of volunteers and transition arrangements would commence in January 2019.
- 1.4. If a viable Expression of Interest is received, but agreement cannot be reached by February 15th 2019, the County Council would commence steps to close the library and arrange alternative library service provision as determined by Cabinet (mobile library and/or outreach library services). In this scenario the library would not close until 1st April 2019.
- 1.5. It is acknowledged that the timescales are challenging; this is necessary because of the County Council's challenging financial situation. Communities interested in exploring Community Library Partnership options have been supported by the County Council for a number of months now, and this support will continue through the process. Exceptions to the timetable and process may be agreed on a case by case basis, but only by the written approval of the Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure Commissioning. Where exceptions are agreed, different stages of the process may overlap or be done in parallel.
- 1.6. Further details of the process agreed are set out in the background paper '*Process for agreeing and establishing Community Library Partnerships*', referenced in section 5 below.

2. The County Council's Core Offer

- 2.1. The invitations sent to community groups on 16th October also set out details of the County Council's final 'Core Offer' to support Community Library Partnerships. This 'Core Offer' sets out how the County Council will support Community Library Partnerships through the provision of book stock, ICT services, network

infrastructure and hardware, and training, development and ongoing technical guidance. Any Community Library Partnerships agreed would belong to the LibrariesWest consortium of libraries, which would enable access to the full range of LibrariesWest services and the intra-consortium catalogue for borrowing and reservations. They would also form part of the County Council's statutory service, and the Core Offer is an important aspect of maintaining an appropriate quality of service. The Core Offer is open to any Community Library Partnership agreed as a result of the recommendations set out in the covering report.

- 2.2. The Core Offer, and associated guidance, has been developed with regard to best-practice guidance on Community Libraries. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport have set out some detailed guidance (for a link, see section below), which we have considered and taken on board. We have also taken on board learning from our experience of operating a pilot Community Library Partnership at Porlock, from the experience of other authorities in the region, who run a number of community libraries, and from our discussions with community groups over the past year.
- 2.3. Further details of the process agreed are set out in the background paper '*Guidance on Community Library Partnerships*', referenced in section 5 below.

3. Direct financial contributions

- 3.1. Feedback during the consultation period, from communities exploring the potential for a Community Library Partnership, and from Friends of Somerset suggested the council should provide a higher level of funding to support the viability of Community Library Partnerships. We cannot afford to provide financial support in all affected communities, over and above the support set out in the Core Offer. However, where local needs are higher, access to alternative libraries is more difficult, and where libraries currently provide good value for money, we are recommending that direct financial support, over and above this core offer, is provided.
- 3.2. It is recommended that funding for Community Library Partnerships is provided in two forms:
 - A 'basic contribution' amount, and
 - A match-funding amount, which would be ring-fenced to the funding of staff costs and would be conditional on an equal and opposite investment in staff costs from one or more community partners.
- 3.3. This approach has been developed through discussions in the consultation period with our principle stakeholder group, Friends of Somerset Libraries, and was also suggested by some individual consultation respondents. Having considered this feedback, and the concerns expressed by many individuals and stakeholder groups over losing paid staff support to Community Library Partnerships, we have concluded that this approach is an appropriate way of incentivising the use of paid staff in Community Library Partnerships. We hope these recommendations will support the sustainability, viability and quality of community libraries in Somerset.

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Staff could be employed directly by the Community Library Partnership or provided (at a cost-recovery rate) by the County Council.

