

Church Stretton Town Council

Response to Shropshire Council

Draft Shropshire Library Services Strategy 2018 to 2023

Church Stretton Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Library Services Strategy for Shropshire 2018 to 2023. This document has particular relevance to Church Stretton, as Shropshire Council will soon begin the procurement process to find a new library service provider for the town.

Overall this strategy reads optimistically in the face of what is essentially a £375,000 per annum cut in funding. It sets out that in future, the library service aims to deliver four strategic objectives, only one of which 'improving literacy and encouraging reading', the previously much better funded library service in Church Stretton, can legitimately claim to have sought to deliver.

The other three new strategic objectives of promoting health and well-being, inclusive and prosperous communities, enterprise and self-sustainability, all lie outside of the core competencies of library staff. Given that those self-same areas also face funding cuts by Shropshire Council, what support, if any, would the Council provide, or would they have to be funded and delivered by 'local partners'?

We had hoped that the strategy would give clarity with regard to 'shaping the future of library services', but unfortunately no specific recommendations are made. We, therefore, still seek clarification with regard to how the fledgling Church Stretton library service will be supported, by what the strategy refers to as 'back office' and what shape and size this client support shall take?

With regard to our library users who, due to age, location or mobility find using the library service challenging, the strategy appears to offer a 'Home Library Service'. There is little mention of this service throughout the document and it is difficult to identify the level of existing service. We seek clarity with regard to this service and its intended future delivery?

On the crucial issue of funding, although the table on page 9, section 5 sets out a hierarchy of library service provision, which will inform decisions on future investment and revenue support, the strategy gives no indication of the level

of financial support to be given to Tier 2 Community Libraries. It does confirm, however, that any funding will be for a maximum of five year time limited, tapered revenue support, linked to a plan to achieve sustainable and cost neutral provision (to Shropshire Council) by the end of 2022/23. We see this financial uncertainty as a major disincentive for possible partner agencies to come forward.

As this and other smaller affected market towns have consistently argued, this Strategy creates a fundamental and indefensible inequity in the funding of local services across the county. The Tier 1 libraries in the largest towns will be funded in full by Shropshire Council, subsidised by the precept payers in the smaller market towns, all of which have much higher local precepts than the larger towns. Furthermore, these precept payers will have to pay again to preserve a library service in their own towns, with no contribution from their surrounding rural areas, from where 53% of active library users come (as stated on page 7).

This Council would welcome discussion with Shropshire Council on ways in which other budgetary adjustments could be made to compensate for this inequity, thereby helping to deliver on the shared strategic aim of achieving greater economic self-sufficiency.

Danny Chetwood
Town Clerk
Church Stretton Town Council
60 High Street
Church Stretton
SY6 6BY
Tel: 01694 722113
Email: townclerk@churchstretton-tc.gov.uk