

Questions for Full Council Meeting 16 February 2011

Blue = Questions submitted to Cabinet meeting 2/2/11

Italic = Answers by Christine Lawrence, Cabinet member for Community.

Bold = Questions for the full Council meeting

Q1. 10,832 residents were asked by the council, 'Is the proposed reductions to the library service fair in the current financial climate?' 78% disagreed - 46% of them strongly disagreed. Over 15,000 residents have signed a petition stating they disagree with the 25% cut to the library service budget. Can you explain why the council is not listening to the strongly held views of its residents?

Q1. The Council is listening and the proposal has been changed.

Q1a) The cabinet response to our question 1 is not evidence based and inadequate. The council responded but the question was about the 25% percentage cut. The cut for 2011/12 has not changed. Since the cabinet meeting the petition (Save Somerset's Libraries) has 23,000+ signatures. Can you explain why the council is not listening to the strongly held views of its residents?

Q2. There is no mention in the equalities impact assessment that paid staff could be replaced by volunteers to maintain library opening hours after a 20% reduction. Are the library redundancy proposals genuine?

Q2. Volunteers would be used to complement, not replace paid staff.

Q2a) Does your reply to question 2 clarify that there will be no redundancies in the library service?

Q3. In the Equalities Impact Assessment the council states the actions needed to reduce the significant reduction in libraries under the headings 'Age', 'Geography' and 'Low income'. All three include targeting the mobile library provision towards home educated children in areas with no immediate library provision, targeting mobile library provision to Somerset's most deprived wards and targeting mobile provision to rural areas and towns where the library service is removed. Having reduced the mobile library fleet from 6 to 2 how is this going to be possible in rural Somerset?

Q3. This will be possible because we will re-plan routes, and re-prioritise use of remaining mobile resources.

Q3a) Did the equality impact survey assessment include the proposed cut in bus services (subsidy)?

Q4. Why can't the reserves be used to prevent the £1.35 million cut to the service?

Q4. We can't use reserves to prevent the £1.35 million cut to the service because there is not enough money.

Q4a) The cabinet reply stated, "There is not enough money". In paper A (A1 - 8 / A1 - 9) it states that general and earmarked reserves stand at £28.138 million. Do you agree?

Paper J - 2 (Cabinet papers 2/2/11) states there is a non-service budget under spend of £1.63 million. Will this be used to stop the proposed £1.35million cut to the library service?

Will the £2.36Million under spend in the community directorate budget be used to stop the proposed £1.35million cut to the library service?

Q5. SCC received unexpected grants in the 2011/12 "settlement" which are not ring fenced? Why can't some of these grants be used to keep the Library Service operational at current levels?

Q5. *Grants cannot be used to keep the library service operational at current levels because NHS money is not recurrent and it is 'ring fenced' in as much as it can only be used in agreement with NHS Somerset.*

Q5a) The question did not ask about NHS money. Are there any un-ring fenced grants in the local government settlement that can be used to keep the library service operational at current levels?

Q6. What rationale was used to decide on a 25% budget cut for libraries? Please explain the methodology used.

Q6. *We had to balance the budget and manage our statutory responsibilities for libraries.*

Q6a) The Government states that Somerset County Council have lost 2% of their spending power. Why are you cutting the library service by 25%?

Q7. Could you clarify the percentage cut required from statutory services other than the library service?

Q7. *The percentage cut required from statutory services other than the library service varies by service.*

Q7a) Can you specify the percentage cut to the statutory services & which services?

Q8. Will community run libraries fall within the authority's statutory responsibility?

Q8. *This will depend on the model the community adopts.*

Q8a) What are the community models? Will they fall within the authorities statutory responsibilities? Will they be democratically accountable and transparent to the people of Somerset?

Q9. Appendix 3, Library service charges, proposes increasing the cost of a lost library membership card to £5. This will discriminate against low income families, and the elderly, deterring future usage. It will also add to the impact on the more vulnerable groups already identified within the Equalities Impact Assessment. What justification do you have for this? (Continues onto Q10)

Q9. *Consultation with the public highlighted that many people would rather see charges increased than libraries shut.*

Q10. Other charging proposals, such as Photocopying, printing and people's

network charges are non-competitive and will almost certainly lose income for the library service. How will you manage this shortfall?

Q10. We don't know that other charging proposals will lose income until we test it out, and we are not interested in competing for business like photocopying against other local businesses and we will monitor the impact of the charging increases as we go through the year to see how well we are or are not achieving income targets.

Q9a & Q10a) In the consultation document there was no specific question about increased charges. How can you justify the reply? How long will you 'test out' the increase in charges before a transparent and open review is held?

Q11) In question 4a at the Scrutiny meeting (Monday 1st February) it was noted that at the Opposition councillors briefing that they were informed there was approximately £29 million in unallocated reserves? Can the money not be used to stop the proposed £1.35million cuts to the library service?

Q12) The South West One delivered savings for this financial year were currently £4.6million and forecast to be £6.7million by the end of March 2011. (£27 million for 3 years Financial Year 10/11 - Financial Year 12/13). Why can't these savings be used to protect services? In particular, used to prevent the proposed cut of £1.35 million in the library service?

Q13) Can SCC confirm that the Local Authority will provide a "Comprehensive and Efficient Library Service"?

Q14) If SCC decides to set up a Library Trust will democratic accountability increase or decrease?

Statement

UNISON has supported the Save Somerset's Libraries campaign. Steve Ross, Library Campaigner will present a petition with over 23,000+ signatures at the full council meeting on the 16th February. We formally request that the chairman is made aware that UNISON would welcome the debate-taking place at the same meeting. We formally request that a recorded vote is taken at the meeting on the library service decision.