

**BRAUNSTONE TOWN COUNCIL**

**OFFICER DECISION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

**RESPONSE TO LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL ON THE  
PROVISION OF INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP  
LIBRARIES – 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

**Background to the Decision**

The Town Council received an invitation from Leicestershire County Council, dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014, to provide both written and oral evidence to the Scrutiny Review Panel looking at the Community Partnership Libraries Support Package. The Scrutiny Panel would be meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and the deadline for expressing an interest in providing oral evidence was 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014. The deadline for written submissions was 13<sup>th</sup> October 2014. Policy and Resources Committee discussed the offer at its meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014.

**Authority for Decision**

Policy and Resources Committee decided on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 “*that delegated authority be given to the Executive Officer and Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee and the Chair of Community Development Committee, to determine whether and how the Council provided evidence to Leicestershire County Council’s Scrutiny Review Panel looking at the Community Partnership Libraries Support Package and to determine as appropriate who the Council’s representative would be*”. Report Reference 9(ii).

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

The following alternative option was considered and rejected:

<b>Details of Option</b>	<b>Reason for Rejection</b>
Decline offer to submit oral evidence	The Town Council has a good record supporting community groups and volunteers, this experience would demonstrate the need for the County Council to have a flexible support model.

**Decision**

1. That Braunstone Town apply to submit oral evidence to the Scrutiny Review Panel on the provision of infrastructure support for community partnership libraries; and
2. that a written response be submitted, as detailed as an appendix to this decision, to the Scrutiny Review Panel on the provision of infrastructure support for community partnership libraries.

Approved By:



Darren Tilley  
Executive Officer & Town Clerk

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014

## **Reasons for Decision**

1. To enable the Town Council to demonstrate the importance of a flexible support package for Community Libraries, based on its successful experience engaging and supporting community and voluntary groups in the Town; and
2. to enable the Town Council to reiterate that it did not support the proposals for Community Partnership Libraries based on volunteers, while recognising the importance that if Leicestershire County Council went ahead with its proposals that it was important to protect Library services and ensure the support arrangements with tailored to each community's and partner's needs and circumstances.

## **List of Background Documents**

None.

### NOTE:

CRIME & DISORDER ACT 1998 (SECTION 17) – The Council has an obligation to consider Crime & Disorder implications of all its activities and to do all that it can to prevent Crime and Disorder in its area.

### EQUALITIES ACT 2010

Braunstone Town Council has a duty in carrying out its functions to have due regard to:-

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and;
- foster good relations between different groups

To ensure that no person receives less favorable treatment on the basis of race, disability, sex, gender re-assignment, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity.

These issues were considered in connection with each of the above decisions. Unless otherwise stated under each item of this report, there were no implications.



# BRAUNSTONE TOWN COUNCIL

[www.braunstonetowncouncil.org.uk](http://www.braunstonetowncouncil.org.uk)

*Darren Tilley – Executive Officer & Town Clerk*  
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Our Ref: DT/JL

Your Ref:

When calling please ask for: Darren Tilley

13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

## **Scrutiny Review - Community Libraries Support Package**

Braunstone Town Council wishes to make the following comments concerning the proposed support package for Community Libraries.

It is important to note that Braunstone Town Council remains of the view that the model, which was the subject of consultation earlier this year is not a strategic solution to managing a Library service both in the short and long term. Options such as a partnership or shared service with other library authorities would enable savings to be made without impacting on the front line service. The model also highlights the potential for double taxation, which Braunstone Town Council is opposed to.

While Braunstone Town Council is firmly of the view that alternative models and/or a different approach could have been by the County Council to address the funding shortfall, it is accepted that the County Council has determined that a £800,000 saving should be made from the Libraries budget. Therefore, should the County Council approve the proposed model, it is vitally important that the support package for Community Libraries is as flexible as possible to support and meet the needs of the County's diverse communities and that of the range of community partnership models, while meeting its primary objective of budget savings.

The areas affected range from large populated suburban areas, such as Braunstone Town and Burbage, through large villages and settlements such as Barwell and Thurmaston, to rural district centres such as Bottesford and Market Bosworth.

As part of the consultation, the County Council provided figures for each of the proposed Community Libraries, this set out property running costs, staff and other overheads and income. In simple terms, the County Council proposed to cover building insurance and reasonable property running costs along with infrastructure, IT and training. The County Council will have undertaken an assessment which would provide an estimate of the financial cost of such support in relation to each Library.

