**FULL COUNCIL – 15 JUNE 2020**

**LIBRARY TASK & FINISH GROUP – FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1 In January 2020, Hampshire County Council (HCC) started a consultation about reducing the cost of the Library Service. The County Council needs to save approximately £80m per annum, of which the Library Service is required to deliver £1.86m of savings. The current cost of the Library Service is £13.8m per year. HCC has outlined its proposals to make these savings: -

The “preferred option” is to close up to ten libraries and reduce the opening hours of the remaining libraries by 15%. That would save c£1m per annum. Fair Oak library was included amongst those it wished to close. Other options included reducing the opening hours of all libraries by 25% to achieve a similar saving. There were several ancillary proposals including withdrawing support for community managed libraries to save £49,000 per annum.

1.2 The proposal to close Fair Oak Library would save £37,000 per year. Further enquiries revealed that this figure is made up of:

Staff £27,000

Stock £9,000

Premises £1,000

Business Rates £1,000 £38,000

Less income £1,000

NET COST £37,000

* 1. In addition, if it closed the library, HCC would expect to sell the building for a substantial sum.

1. **TASK & FINISH GROUP ESTABLISHMENT & FINDINGS**
   1. As the proposed closure will adversely affect many of the more vulnerable people in our community. Accordingly, the Parish Council appointed a Task & Finish Group consisting of the Cllr Couldrey, the Clerk and Mr Dunne to investigate other options.
   2. Cllr Couldrey & County Councillor Thornton in February met with HCC Officers and discussed the issues surrounding Fair Oak library and its possible retention. The Library Service invited the Parish Council to consider paying £30,000 per annum to keep the library open. To raise this additional income the Parish would need to increase the precept for a Band D to £110.64 which equated to a 7.3% increase.
   3. Considering this, the Task & Finish Group investigated other options. There are several community run libraries, both in and outside Hampshire, with varying arrangements with their county library service. They all depend on the support of volunteers. Clearly some are successful, but others are not.
   4. Cllr Couldrey and the Clerk met (virtually) with those running the Hamble and Bursledon libraries. The first is an independent library and the second is a community managed library which remains part of HCC Library Service. Members can obtain a copy of these notes from the Clerk. These meetings highlighted that the library operating in Hamble needed a lot of support from the local parish council despite having a good number of volunteers, but the Bursledon Library is largely run by volunteers with minimal supervision from the Parish Clerk.
   5. The Group have concluded that it is preferable to remain part of the county library service in order to retain access to a supply of books and access specialist library services, such as book reservations, inter-library loans, County Council Wi-Fi and Go-Online public computers. The Group also consider it desirable to avoid taking on the cost and obligations of providing premises and limit the support needed from the parish council.
   6. The Group noted that approximately 70% of the current expenditure on the Fair Oak library related to the cost of the staff. There are always two part time staff in the building whilst the library is open. It is not clear whether the staff costs include the cost of outside supervisors providing support - Bursledon receives support for 1.5 hrs a week at an annual cost of £4000. This is the obvious area to investigate. Other libraries have recruited volunteers to run much of their work and Bursledon is open longer than Fair Oak using volunteer staff. Accordingly, it must be feasible to recruit volunteers to do so in Fair Oak.
   7. Given all the factors above, the Task & Finish Group recommend that HCC be approached with the proposal that the Parish Council source volunteers from within the community to perform much of the work currently carried out by staff members, whilst the library remains part of the County Council network. Accordingly, HCC would continue to manage the library, provide books and other library services.
   8. At this stage, the proposal cannot be detailed but it is envisaged an agreement under which the Parish Council agreed to seek volunteers. Assuming such volunteers were available, HCC would agree to continue the library service, providing the same services as now. It is anticipated that the parish’s obligations would be assumed and discharged through a charitable company formed for the purpose. Volunteers would be engaged on the same terms (save as to pay) as current employees of the parish but provide the service in accordance with the directions of HCC.
2. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

3.1 That the Parish Council approach HCC with the proposals outlined in paragraphs 2.6 – 2.8 above; and

3.2 That the Task and Finish Group enter negotiations with HCC and report back findings and final proposal in the coming months.

For further information contact:

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