SAVE A FULL LIBRARY SERVICE

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PRODUCED BY DENBIGHSHIRE'S LIBRARY STAFF WITH THE SUPPORT OF THEIR TRADE UNION UNISON

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Summary

1. Problems with the process

1.1. The rationale for the scale of the cuts is unclear

The paper issued to staff claims 'an unsustainable budget shortfall of between £10m and £28m for the next financial year'. This is an unacceptably vague assertion. The margin of error of £18m is so large as to cover completely different scenarios with completely different requirements. Separately UNISON have been told that between £8m and £15m are required. It is necessary for there to be clarity on what is required at a corporate level rather than the current policy which appears to be cut as much as you can even if this potentially means £18m or more of unnecessary cuts and untold damage to services, the reputation of the council and lives of affected staff and their families.

We would usually expect a proposal for service change of this magnitude to include:

- detailed figures of the savings requirement
- a rationale of why the cut needs to fall on this particular service
- an options appraisal which considers a range of possible options weighing the strengths and weaknesses including the impact on services and staff as well as the finance.

1.2. The Wellbeing Impact assessment fails to consider some key issues

1.2.1 The library has services for groups of people with specific protected characteristics but these have not been involved in the writing of the Wellbeing Impact Assessment

Disabled people receive many services through the libraries including blue badges, RADAR keys and for information advice and support but representative groups for disabled people have not been involved in the impact assessment.

Women's groups utilise the libraries as a safe reporting space and for information, advice and support but representatives of these groups have not been involved in the impact assessment.

LGBTQ+ groups utilise the libraries as a safe reporting space and for information, advice and support but representatives of these groups have not been involved in the impact assessment.

Older people's groups utilise the libraries as a social space and for information, advice and support but representatives of these groups have not been involved in the impact assessment.

1.3.　The public consultation is insufficiently detailed and unclear

Since the launch of the public consultation library staff have received many submitted forms but all had fielded many questions about what the options actually are, and what will be affected by the proposals. It is clear from this that some members of the public believe they are being asked to choose between accepting the proposal or facing the prospect of all libraries being closed. As far as we are concerned this is not the case and such confusion has only arisen due to a lack of clarity in the consultation document itself.

In other cases it is clear that members of the public do not realise that the One Stop Shop service will also be affected by the reductions of service believing this only affects the 'book service'.

We believe it would be much better to have consulted the public on a range of options rather than the approach taken.

2. Arguments against the current proposals

2.1.　The problems of process outlined above mean the current proposal is untenable

Without a proper understanding of the savings requirement, without the consideration of alternative options and without the benefit of a comprehensive Wellbeing Impact Assessment it would be totally irresponsible for Cabinet to approve the proposals in their current form.

2.2.　The proposals would see libraries closed at some of their busiest times

Our analysis of the new proposed opening hours and data on visitor numbers, available from our website here, shows that the proposals would see the libraries closed during some of their busiest times.

2.3.　The negative impact on service users and partners would be enormous

Libraries are a key source of books and vital to a literate society developing reading skills throughout the community. Reading books benefits both your physical and mental health, and those benefits can last a lifetime. They begin in early childhood and continue through the senior years.

- Reading strengthens your brain
- Increases your ability to empathize
- Builds your vocabulary
- Helps prevent age-related cognitive decline
- Reduces stress
- Prepares you for a good night's rest
- Helps alleviate depression symptoms

But libraries are not just about books. The Council's One Stop Shop facilities are run in each of the libraries (with the exception of Ruthin). For the vast majority of people these provide their only means of face to face contact with the council's services. We detail the DCC services affected below, but libraries also operate as a community hub and are essential to many services offered to the community by a multitude of providers. Examples include:

- **Banking service** – the presence of Barclays service in Llangollen library is a lifeline in a rural community without other access to banks.

- **Post Office**- rural outreach

- **Transport for Wales** – information and bus passes

- **Wrexham Social Services –** utilise the library as a safe meeting space for families placed in Denbighshire.

Many more deliver advice or training sessions from libraries, utilise library meeting spaces, access to computers and reference books and receive referrals through library staff signposting including:

- **Citizen's Advice**

- **Working Denbighshire, Job Centre and Working Wales**

- **Coleg Llandrillo and Coleg Cambria**

- **Food bank – Trussell Trust**

- **Homeless charities the Wallich and Shelter**

- **Vision Support**

- **Audiology**

- **Women's Centre**

- **Victim Support**

- **Help Me Quit (Stop Smoking)**

- **Hafod**

- **Adfeiriad**

- **Hafal**

- **Red Cross**

- **Local schools**

- **VIVA**

- **Unique**

- **Nurseries**

- **DVSC**

- **Baby Basics**

- **Stepping Stones**

- **Good Things Foundation (combatting digital exclusion)**

These are services that people rely on. If the cuts go ahead our ability to provide all these services, and those DCC services listed below, will be compromised due to staffing levels and time constraints. Many of the enquiries are time sensitive and this will impact on us offering an efficient and timely service.

