



THE LONDON BOROUGH  
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**Environment and Community Services**

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Ms V Devaney

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2015

Dear Ms Devaney

**Re: Save Our Community Libraries – Petition**

Thank you for submitting your petition requesting that the Council 'continue to fund professionally staffed libraries at Burnt Ash, Mottingham, Shortlands, Southborough, Hayes and St Paul's Cray.'

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to your petition and to clarify couple of points that you have raised.

The Council must find over £60million of savings from its annual budget in 2017/18. Therefore, the Council must scrutinise and review all of its service areas to identify efficiencies and savings. It is in this context that the Council must look at different ways of delivering services, including those that it has a statutory duty to provide, such as libraries.

The Council developed a new Library Strategy in 2014 which was the subject of public consultation. The strategy set out the Council's plan for the future of the library service and seeks to continue the delivery of a comprehensive and efficient library service for residents whilst reducing our operating costs.

One of the recommendations of this Strategy was to explore community management as an alternative way of delivering library services at community libraries in the context of reducing budgets. The Council are exploring this alternative to **avoid** closures or a reduction in the availability of services. The Council do not intend to close community libraries at this moment in time.

Nationally, just fewer than 400 libraries are managed by community organisations; this represents over 10% of public libraries in England. Community managed libraries have been successful for many other local authorities, including Bromley's neighbouring boroughs of Lewisham and Bexley.

Community management arrangements vary although some are reliant on volunteers, others may choose to employ staff to deliver library services. For example, some community managed libraries are managed by community or social enterprises, whilst others are



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Executive Director of Environment and Community Services, Nigel Davies.



The Government Standard

managed by local residents associations. At this stage, registrations of interest in managing Bromley's community libraries have been received from both types of organisation.

In any case, the Council has committed to providing dedicated members of staff to train and support community management organisations in the delivery of library services and to provide access to the qualified librarians providing back office support to the whole of Bromley's library network.

The Council will also work to minimise the impact of its proposals on the experienced staff that currently provide front line services in community libraries.

The Council will be scrutinising community management proposals to ensure that what is suggested is sustainable and meet some core requirements so that residents continue to benefit from a quality library service. You may be interested to know that many of the existing community managed libraries in the UK currently offer extended opening hours to those which were provided by the local authority, increasing access to services for vulnerable groups.

The Council could use its reserves to continue to fund its services at current levels, however this does not represent a long term solution. If the Council agreed to do this for all of the services affected by budget reductions, we would run out of reserves and be faced with the same difficult decisions, except that the Council would have lost the subsidy income it generates from those reserves. The Council is therefore not proposing to make use of its reserves in this way.

It is expected that the Council's Renewal & Recreation Portfolio Holder will consider recommendations in relation to community management at community libraries following the conclusion of a formal tender process in January 2016. Their decision will be based on a value for money assessment that takes into account the sustainability of proposals and the quality of the services that will be provided.

If you are not satisfied with the Council's response, you can request that your petition is referred to the next full Council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015 where you will have the opportunity to address the Council for up to five minutes.

Yours sincerely



Nigel Davies  
Executive Director for Environment & Community Services

cc Cllr Peter Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Renewal & Recreation  
cc Cllr Ian Payne, Chair of the Renewal & Recreation Policy Development & Scrutiny Committee