



Registered Charity No. 1139163
www.chestertoncommunityassociation.org.uk

Future of Milton Road Library

Open Meeting 4th March

Presentation by Michael Bond, Chairman of Chesterton Community Association

1. I welcomed the report of the Library Service Review considered by the County Council's Cabinet on 25th January, 2011, and approved by the full Council last month. I noted the main conclusion of the Review that the creation of a trust to manage the whole service is the only way to secure a successful library service with a long-term future in Cambridgeshire. I am sceptical that this represents a complete answer to the County Council's problem as the service will still have to be paid for and the greater part of the funding will continue to be from the public purse.
2. My view is that there are two aspects to the library service: the 'wholesale' provision of catalogued stock and its delivery to service points; and the 'retail' part of providing and running the premises from which it is delivered.
3. The creation of the SPINE initiative, a co-operative programme between library authorities, is to be welcomed as it has the potential to achieve significant economies of scale and share development costs of service improvements that are not premises specific. Similarly the provision of specialist library staff, trained to an appropriate level appears to be appropriate to a larger organisation.
4. In my view it is the delivery points that are the main cost areas that need a radically different approach. In many localities local schools and local libraries are the only community owned premises. In the case of libraries they operate for a relatively few hours a week and as a community owned resource are simply underused assets. There are usually no alternative premises that are not already fully used. This is particularly true of community centres and public halls in Cambridge.
5. By using its powers under the Local Government Act 1972 (General Disposal Consent 2003) to transfer local library premises to the local communities they serve the County Council can, at a stroke, divest itself of the management overhead incurred on running the buildings and facilitate their development as community hubs.
6. Local people can provide the management skills and initiative to introduce additional activities, improve and develop the premises and respond to specific local demands that are compatible with delivering an effective and efficient local hub. Having worked with local communities around the county I am aware of the wealth of talent that can be unlocked if the right climate to release it is created.

A local charity

Address for correspondence: 119, High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge, CB4 1NL



Registered Charity No. 1139163

www.chestertoncommunityassociation.org.uk

7. Chesterton Community Association has already put forward a proposal to run Milton Road Library as a local hub. So how would it work?
8. The County Council would enter into an agreement with the Community Association transferring the building to the Association on a long lease at a peppercorn rent. The Association would then enter into a Service Level Agreement with the County Council to provide for the continuing delivery of a library service at Milton Road. This agreement has to be flexible to allow the Association to manage and develop the premises so it should focus on the service to be delivered and not be needlessly prescriptive. The County Council or its newly created trust would be responsible for the costs of and delivery of the service. The Friends of Milton Road Library should have a formal role on how that service should develop to better meet the needs of its users. Richard will be expanding on the role of the Friends but the point I would wish to make now is that any group invited to provide advice should be able to initiate as well as respond to changes. Micromanagement from the centre is incompatible with local success.
9. So what does the Community Association do for money? In the first instance we would expect the County Council to allocate the budget provisions for the building maintenance, heating, cleaning &c. to the Community Association. These are costs that unlike 80% of Non-domestic rates (around £7,000) will not disappear on transfer of the building to a charity.
10. In the short term not a lot can change but we would aim to make an early start on creating space for other activities to take place regularly without the requirement for library staff to be present. This will probably require some adaptations to layout and access and would require the consent of the County Council under the terms of the lease and the City Council where it is required to meet statutory requirements. There are grant givers who are specific providers of capital funds, e.g. WREN will give up to £50,000 for qualifying projects, this building had £15,000 from that source and you are sitting in items purchased with WREN money.
11. There may well be funds for major works available through the Big Society initiative but the extent of those is not yet clear. Many foundations and trusts are also willing to back sound business plans where these produce a long-term benefit for local communities. Historically the Carnegie trusts have been staunch supporters of local community facilities, the Big Lottery, LloydsTSB Foundation, Foundation for Sports and the Arts are amongst others with a recent track record of support for local facilities within Cambridgeshire.

A local charity

Address for correspondence: 119, High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge, CB4 1NL