

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Community		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	29 August 2024 7 pm	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Deputy Chief Officer		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	12 Committee Response to the CEC Library Consultation		
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	<p>Cheshire East Council is looking to save £615k on library services over the next two years. This is part of a larger medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) 2024-2028 where CEC is seeking to save £100 million over four years in order to prevent the Council from going into Section 114.</p> <p>Cheshire East Council is consulting on a draft strategy on how to deliver library services on less budget. The consultation closes on 15 September. A report will go to CEC Community and Environment Committee on 14 November for a final decision.</p> <p>Anyone can respond to the consultation which can be found at: https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/libraries/Libraries-strategy-consultation.aspx</p> <p>This paper seeks to see if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Community Committee wishes to respond to the consultation and the proposals for Congleton Library 2. The Community Committee agrees with the way that CEC has graded the libraries 3. The Community Committee has any ideas it wishes to put forward to strengthen Congleton Library <p>Officers suggest that the Committee response should be in the form of a letter, rather than the standard survey, and should concentrate on Congleton's library's future rather than changes to other towns.</p>		
How the Strategy may impact on Congleton library	<p>Cheshire East Council proposes to divide the borough's libraries into three tiers. The tier allocated is based on core metrics (visitors, active users, issues), Library usage criteria (computer use, event attendance for adults, event attendance for children, registered users) and Public Health matters. (more details on the assessment matrix scoring can be downloaded via this link – CTC website)</p> <p>CEC supports 15 libraries. Congleton's metrics made it the fourth busiest library – after Crewe, Macclesfield and Nantwich- and puts us in Tier One Library Hubs along with the towns above and Wilmslow.</p> <p>Tier Two is proposed to consist of Alsager, Holmes Chapel, Knutsford, Poynton and Sandbach.</p> <p>Tier Three is proposed to be Alderley Edge, Bollington, Disley and Handford.</p> <p>The proposal is to call Tier One Libraries - Library Hubs, modelled on 'Community Hubs.' The focus will be on investment to maximise their potential as a hub. In addition to core</p>		

	<p>library services they are likely to offer free support around Employment, Skills and Education opportunities, personal finance, third-party community services and health services.</p> <p>Two town councils with larger libraries are already funding additional opening hours. The consultation at least implies that CEC will be looking to work with others on top-up funding and use of volunteers to provide access to some parts of services outside of 'staffed hours.'</p> <p>Officers initial thoughts, recommendations, observations and questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome the work that Cheshire East Library services have carried out in evaluating the services and commitment to providing library services. 2. Regret the position that the Borough Council is in that such drastic cuts are needed. 3. Approve the core principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the service offer for all and enhance it through the introduction of other complimentary council services focussed on enabling customers and public health and well-being - in locations where it is needed the most • Actively promote the service, increasing visitors and becoming more accessible to residents through the use of new technologies • Offer a library service delivered in partnership with local councils, communities and organisations with similar aims • Ensure that the service continues to be affordable for the residents of Cheshire East 4. In the previous consultation CTC expressed concerns about volunteers getting involved in core library roles. This is mentioned again in this consultation as a way of keeping library services operating. It appears to relate to tiers two and three. Does the Council wish to make a comment on this consultation? 5. Approve the assessment scoring matrix as a fair way to make a difficult decision. 6. Suggest in the scoring that they also consider, if they haven't already, accessibility of the libraries – in terms of transport networks and parking near the library and in terms of physical accessibility for the 16.2% of people with a disability. 7. Based on our knowledge of Congleton Library we wholeheartedly agree that Congleton Library should be a tier-one library. We are not aware of how the other libraries are used by their communities so would not want to comment on the suitability of their tier. 8. Emphasis that Congleton Town Council is keen to negotiate with CEC about further potential community use of the Congleton Library and see this service and building as fundamental for the vitality of the town. 9. Emphasis that Congleton is a rapidly growing key service centre, with the population in its immediate surrounds set to grow by almost 10,000. It is important to plan for the future and keep services local. 10. Contact has already been made to the Head of this service about the potential of CTC renting the ground floor of the library from CEC. This would include the toilet facilities which could, with some modifications, become formal public toilets
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	under the control of the town council. There has been no response to this proposal which would require some feasibility work. The basic principle would be we would pay a rent for the whole of the ground floor which would be additional income for CEC rather than contributing a sum of money with no additional benefit to the town.
Environmental Considerations	Providing local services in local hubs saves travel miles. Libraries are environmentally friendly with re-using resources.
Equality Considerations	Libraries are hubs for the community, servicing all ages and providing a safe and warm space for some of the people most in need in our community.
Financial Considerations	Conversations are ongoing at an officer level to understand the ask. This will be discussed at Business Planning and Budget Setting in September.
PROPOSAL	To respond to the Cheshire East Council consultation on the library strategy consultation using points 1-10 above, plus any additional points the committee wants included or points to exclude. Advice is sought on if you wish to respond to the point about volunteers working in libraries.