- 3.4. Our experience of piloting a community library at Porlock, and the experience of neighbouring authorities, is that successful community library models take a long time to establish themselves, and certainty of funding is critical in the development of sustainable models. We are therefore recommending that the contributions set out in the table at paragraph 3.4 below are set for the term of Community Library Partnership agreements. We hope to form long term agreements for a 5-year term, and Cabinet should be prepared to commit to ongoing funding at the level recommended for the 5-year period 2019/20 - 2024/25. Funding would form part of Community Library Partnership agreements and would be tied to certain conditions relating to a minimum agreed level of opening hours, and various quality assurance mechanisms. These would enable the council to withhold funding in the event that Community Library Partnerships did not meet certain minimum standards.
- 3.5. Cabinet are only being asked to agree the budgetary provision for funding for Community Library Partnerships. Individual Community Library Partnership agreements will determine how the funding is made available to communities. Where communities take advantage of the County Council's offer to provide staff (at a cost recovery rate), some or all of the recommended level of funding set out in table 3.6 below could be provided 'in kind' by funding staff.
- 3.6. The table below sets out the proposed annual level of funding, which Cabinet is recommended to agree:

Community	Basic Contribution funding (£)	Match-funding for staff (£)	Total funding recommended (£)
Castle Cary	5,000	2,000	7,000
Nether Stowey	5,000	0	5,000
Porlock	5,000	0	5,000
Priorswood	6,000	1,000	7,000
Somerton	5,000	2,500	7,500
Street	8,000	7,000	15,000
Watchet	5,000	2,000	7,000
Wiveliscombe	6,000	1,500	7,500
TOTAL	45,000	16,000	61,000

4. Proposed support through property transfer or leasing arrangements

4.1. Cabinet are recommended to agree that, where Community Library Partnerships are developed and agreed, the County Council will support community partners through the following property transfer and leasing arrangements:

Bishops Lydeard The library building in Bishops Lydeard is owned by a private landlord and leased to the council on a short-term lease. The council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord but will not be able to provide any support beyond a facilitative, liaison role. Community partners would need to agree their own terms for a lease arrangement, and the council will end its lease at the site.

Bruton The library building at Bruton is owned by the Ward Library Trust and leased to the council on a short-term lease. Potential community partners are advised to contact the Bruton Library Trust directly. The council will end its lease at this site.

Castle Cary The library building in Castle Cary is owned by a private landlord and leased to the council on a short-term lease. The council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord but will not be able to provide any support beyond a facilitative, liaison role. Community partners would need to agree their own terms for a lease arrangement, and the council will end its lease at the site.

Highbridge The library building in Highbridge is owned by Sedgemoor District Council and leased to the County Council on a long-term lease. The County Council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord, with a view to arranging the assignment of the current lease to any agreed Community Library Partnership.

Milborne Port The library building in Milborne Port is owned by a private landlord and leased to the council on a short-term lease. The council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord but will not be able to provide any support beyond a facilitative, liaison role. Community partners would need to agree their own terms for a lease arrangement, and the council will end its lease at the site.

Nether Stowey The library building in Nether Stowey is owned by the County Council. In order to support a potential Community Library Partnership in Nether Stowey, the County Council will offer potential community partners a 25 year full repairing lease on the current building at a peppercorn rent, subject to the following terms, which would be enforced through the lease arrangement:

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- A Community Library Partnership agreement would need to be signed between the County Council and the tenant.
- A core area of the building must be used to operate a public library. The tenant would be permitted to sub-let other areas of the building, but any income raised must be used to support the operation of the library (including the maintenance of the building).

North Petherton	The library building in North Petherton is owned by a private landlord and leased to the County Council on a long term lease. The County Council will offer potential community partners a sub-lease on equivalent terms, subject to the continuing operation of a public library under a Community Library Partnership agreement, signed between the County Council and the tenant.
Porlock	The library building in Porlock is owned by Porlock Parish Council, who operate Porlock Community Library in partnership with the County Council, and lease part of the building to the County Council. At the end of the current pilot arrangement, the County Council will end its lease.
Priorswood	The library building in Priorswood is part of the Hillside Children's Centre building, which is leased to the County Council on a long term lease. The County Council will maintain library outreach provision at the current site and will support potential community partners to maintain a library at the site by making space available for library use. In order to make best use of the Council's asset, the current space may need to be re-designed to enable shared use, and the space may not be available for library use on every day of the week. Further details would be discussed and agreed with any prospective community partners, but the Council would support the continuation of a library at the site (through a Community Library Partnership) by making space available at no charge.
Somerton	<p>The library building in Somerton is owned by the County Council. In order to support a potential Community Library Partnership in Somerton, the County Council will offer an asset transfer of the current building to Somerton Town Council, at no charge. This will be subject to the following conditions, which would be governed through a clawback arrangement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A core area of the building must be used to operate a public library. Somerton Town Council would be permitted to sub-let other areas of the building, but any income raised must be used to support the operation of the library (including the maintenance of the building).

