

Record Note of Library Working Group Meeting with Priti Patel MP

11th April 2019 at the Village Library

Present: Priti Patel MP and Stuart Gulleford (from the MP's office)

Peter Bates, Henry Bass, Danielle Whittle and David Pearl.

The Meeting was arranged to advise our MP of the Working Group's activities in support of (1) maintaining the current ECC run library service and, only should this be unsuccessful, (2) preserving the library as a community owned and operated facility. The Working Group sought the support of our MP in the pursuit of those objectives.

The meeting lasted 40 minutes and was pragmatic in its focus. PP was well briefed in advance of the meeting and discussed issues in an informal and constructive manner.

- PP noted that she did not support library closures and had informed ECC accordingly. She considered ECC's consultation process to have been poorly conducted. She had written to Cllr Finch on several occasions but received only standardised responses.
- PB outlined the building's history and the current position regarding ownership, i.e. the available documentation indicated that ECC is the legitimate owner. HB noted that there remained a possibility that the land upon which it stands was originally common land and this avenue was still being explored.
- PB advised that a Business Plan was being prepared to cover community ownership and operation. This included identifying both the types of activities (clubs, training etc) that the building would be used for in addition to library services, and lists of volunteers to run the facility.
- DP noted that the Business Plan contained only outline financials as we currently had very limited information on capital and operating costs from ECC. It was agreed that ECC should be required to provide more financial data to community groups who were submitting 'Expressions of Interest' to allow coherent plans to be developed. At the same time ECC should not be allowed to claim that the preparation of Business Plans by community groups was an endorsement of its closure policy.
- PP requested a copy of the draft Business Plan and offered assistance in its development (she intended to contact KJ directly).
- The issue of funding – both the initial capital and ongoing costs was discussed. It was noted that the Parish Clerk was active in pursuing funding options. PP noted that the independent charity the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) could be a source.
- It was noted that the £2m p.a. saving that the ECC believes it will make by disposing of the Tier 3 and 4 libraries is a very small part of its annual budget (*actually ca. 0.2%*) and that closing libraries could be expected to add to ECC's costs in addressing social isolation of the elderly.
- PP advised that she would continue to resist library closures and would lobby in support of the Parish as it develops its plans.

- PP indicated that she considered WB library to be a good example to feature in her representations regarding the future of library services in her constituency. Internal and external photos were taken.

Prior to the meeting commencing DP had noted that the UK Government announced on Monday 8th April the beginning of a campaign entitled “Chat, Play and Read” as part of its initiative to improve children’s language skills (*Extract from Minister’s statement attached*). In this the Department for Education stated that “trips to the library” and “reading a library book together” provided opportunities to children that “can have a huge impact”. PP advised that she was aware of this announcement and noted that ECC’s proposal to close libraries ran counter to this initiative.

DJP/11.4.19

Department for Education’s “Chat, Play and Read” Campaign

Children and Families Minister, Nadhim Zahawi

“We want to create a generation of confident learners – and parents are a child’s first and best teacher, helping to get them talking and communicating before they reach the classroom. You don’t need expensive books or toys to help children develop literacy skills. It can be as simple as reading a library book together or making up your own stories – little interactions can have a huge impact.”

Children from lower income families are more likely to fall behind at school compared to their peers and once you’re behind it’s hard to catch up. That’s why we are launching a major new campaign later this year to help parents incorporate Chat, Play and Read into their daily life, putting their children on track to succeed.”

8th April 2019

Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust

“Every seemingly small interaction between a parent and a child is a great opportunity to fill that child’s world with words: bath time can be a great time to sing a song together, bus journeys can provide opportunities to talk about what you see around you, and a trip to the library will enable you to choose a book to take home and share together. To make these small changes part of normal life, we must support the people, places and services that regularly come into contact with parents and children to promote positive messages around the three areas we know support a quality home learning environment: Chat, Play and Read.”

5th April 2019