2.4. The negative impact on other DCC services would be enormous

By removing capacity from the library these proposals jeopardise our abilities to provide these services and support these groups. They will not remove the demand for these services. Instead, they will transfer that demand directly on to the partner agencies and other DCC departments that rely on the library service to act as their 'front of house' facility.

Either Denbighshire County Council begins to fail its citizens or these demands will have to be supported by increasing capacity in other areas despite the fact that the customer services functions, carried out by the libraries, have been deliberately centralised in this way precisely to save resources and meet customer needs. Each department does not need to cover these functions through its own staff while the libraries can support them but without that support the impact is potentially huge.

Libraries support the Benefits system through:

- Reporting via email notification of change of circumstance including no. of occupants, rent increase, wage increase/decrease, change of personal details, change of benefits received
- Assisting with making payments on kiosk by cash and card and also processing cheque payments through Pay360
- Assistance completing forms including Council Tax Reduction applications and Discretionary Housing Payment applications (online/paper)
- Providing telephone access to benefits department where further information is needed. Speaking on behalf of customers who are unable /don't feel confident communicating their issues.
- Scanning and emailing proofs to support applications made online/changes in circumstance.
- Supporting customers in accessing any additional benefit schemes they are entitled to such as the Winter Fuel Support Scheme
- Supporting customers in making applications for School Uniform Grants and Free School Meals

- Taking payment for housing benefit overpayment

Libraries support the Council Tax systems by:

- Assisting with the processing and setting up of direct debit mandates
- Assisting with applications for council tax discounts and exemptions
- Liaising between the council tax department and customers to solve any problems
- Take payments for council tax by card, cash or cheque
- Assisting with reporting a change in circumstance

Libraries support the Business Rates system by:

- Taking payments for business rates by cash, card and cheque
- Taking Rhyl BID payments

Libraries support the Refuse service by:

- Processing payments for garden waste bins
- Ordering replacement containers and taking payments
- Arranging bulky household collections and taking payment
- Reporting missed bin collections
- Distributing food waste bags
- Processing trade waste and trade recycling bag purchases
- Completing Van Ban applications and taking proofs to support applications
- Booking slots at recycling park

Libraries support the Licensing service by:

- Assisting in completion of hackney carriage/private hire driver and vehicle licence application forms, taking payment and scanning forms and proofs to Licensing Department.
- Taking payment for other licences e.g. small lotteries, street traders and providing confirmation of this to the licensing department.

Libraries support the Homelessness service by:

- Providing telephone access for customers to report homelessness
- Scanning documents to the Homelessness Prevention Team
- Signposting customers to My Home Denbighshire

Libraries support the Housing Service by:

- Providing telephone access to the Housing Register (SARTH)
- Scanning application and medical forms to the Housing Department
- Taking payment for housing rents

- Providing telephone access for council house repairs (often an emergency)
- Reporting anti-social behaviour by council tenants

Libraries support the Welsh Government's Blue Badge service by:

- Completing online application for those who are unable to do so due to digital exclusion (minimum of one hour staff time required for full application appointments)
- Taking photos of applicants and scanning over supporting evidence to the council's Blue Badge department
- Receiving and disposing of expired blue badges and arranging and taking payment for lost badges

Libraries support Social Services by:

- Referring customers to Talking Point sessions held in the library
- Providing access to food bank referrals via SPOA
- Taking invoice payments for care fees by card, cash and cheque
- Providing telephone access for contacting Social Services

Libraries support the Heritage service by:

- Receiving and passing on donations of artefacts brought in by customers
- Staffing school visits to Rhyl Museum
- Maintenance of Museum equipment

Libraries support the Education Service by:

- Assisting with school admission forms
- Providing books and other reference materials
- Providing access to online educational content
- Providing early years educational service including BOOKSTART
- Providing a venue and resources for lifelong learning in partnership with the colleges

Libraries support the Parking service by:

- Issuing long stay and seasonal car park permits, concessionary parking permits and visitor parking permits
- Processing resident parking permits
- Processing change of address or vehicle details
- Replacing lost permits
- Processing parking dispensations
- Taking payment for parking fines and assisting with parking penalty charges
- Reporting broken car park payment machines

Libraries support the Environmental Health service by:

- Providing a face to face means of reporting fly tipping, pollution and infestation/hygiene matters

Libraries support the Highways service by:

- Providing a face to face means of reporting pot holes, street lighting, street furniture and traffic issues.

Libraries support the Planning service by:

- Assisting the public in viewing planning applications online
- Displaying plans for major projects

Libraries support the Transport service by:

- Completion of online applications via Transport for Wales for over 60s and Disabled bus passes including taking photo and copies of proofs
- Assistance in applying for a disabled pass with companion included
- Providing bus timetables (no longer available in printed format)

Libraries support the Facilities service by:

- Processing and payment of applications for RADAR keys

Libraries support the Finance service by:

- Processing payment of miscellaneous invoices for services provided/ fees incurred

2.5. The negative impact on staff would be enormous

These proposals will have a huge impact on staff. The proposals carry with them the threat of a substantial number of job losses or a massive reduction of hours for already low paid individuals struggling to cope with the cost of living crisis.

