



**Lancashire County Council Property Strategy**

**Library Service Consultation - *SECOND DRAFT***

**Introduction**

Wyre Council is pleased to submit comments from a consultation group comprising sixteen elected members, which we hope will make a positive contribution to the County Council's consultation.

The response is framed in relation to the proposals to close three libraries in Wyre, namely Thornton, Cleveleys and Flakefleet. Councillors have addressed the three questions marked c), d) and e) in the consultation document. Questions a) and b) were less directly related to the consultation about library closures.

The consultation group appreciates the significant contributions to the consultation that were made by the following:

Mel Ormesher, Head of Asset Management, Lancashire County Council

Steve Walker, Chairman, Friends of Thornton and Cleveleys Libraries

Councillor Alan Vincent, Resources Portfolio Holder, Wyre Council

The consultation group was disappointed that library staff had been told that they should not enter into any discussions about the proposed closures. Councillors would have welcomed their input, which might have helped inform the consultation response itself.

While the group welcomed the information that it received on request from the County Council about libraries' footfall and costs, there was a degree of frustration that some of the essential detail and explanation was lacking, which has been to the detriment of the consultation group's work. The number of people using the libraries is likely to be under-recorded as people attending regular events, groups and meetings at the libraries do not appear to be included in the footfall figures provided.

### **Question c) How will this proposal impact upon you?**

The proposal to close three libraries in Wyre will have a significant impact upon many different sectors of the community. The libraries are currently viewed as much more than simply libraries and are relied upon by many as hubs of the community.

Closures will have the following negative effects:

- 1 Increasing the social isolation of some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including
  - a. older people, who are disproportionately represented on the Fylde coast,
  - b. people with disabilities, who will find it more difficult or impossible to travel further to access a similar essential service,
  - c. people with mental health issues, for whom travelling further and beyond their locality can be difficult,
  - d. people on low incomes, who simply cannot afford to travel further on a reduced bus service in order to access similar services,
  - e. people looking for work, who are required to provide evidence of their job-search activities,
  - f. in general, people with financial and/or mobility difficulties who will be disenfranchised.
- 2 Reducing access to education (in its broadest sense) for people of all ages, from the cradle to the grave. Members of our community of all ages will lose a crucial means of access to information and technology. This is likely to impact more significantly on low income families in particular.
- 3 It has been suggested that the number of people who actually use the libraries is a relatively small percentage of the population. However, the people who do use the libraries are those who heavily rely on them for a variety of practical and social reasons, many of those people covered in 1, above. The consequent negative impact on people's health and wellbeing is likely to be significant, placing ever greater financial burdens on our health service which might be better contained through preventative means.
- 4 The consultation group is concerned about the direct loss of staff jobs at the three libraries, should they be closed.
- 5 Wyre Council will suffer a loss of income from business rates if the three libraries are closed in line with the County Council's proposal.
- 6 Lancashire County Council's Equality Analysis Toolkit seeks to ensure that the decision-makers meet the requirement of section 149 of the Equality Act

2010. A definitive analysis will need to be undertaken in order to confirm that the closure of any library does not contravene the Act.

The analysis is designed to ensure that due regard is given to the effect that the policy has or may have upon groups who share the following protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Race
- Sex
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership status

The categories of age and disability are particularly pertinent to this consultation as detailed in 1, above.

According to Lancashire County Council's Toolkit document, the phrase "due regard" means that the level of scrutiny and evaluation to be applied is reasonable and proportionate in the particular context. Wyre's consultation group believes that for such significant decisions as closing three of the borough's libraries, the level of scrutiny and evaluation should be correspondingly high.

**Question d) Where we are proposing to no longer deliver services from a property, but you think we should continue to deliver services from it, what are your reasons.**

To avoid any unnecessary duplication, the response to this question is fully covered by our response to Question c), above.

DRAFT

**Question e) Thinking about this proposal, please tell us if there is anything else that we need to consider or that we could do differently.**

The consultation group are clear that every effort should be made to ensure that the three libraries that are under threat in Wyre should be kept open. There are several alternative models that should be fully explored before any irreversible decisions are taken.

Wyre's consultation group proposes that a Community Interest Company (CIC) be set up covering all seven of the borough's libraries.

The CIC model would require a dedicated group of people to support it and an assurance that the current buildings would still be available. Initial costings indicate that the CIC model would deliver a saving of £222,000 through a combination of NNDR reduction, management cost reductions and eliminating costs of recharges. Such a saving would be within £3,000 of the savings that Lancashire County Council is understood to be seeking to achieve.

The evidence suggests that the CIC model would be financially viable, subject to a full business case being drawn up. This option should be thoroughly investigated and the implementation of the planned closures not commenced until after the full appraisal has taken place.

In principle, it is accepted that in order to keep all three libraries open a reduction in opening hours and/or in the level of service provided as well as a reduction in staffing costs will be required. We believe that these alternatives would be achievable if a policy of natural wastage and voluntary redundancy was pursued. Different working methods should be explored, including the expectation that libraries work more closely together, sharing staff and with increasing flexible working arrangements. The assumption is that these factors will have already been fully explored by the County Council prior to the proposal being made to close three libraries but there appears to be no evidence that this is the case.

The consultation group would also like to see options for sharing buildings with other organisations fully considered. The model would require a revised budget for the whole of Wyre, taking into account the benefits of sharing buildings with, for example, the police, job centres, the NHS or Wyre Council. Income generation opportunities (e.g. café, the provision of meeting rooms for hire, lettings) should be built into such a model. Regarding Wyre Council's contribution, the possibility of delivering benefits advice from those centres rather than from the council's benefits bus was proposed as one option to be analysed.

Two other models are worthy of consideration

1 The use of satellite centres to deliver a library service, depending on the availability of other community assets in appropriate locations. It is possible that a

suitable building could be identified in Cleveleys but there is no obvious alternative in Thornton.

2 Suffolk Libraries - a model that has been successfully implemented since August 2012 whereby an industrial and provident society, a not for profit, independent and charitable organisation has run the service for the benefit of the people of Suffolk. Membership is drawn from community groups that are made up of people who want to support their library and have a say in how they are run. Each library in Suffolk works with local people to develop these member organisations.

DRAFT

## **Endorsement from Cabinet**

Although this report has been supported by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 1 August 2016, this submission is subject to final endorsement from Wyre's Cabinet, who will be considering the matter at their meeting on Wednesday 7 September 2016. In the meantime the report is submitted in the name of Garry Payne, Chief Executive.

## **Consultation group**

Wyre Council's consultation group members were:

Councillors Matthew Vincent (Chairman), Emma Anderton, Lady Dulcie Atkins, Howard Ballard, Colette Birch, Ruth Duffy, Rob Fail, John Hodgkinson, Tom Ingham, Kerry Jones, Andrea Kay, Patsy Ormrod, Brian Stephenson, Ann Turner, Shaun Turner and Lynn Walmsley.

29 July 2016

arm/o&s/cr/16/0108pf3