

Church Stretton Town Council

Response to Shropshire Council

Confirmation of selection criteria for the appointment of a new organisation to manage library services in Church Stretton

The Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation. It must however be noted, that members of the Town Council feel that Shropshire Council has engaged in 'consultation overkill', with two local library consultations held in the last six months. Community feedback also reflects a degree of lethargy, which we fear may result in a low response rate.

Feedback from the prior local consultation indicated that running the library in the most cost-effective manner was only rated seventh in a list of 12 key factors. This shows a difference in priorities between the public and Shropshire Council, who have allocated 'Financial Evaluation' 40% of the overall marks. Whilst it is recognised that this whole procurement process is based upon delivering savings on the library service budget, when it comes to evaluating service providers, the community has placed higher priority on other factors.

With regard to the quality component of the procurement, we feel that there should be a higher weighting to the core business of the library (improving literacy and encouraging reading) as compared to the other new strategic objectives set out in the strategy. In the beginning of this service, primacy has to be given to the core service.

In the overall award criteria, sustainability is not singled out for weighting, however it is highlighted as a key factor throughout the document and is listed separately under 'primary outcomes'. It is not clear which element of the award criteria, sustainability is identified within?

In relation to Social Value, in the context of Church Stretton, it is important that particular attention is paid to meeting the needs of the increasing proportion of disabled residents but also the promotion of inter-generational activities as between young and old in order to bolster community cohesion. In terms of safeguarding the future of libraries, bearing in mind the declining usage in recent years, it will be important that the new service retains the involvement of young people beyond their school age years and that will

require a commitment to continued investment in the new digital technologies.

The selection criteria completely ignore the divisions that have been created in the community of Church Stretton over this elongated process. The Town Council feels strongly, that there should be an element of this selection criteria that explores how the successful party will look to bridge these divisions and restore community cohesion.

Given the procurement time-table for Church Stretton Library, the Town Council's gravest concern is that Shropshire Council has still not defined, either to the Town Council or to the bidding agencies precisely what elements it will continue to fund, by how much and for how long. The bidding agencies will now have very little time to identify and validate the requisite funding for which they will be responsible.

With regard to the Town Council's position during this procurement process, we ask Shropshire Council to give consideration to the potential requests for support (financial and other), that we may have to consider. These decisions will ultimately have to be made in line with the Town Council's standing orders and timetable of meetings, which may not necessarily fall in line with your timetable for procurement. These will be important and no doubt challenging decisions for the Town Council, particularly as there may be further devolvement of services to consider in future. The Town Council's decision-making process, will not be dictated by an external procurement process and we ask Shropshire Council to respect this.

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