

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

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Report Originator	Martin Hammond – Executive Director	<i>Fwd Plan Ref No:</i>	
Wards Affected	Rothwell and Desborough	12 th June 2018	
Title	LIBRARY PROVISION IN ROTHWELL AND DESBOROUGH		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider proposals for the Borough Council to intervene to help protect library services in the A6 towns.

2. INFORMATION

2.1. Earlier this year, the County Council decided to close two of the four libraries in the Borough, in order to help it set a balanced budget for 2018/19. Desborough and Rothwell libraries are due to close some time in this financial year and the County Council had, at the time, set out its intention:-

- a) to dispose of the buildings affected
- b) to consider proposals from community groups to provide continuing library services in place of the current service, presumably on the basis of a voluntary sector arrangement, operating from some other premises if the groups concerned could not acquire the current library buildings.

2.2. Since then, there have been a number of developments:-

- i) Rothwell library had been designated as an asset of community value which means that a process is in place which will slow any disposal of the building by six months whilst time is provided for community groups to make a bid. An application for Desborough library as an asset of community value is being considered.
- ii) The Department of Culture, Media and Sport is carrying out an investigation into whether the County Council properly considered all aspects of library provision when making its decision to close a large number of libraries.
- iii) A Judicial Review has been lodged against the decision to close libraries.
- iv) Commissioners have been appointed to manage aspects of the County Council's operation, including its overall budget.

2.3. It is therefore not clear what timetable the County Council is working to on the transition, whether and when it will accept any proposals for community run library services and even if the library buildings are still for sale. Clarity has been sought from NCC but no definitive answers have yet been received.

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Verbally, the County Council has indicated that it is still seeking to ensure a continuing library service in the affected locations, and that it is not prioritising the disposal of its buildings.

- 2.4. It has been suggested by those wishing to protect library services that the Borough Council should buy the building(s) from the County Council and then let them to a community group who would provide a library service. In the case of Rothwell, a variation of that request has been received from a local business owner that the Council acquires the building, rents out part to local commercial interests and retains a smaller library within the footprint of the site.
- 2.5. No other District or Borough Council in the county is considering acquiring any library building or asset.
- 2.6. Especially considering the delay imposed by their designation as asset(s) of community value, it is possible that the County Council does not sell its former library buildings before any moratorium comes into effect on the sale and acquisition of assets in the run up to the creation of new unitary councils. In that case, there seems to be little point in one outgoing authority buying assets from another one when in the normal state of affairs, the asset would become the property of the new unitary authority anyway.
- 2.7. It does not follow that a continuing library service should be provided from the current buildings.

3. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 3.1. The Borough Council has done no consultation on this matter as it is a County Service, The County Council consulted at the time that its budget was being proposed. Clearly, there is a level of opposition to the loss of library services which has manifested itself in groups formed to try and rescue some continuing library service in the longer term.
- 3.2. The Borough Council has customer service centres embedded in both library buildings. If these buildings close to the public, then this service will have to be re-provided elsewhere within the two towns. No notice of closure has been received by the Borough Council at the time of writing. There will be – as yet unknown – costs associated with relocating this service. The Council has rent free use of the libraries for its customer service centres and we have indicated that we would continue to co-locate our CSC with any future library provision, wherever possible, and on the same basis.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Borough Councils' golden rules prevent it from stepping in to replace those services cut by another public agency. Acquiring a library building to enable

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another party to provide a library service from within it without cost recovery would therefore breach that golden rule.

5. **FINANCE and HR RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. The book valuation for both libraries is approximately £1m, although this does not mean that this would be the disposal price. The Borough Council does not of course have any sums available within its capital programme for this purpose, and would need to borrow to supplement its current capital programme.
- 5.2. The criteria attached to those funds available to support the Council's property investment strategy require there to be a commercial return from the acquisition and it is not clear how any return could be available from such an acquisition.

6. **SUMMARY**

- 6.1 There is at this stage a lack of clarity around the County Council's intentions and timescales regarding the disposal of their buildings, and equally, a lack of certainty about the likelihood of a library service being continued through a community group.
- 6.2 The Council is willing to provide support in kind to help any community group set up a library service and has undertaken to co-locate its customer service centre alongside any future library service.
- 6.3 The Council's overall financial position, its golden rules and the criteria governing the use of the property investment fund rule out our ability to purchase the library buildings and stay within those policies and budget.

7. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is asked to note the current situation.

Background Papers:

Previous Reports/Minutes: