

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Wednesday 11 October 2023

1. QUESTION FROM JOHN LAWLOR (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Mobile Library – Obtaining Reading and Social Contact.

I live in a rural community in North West Devon, Halwill. We have many elderly residents who cannot drive nor are able to access the internet. The mobile library is a social lifeline for them. They are able to obtain reading material and a community we are able ensure they are safe and well. I wish to ask the cabinet how they intend to ensure that these residents are able to obtain reading material and receive social contact?

Although there is a library in nearby Holsworthy, bus travel is not an option since DCC decided to reduce the previous frequent service to now only every three hours. A return journey will now take nearly four hours.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Due to the short timescale between the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and this Cabinet, and the matters raised at that meeting, a response will be provided at the next Cabinet meeting covering the matters raised by Scrutiny and the public questions received.

2. QUESTION FROM KATIE SANDFORD (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Spending on Library Services

Devon County Council says it wants to remove the mobile library service in order to spend the money on children's services in towns and cities, but why does DCC believe that means that children in rural areas should have their service taken away in order to benefit those in towns and cities?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

3. QUESTION FROM Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin (ATTENDANCE CONFIRMED)
Re: Mobile Library Statements

In 2022, Councillor Roger Croad, Devon County Council's Cabinet Member responsible for libraries, is publicly quoted as saying "Mobile libraries are a lifeline to rural communities and they give residents, particularly the elderly and vulnerable, access to vital services." What has changed?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**4. QUESTION FROM KATHRYN AND PAUL MOORE (ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Pioneer for using Mobile Library as Multi-Purpose Vehicle**

I lived in Devon for over 40 years and it's mainly made up of rural communities. These communities have over the years had more and more services taken away or moved so far away that for some people it means a whole day is taken up to do one trip which can mean using a variety of transport to achieve this and extremely exhausting. The mobile library service is in many cases considered a life line and means of learning and communication from the very young to the elderly. Whilst I appreciate you authorities have budget constraints, could Devon consider being a pioneer in the Southwest for using the mobile library as a multi-purpose vehicle by providing several services within it?

I sincerely hope this invaluable service will be kept.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**5. QUESTION FROM ANGELINA BAKER (ATTENDANCE CONFIRMED)
Re: Usage of Mobile Library**

I would like to ask the Cabinet why they are comparing figures from 2013 when there were 8 vans to today's usage figures when there are only 4 vans, to prove a decline in usage. When the true figures show that usage is on the rise, this year's figures show that the Torrington Mobile Library user figures have risen from 858 in January to 956 in August.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**6. QUESTION FROM WILL MATHEWS (ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Mobile Library and Freedom of Choice.**

Does the council recognise that removing the mobile library service and trying to substitute it with a Good Neighbour or Home Library Scheme is removing freedom of choice and removing independence for those who need it most, including our young people for whom it is a great skill to learn at an early age?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**7. QUESTION FROM AMY ANDERSON (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Library Strategy**

Does Devon County Council have a library strategy and if not, do they feel they should have one in place before making drastic measures such as removing the mobile library service?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**8. QUESTION FROM ALAN HUNKIN (ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Usage of Mobile Library for other Services**

Don't you think it would be a good idea if you used the mobile libraries to provide other services in our rural areas, I understand they've started doing this in some other counties. I hate driving anywhere and it would be good to have more services in the village even if it's just once a month on the library van.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**9. QUESTION FROM CLAIRE RICHARDS (ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS)
Re: Marketing of Devon Library Service**

I would like to ask Council, as regards online presence, why when the static libraries are regularly marketed on social media, the Devon Mobile Library Service is not marketed anywhere online or on social media, and why it is also impossible to find any terms of service or services offered for the Devon Library Mobile Service on the Libraries Unlimited website?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**10. QUESTION FROM ROGER ALLEN (ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Change of Policy on Stops on Mobile Library Service**

Many of the stops that have been abolished are in hamlets which are on the route to other local areas. If a decision is made to find a way to keep the mobile libraries running, will the council consider changing the policy of removing stops of fewer than 5 people, and add stops to rural areas for those who would like to use it?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**11. QUESTION FROM CHRIS WHEATLEY (ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Community Libraries**

Torrridge District Council asked for details months ago regarding DCC proposals for mobile library services to be replaced with a voluntary scheme with no details?