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- A Community Library Partnership agreement must be signed and agreed between the County Council and community partners.

South Petherton	The library building in South Petherton is owned by a private landlord and leased to the council on a short-term lease. The council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord but will not be able to provide any support beyond a facilitative, liaison role. Community partners would need to agree their own terms for a lease arrangement, and the council will end its lease at the site.
Street	The library building at Street is owned by the Street Library Trust and leased to the council on a short-term lease. The council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord but will not be able to provide any support beyond a facilitative, liaison role. Community partners would need to agree their own terms for a lease arrangement, and the council will end its lease at the site.
Sunningdale	The library building is occupied by the council under a Statutory License, in a building which is owned by Yeovil Town Council. The council will engage in discussions with potential community partners and Yeovil Town Council about potential property arrangements to maintain a Community Library Partnership at the current site.
Watchet	The library building in Watchet is owned by West Somerset District Council and leased to the County Council on a long-term lease. At an extraordinary meeting of Watchet Town Council on 16 th October 2017 members of the Town Council felt that it was important that Watchet Town Council takes a lead in securing the continuation of the Library Service in Watchet, and resolved to apply to West Somerset District Council for a Community Asset Transfer of the library building for a peppercorn consideration so that the ownership passes to Watchet Town Council. The County Council will support this application, and potential community partners are advised to contact Watchet Town Council directly.
Wiveliscombe	The library building in Wiveliscombe is owned by a private landlord and leased to the County Council on a lease which ends on 4 th May 2020. The County Council will offer potential community partners occupancy on equivalent terms, subject to the continuing operation of a public library under a Community Library Partnership agreement, signed between the County Council and the community partner(s), covering the period up to the 4 th May 2020. The County Council will support discussions between potential community partners and the current landlord on arrangements beyond this date, but will not be able to provide any support beyond a facilitative, liaison role. Community

partners would need to agree their own terms for a lease arrangement beyond 4th May 2020, and the council will end its lease at the site when the current lease expires.

4.2. Cabinet are recommended to agree that, where Community Library Partnerships are developed and agreed, and where these involve the relocation of the library to a different building within a community, the County Council will endeavour to support community partners by:

- Setting up, and funding, the necessary ICT network connectivity to enable the ICT services provided through the Core Offer.
- Installing the ICT equipment required to enable the ICT services provided through the Core Offer.
- Providing advice and guidance on the layout and design of public library space within the building, and the requirements for associated workroom space.
- Providing advice and guidance on the relocation and transfer of book stock, equipment and other stock.
- Making available library furniture and equipment from the previous library location.

5. Background Papers

Background papers and supporting documents referred to above can all be found online, and links are set out here:

Expression of Interest in Community Library Partnership Procedure decision:

<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=898>

The following papers can be viewed in the 'Community Library' section at:

<http://somersetlibraries.co.uk/redesign/>

'Process for agreeing and establishing Community Library Partnerships'

'Guidance on Community Library Partnerships'

Further information and guidance for groups considering Community Library Partnerships can be found at the following links:

Library Taskforce: Community Library Good Practice Toolkit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-libraries-good-practice-toolkit>

Community managed library network:

<https://communitylibrariesnetwork.wordpress.com/>