



To whom it may concern on the Priorities and Resources Review Panel

Saving £297,500 from the Library Service is bound to be painful for Torbay and is being planned whilst the outcome of Maria Miller MP & Ed Vaisey MP's Consultation on Public Libraries has not published its findings; although they are expected in September.

I took part in this consultation with the Dept of Media, Culture, Sport and Communities stating:

"The current reduction in services at local level due to central government dictat has denied many of the public access to a place that has been freely available to all since 1850. Already in Torbay there is no scope to use a library after work, with limited opening at weekends on Saturday morning only. Other opportunities for betterment have been lost across the country with cuts to adult education.

Libraries are warm, welcoming, and accessible, bringing all ages together. They offer good access for disabled people with physical ramps and lifts, hearing loops and large print books. Small children are welcomed to cosy reading corners with bright books to stimulate their imaginations. No doubt most politicians started their reading journey in a library. For single parents and others with little income, the library is not only a refuge but also an opportunity to engage, maybe take up learning successfully after failure at school. Free access to computers is essential as more and more services need to be completed online.

Older people can master the skills needed to use a PC, take out books that stimulate the mind, develop new skills and interests, or just pop in for a companionable chat and to read the daily paper. Local studies are supported, as is research into family history. In Brixham our pro-active Friends group raises funds for essentials that the Library Service cannot afford, we also offer a community programme in this central venue.

There is clearly a need for access at all times from the electorate. This is proven by the wide range of successful classes and activities offered by the Friends of Brixham Library (FoBL) outside library opening hours - both afternoons and in the evenings. The FoBL have shown it is possible to generate money and goodwill rather than cut the service. There is a need for more cultural activities for all ages that are affordable and accessible.

The FoBL feel that our libraries are best placed to become community hubs offering education, information and culture. The 600 people who took up our programme last year demonstrated that this is the way forward.

The government needs to give clear guidance to local authorities on their support for libraries which are a soft target in the current swingeing round of cuts. This consultation must result in the funding to ensure our libraries are up to date and thriving."

I note that Torbay's review of library services draws the same points from users:

"I visit the library with my children and it is difficult since the reduction in hours last year. We cannot take another cut in hours. I rely on their books to help my children with reading and development we need the library to help with education and support."

"An important meeting/social place particularly for the elderly, somewhere warm and safe and a good all round information centre."

“The library is far too important to consider closing and the help given in the library needs to be of a high standard which might not be possible if it is run by volunteers.”

“Use the venue for night school type courses

“Establish regular talks and short courses from communities and organisation. Charge a small fee to attend.”

“We would ask you to consider new ways of providing a library service it for the 21st century which offers more choice and increased activities rather than reductions that will ultimately make the service non-viable.”

In your decision-making regarding the existing service reductions, please bear in mind that every library closed is an opportunity lost. The national consultation can be expected to encourage a move to a digital library service offering a wide range of services. As this will require funding I anticipate the government will find it. Surely, Torbay should await the recommendations before implementing cuts to the service.

The profile from your review is predominantly older users, aged 35-75, the majority of whom are retired. Only 110 younger people gave feedback from the 2038 who took part in the review. Their feedback when the caravan came to Brixham was there was no WiFi in the Library, but if there were, they would use it.

It is essential we maintain libraries for the future with modern facilities. There is a need for more cultural activities for all ages that are affordable and accessible. The Council needs to support and ‘grow’ the Friends groups across the Bay to encourage more opportunities for learning and social activities as well as employing well trained front line staff.

Jenny Harriman
Chair of Friends of Brixham Library
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