However, each community and the organisations within those communities will have different needs. Not everyone will need a building, for example some communities may choose to co-locate in another community building, while in others the Library already exists as part of another organisation's building. In such cases buildings insurance, management and maintenance of the building may not be required from the County Council. Others may have computers or wi-fi access or have access to alternative arrangements at a lower cost, again there would be no need for this support from the County Council. However, for some communities, access to professional library staff to ensure that the book stock and involvement of the library in the wider community is maintained will be important and equivalent funding from the County Council for provision of this service would be more value to that particular community partnership library.

In some cases the County Council will have legal and contractual obligations, such as a lease agreement, there is the potential to discuss the transfer of these or negotiation of terms in order to unlock the equivalent funding for other library services, should this be of value to a particular community partnership library.

Another community partnership library may value the professional expertise of the County Council, legal advice, financial services, professional funding and grant services.

In short, the one size fits all model is inflexible and could hinder the success of community partnership libraries. A pick and mix approach to support, where the elements of support that the County Council provide are attributed a value, enables each individual community partnership library to pick the support elements which meet their local needs and circumstances and present the best chances of success. It gives the partnership the autonomy and therefore ownership and motivation for the project to succeed in their area. Each community library would be able to pick elements up to the value equivalent to the originally proposed support package. Each individual community partnership could potentially pick a larger support package than the equivalent value and chose to pay the difference.

Equally, a pragmatic approach on the part of the County Council would be to continue to directly run a Library Service in an area where suitable partners, public sector, private sector, education establishments etc. can be found to co-locate services and save on fixed and operational costs to the mutual benefit of the partners. In reaching an agreement, consultation could take place with partners and the local community on how the service should operate, for example changed or reduced opening hours. Where such an arrangement resulted in the equivalent expenditure as highlighted above, the core objectives of service cost savings has been met by the County Council, while retaining the County run professional library service for the community and resulting in cost savings for the other partners.

Therefore, concerning the specific questions that the Scrutiny Panel have asked, Braunstone Town Council's response is as follows:

1. *Have the changes to the support package helped to address your concerns?* To some extent, the support package is wider and therefore will better meet to needs of partnership groups.
  - a. *Which changes do you consider particularly valuable?* Each Library having a Named County Council Liaison Officer who will visit to provide advice and support on a regular basis. This person will undoubtedly be to many community groups, volunteers and partner organisations welcome support, particularly in the early stages.

- b. *Are there any aspects of the support on offer (or lack thereof) that remain of concern?* There is no recognition of the County Council's ability to reduce the overheads of Community Partnership Libraries beyond 5-7 years through its ability to act on their behalf and providing savings overall through economies of scale, for example costs for insurance, legal, maintenance, utility services.
2. *Should the Council make provision for partnership libraries to purchase additional library service support?* Yes and also the ability to choose additional support instead of the standard support.
3. *Would the option to capitalise the running costs into a single payment be useful?* Yes, this should be an option.
4. *Which of the lease options would best enable the partnership body to plan and budget for maintenance and repairs?* The partnership body should be able to determine from the lease options available at the outset.
5. *Under which circumstances would you consider it fair for the County Council to introduce a market rent for its library premises and/or transfer rental costs to the partnership body?* It would not be appropriate to levy a market rent or transfer the rental costs to a community library. However, if the organisation has developed other lines of business, which having funded the community library, is making significant profits for the business, rather than for the community, e.g. a Café business or retail outlet, then a market rent on the floor space of those businesses activities could be considered.
6. *Looking at the index of the Information Pack to be made available for each library - is there any particular information or guidance missing?* Should the Panel agree to a "pick and mix" support model, part 1 needs to include a definitive list of support options with the cost of each option and part 2 need to include the attributed value of support for the specific Library.
7. *What key message would you like to convey to the Scrutiny Review Panel?* For any community organisation or partnership, particularly one formed of volunteers, it is vitally important that to be motivated and successful as a group that they feel supported by the County Council and that they are not constrained by a bureaucratic and one size fits all approach. Many community partnerships and volunteers will be presenting themselves to run their local Library rather than see it closed, they will be finding it difficult to recruit, train and retain volunteers and their view of the County Council will not necessarily be that complimentary. The County Council therefore needs to work hard to demonstrate that it is supportive, understanding and flexible to the needs of the various communities and partnerships who will be involved in making a success of their local Library service.

Braunstone Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on these proposals and is hopeful that the Scrutiny Panel will take a realistic and pragmatic approach to developing a support package and enabling the County Council to make savings while ensuring the continuation of services through both community partnerships and public/private partnerships.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Nick Brown  
Leader of Braunstone Town Council