Torrridge District Council fully support the mobile library services including two motions and a recorded vote.

County Cllr Andrew Saywell has been going around telling people that when the mobile library service closes down, he will help create community libraries here there and everywhere. What are the details of these proposals please and how will they run? Cllr Croad simply said at Libraries Unlimited would "chip-in".

What does that mean? Details please.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**12. QUESTION FROM STEVEN BURY ((ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS)
Re: Alternative Provision if Mobile Library is Closed.**

The Community Libraries Council proposes to set up an alternative to the Mobile Library Service, as the Mobile Service does 376 stops.

So, suppose the Mobile Library Service is shut down. If that is the case, I have to ask, will there be digital access of broadband, volunteers, rotation of the book stock for choice of books, ordering, the security of library books, to get the books to the proposed community libraries coming from?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

**13. QUESTION FROM MARK WOODING (ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS)
Re: Consideration of Running Hybrid Services**

Has any consideration been given to running a hybrid-service that combines the mobile library with other services? For example, Banking services, Post office services, Pharmacy services, Basic healthcare services (including vaccinations) Pre and post natal services, Internet technology training and advice for older residents, Job seeker services, Counselling services

It may even be possible (given the banks' desire to close branches) that a hybrid mobile banking and library service would be revenue positive.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

14. QUESTION FROM HELEN WAYLAND-SMITH (NOT IN ATTENDANCE) Re: Grant Funding from Government for Vehicle Replacement

It was heart-warming to see the cross-party support from councillors on the scrutiny committee, with members from all parties (Labour, Green, Lib Dem and Conservative) voting in support of finding a way to keep the hugely important mobile library service running. As a possible funding idea, will the County Council please contact Central Government and ask them to fund a one-off grant to enable the replacement of the ageing vehicles?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

15. QUESTION FROM CLAIRE DAVEY-POTTS (ATTENDANCE TBC) Re: Equality Impact Assessment

Are the council confident that their equality impact assessment is sufficient to comply with its equality duty as defined in the equality act of 2010? It can be difficult for some people to get into town to visit the library. The mobile library makes life so much easier for certain groups of people with protected characteristics to access books.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

16. QUESTION FROM CHRISTINE BURY (ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS) Re: Educational Levels and Disadvantaged Students

In a speech today by the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, Leader of the Conservative Party said:

*"we have made three huge decisions to change the direction of our country. We will give Britain the infrastructure it needs to protect the long-term future of our NHS cut cancer deaths by a quarter **and create the best education system in the Western world to set our children up for the opportunities of the future.***

Today we set a course for our education system that will set our children up for the opportunities of the future. No more rip-off degrees; no more low aspiration; no more denigration of technical education. Just the best education system in the Western world."

How are you to achieve this if you take away books from disadvantaged children, students at school, home education, College and University students by axing valuable resources in rural Devon, like the Mobile Library? I believe some students do things online now.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

17. QUESTION FROM CLLR PAUL PARKER (ATTENDANCE CONFIRMED) Re: Queen Street

In the approved plans to change Queens Street Newton Abbot, the loss of revenue for the on-street parking could be in the region of £100,000 per year. How do the Council intend to recoup the lost in income.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

At an early stage of discussion with Teignbridge District Council it was understood that their proposals would result in a loss of income from on street pay & display in Queen Street.

Whilst surplus derived from on street parking plays an important role in supporting other services such as cyclic maintenance of verges and bus subsidy, income is not the primary aim. Therefore there are no plans to directly recoup monies that may be lost through these changes.

However, it would be expected that spare capacity in other on street parking locations will accommodate some of the displaced parking which will mitigate a portion of income lost from this section of Queen Street.

18. QUESTION FROM HANNAH PARKER (ATTENDANCE CONFIRMED) Re: Kenwyn

Over 10 years ago the council closed Kenwyn care home in Ashburton, there have been several failures in disposing of the property and one failed planning proposal. Last year squatters had to be removed. How much has this cost the council in maintaining the house and grounds, all the officer time. Consultants, agent's and solicitor's fees etc. A figure to the nearest £25,000 would be sufficient.

