

Dear Penny

Re. Shropshire Council Library Service

Shropshire Council's financial situation is no secret, having been granted a significant level of Exceptional Financial Support from MHCLG for 2025-26 and 2026-27 just to have a legal budget position.

Alongside this, the Council's external auditors have issued a statutory recommendation to the Council that requires us to undertake an immediate review of all services to determine the cost of minimum viable service provision to deliver its statutory responsibilities.

The local authority has a legal duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide:

"A comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who live, work or study and want to access the service in the local area"

For libraries, any future savings delivery will require significant service changes requiring public consultation in line with the Statutory duty for a comprehensive Library Service and our Library Service Needs Assessment.

Shropshire Council is considering all aspects of the library service (principal libraries, rural branches, mobile provision and the core library offer) while aligning with the Needs

Assessment and seeking to avoid disproportionate impact on any single element. A priority has been to balance the impact on the urban and rural areas.

All the possible efficiency savings have been implemented; difficult decisions now need to be considered. No decisions have been made yet, and any decisions will only be made following public consultation.

We would like to discuss the future of Wem Library with the Town Council as a key partner and stakeholder, building on the successful relationship that currently exists.

As part of the overall approach to reduce the overall budget, the Library Service is seeking to build on the financial support that is already provided by several Town and Parish Councils (T&PC). Several T&PC offer direct support to their local libraries through funding contributions, but the libraries remain directly operated by Shropshire Council.

An alternative approach, currently adopted by three T&PC, transfers the operation and costs of the library to the T&PC. This delivery model operates by:

- Town or Parish Council staff run the library and manage daily operations of the branch at their expense.
 - Shropshire Council manage and fund infrastructure costs for book stock, computers, network connections and advisory support.
- Shropshire Council remain as the library authority with the responsibility for the statutory duty to provide the service.

Where this approach has been implemented previously, a reducing Shropshire Council financial contribution over a three-year period has been agreed.

We would welcome further discussions on these options. We see this as a partnership approach to ensure the sustainable delivery of key services to the communities of Shropshire.

Please get in touch to discuss this matter at your earliest convenience.

Pete

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