What are your plans for the future of this care home.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

The costs of maintaining Kenwyn since 2016 when the property became surplus to DCCs requirements totals c£282,000 which includes essential maintenance, business rates, management costs and planning and legal fees. In addition there were further costs of c£105,000 associated with the eviction of illegal occupiers and the need to tighten security.

DCC still intends to sell the property and currently DCC is in contract to sell the property subject to planning approval being granted.

19. QUESTION FROM BRIAN FURNESS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Community Library and Levels of Service

It has been suggested that the mobile library service be replaced with a community library service, but no details of this have yet been forthcoming. I would like to ask the following question about this proposed service:-

The mobile library service stops in 396 communities and carries in excess of 2,000 books, including fiction and non-fiction, children's books, large print and audio books. How many community libraries will there be? Will they provide an equivalent range of books, particularly books for children and the visually impaired? And what provision will be made for the many users who do not have a car and cannot access the community library?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

20. QUESTION FROM PAT BURR (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Saving the Mobile Library

I would ask the Council PLEASE to consider every possible way that our Mobile Library can be SAVED, not just now and for us-- but for the future in this vast rural area. The world would be a barren place without a book at your elbow. Thank you.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments, which have been noted.

21. QUESTION FROM JANET FURNESS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Range of Services that Mobile Libraries Could Provide.

With regards to the proposed cessation of the mobile library service:
The mobile no longer stops in the tiny hamlet where my pre-school children first enjoyed choosing books, together with our elderly neighbours, but I still remember the enjoyment and sense of community that it brought. Instead of stopping the service altogether has the council considered copying the example of other counties and extending the range of services offered, such as selling stamps and hearing aid batteries, providing advice leaflets and local information? All of these would be very useful to people in isolated communities with vanishingly few facilities.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

22. QUESTION FROM MARIA HENDERSON (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Concern over Closure of Mobile Libraries

It beggars belief that the closure of this essential service to our rural community is even being considered.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments, which have been noted.

23. QUESTION FROM MICHAEL SYMONS (ATTENDANCE TBC)

Re: Accessibility and Travel

I would like to ask the Cabinet, in the event of not being in a position to travel to a static library, how will disabled users and their families/children or carers be able to access the library service, how much of the current service will be available to them, and how far would they have to travel on average, if the Devon Mobile Library Service is shut down?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

24. QUESTION FROM RAY AUVRAY (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Government's "Unleashing `Rural Opportunities" Strategy

How does the running down, and now the proposed closure of the Devon mobile library service support and contribute to the Government's "Unleashing `Rural Opportunities" strategy in which there is explicit commitment to improving rural library services?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

25. QUESTION FROM GRAHAM BRIDGER (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Enhanced Social Interaction and Mitigations

The mobile library service also provided an opportunity of enhanced social interaction and improved resilience in our rural community which takes place during the visit of the mobile library van e.g. by coffee morning or afternoon teas or simply meeting neighbours etc. What mitigations can DCC offer to replace these enhancements and supports to our remote rural communities if the mobile service were withdrawn?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Please see response to question 1.

26. QUESTION FROM CATHERINE BOWNESS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Volunteers and Vulnerable People

When DCC proposed that the mobile library service ceased it was suggested that electronic services, volunteers or friendly neighbours could replace it. Please could you explain how a member of the mobile library who is an elderly, disabled council tax payer who loves reading but is scared of strangers including volunteers after being the victim of a doorstep scam, lacks any dexterity to deal with electronic devices and in addition lives in a mobile phone dead-spot with very poor broadband connections, no near neighbours and no public transport nearby will still be able to use the library service should the mobile van be taken off the road?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

[Please see response to question 1.](#)

**27. QUESTION FROM JOHN SMITH (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Scrutiny Committee Recommendations**

Further to the Recommendation of the recent Scrutiny Meeting, will Council please guarantee that they will fully consider, investigate and cost any and all possible practical and economical means to maintain our vital mobile library service, so essential for the equality, education and social cohesion of our rural communities?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

[Please see response to question 1.](#)