There are lots of euphemisms for firing people – downsizing, outsourcing, rationalisation, organisational change, company review, restructuring and redundancy. Irrespective of which labels organisations use, people's emotional reactions tend to be the same. Apart from the financial implications, job loss can mean a significant loss of identity and an individual's self-confidence may be eroded. In addition a person may feel excluded from society…The most common reaction to job loss is physical shock accompanied by some of the classic symptoms associated with grief – disbelief, denial, anger, feeling stunned, becoming withdrawn, loss of confidence, and a feeling of 'why me?' This is particularly true when an individual had no prior warning or sense that they would lose their job.

Job loss, like any other form of major loss can have many of the emotions akin to those of bereavement.[i]

Even where job losses are avoided the dramatic cut in people's hours will force many people into in-work poverty and place an increasing burden on the tax payer through the benefits system. In-work poverty, is already a reality for many local government workers.[ii]

2.6. Servicing the same public demand but within the reduced timeframes would require more staff at any given time

The proposal suggests that by retaining the same number of staff (FTE) but for less time, it will be possible to meet the same level of demand despite the reduced hours. This clearly is not going to be the case since library staffing levels have been carefully managed and are already aligned to meet the current demand. This includes the regular, almost perpetual, use of relief staff at the busier libraries at the busier times.

3. Arguments for retaining a full library service

Our libraries serve a social and educational need. *Public libraries provide positive outcomes for people and communities in a variety of ways, beyond simply providing access to books. They contribute to the formation of human capital, the maintenance of mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusivity and community cohesion.*[iii]

3.1. Libraries engage children of all ages

Libraries offer pre-school singing and rhyme sessions, summer reading challenges for older children and direct support for local schools.

> *Libraries play a key role in providing books for children: research has shown that where library usage has increased for an individual, the most common reason given was 'I wanted to encourage my child to read books', selected by 20% of people, closely followed by 'I like to read/wish to read more' (18%)[iv].*

3.2. Libraries help to combat social exclusion and promote health and wellbeing

Denbighshire includes some of the most deprived communities in Wales as well as pockets of rural poverty and an aging population struggling with the cost of living crisis and social isolation. Libraries play a huge role in supporting residents to access digital facilities, adult education, advice, cultural events and all sorts of other support, including book prescription schemes and many other services. These all have positive impacts on wellbeing.

> *Research funded by Arts Council England in 2015 found that after controlling for a wide range of factors, library use is positively associated with subjective wellbeing, with library users having higher life satisfaction, happiness and sense of purpose in life.*
>
> *Being a regular library user is also associated with a 1.4 per cent increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health, valued at a medical-cost saving associated with library engagement at £1.32 per person per year. The aggregate*

NHS cost savings across the library-using English population is £27.5 million per year.[v]

3.3. Library facilities allow the unemployed to get online to search for work

In addition our libraries in Denbighshire host Working Denbighshire 1-2-1 mentoring sessions and training events, as well as Rhyl library hosting the Working Denbighshire Service itself.

3.4. Libraries are vital safe spaces for vulnerable members of the community

Libraries are safe spaces not only as they participate in the North Wales Police Scheme for acting as alternative reporting centres for Hate Crime and Domestic Violence but also because they offer a public space in which many and diverse people and groups feel comfortable.

They are utilised by the LGBTQ+ community, particularly the trans community as a venue where people can be themselves without fear of harm.

They are also havens of tranquillity for many people including neuro-diverse people and people with learning disabilities who thrive in the quiet and calming atmosphere not offered by any other public space.

Our libraries (particularly in Rhyl library) are used by many homeless families and individuals that are in temporary or poor-quality accommodation without a suitable social space.

3.5. Libraries support flexible working in DCC and for businesses across the county

Since the pandemic we have seen a massive increase in remote workers using libraries, taking advantage of the free desk space, wi-fi, charging points and quiet environment. Remote workers, frequently do not have an appropriate space in which to work at home or struggle with the additional costs of home working, such as energy bills. Having access to these facilities at their local library is crucial to their well-being and ability to do their job.

3.6 Libraries have become a vital warm space in this cost-of-living crisis

Our libraries have embraced the Croeso Cynnes - Warm Welcome scheme. The scheme is so important for the reasons explained on the Warm Welcome website and reproduced below.

> **Poverty** - The rising cost-of-living means that too many vulnerable people are falling into debt and struggling to keep warm or buy the food or essentials they need.

> **Safety** - The top reasons visitors had for coming to a Warm Welcome space were its warmth, its safety, to meet new and old friends, and because it was free.

Loneliness - Across Britain over 7 million people experience chronic loneliness. We all lived through the pandemic and experienced the impact of social isolation. Feeling isolated and alone can affect your physical and mental health.

Cold - Over half of visitors would have been at home with the heating off if they had not been at a Warm Welcome Space.[vi]

3.7   Libraries help to combat digital exclusion and promote digital inclusion.

Digital inclusion is a social issue.

A lack of digital skills and access can have a huge negative impact on a person's life, leading to poorer health outcomes and a lower life expectancy, increased loneliness and social isolation, less access to jobs and education.

It can mean paying more for essentials, financial exclusion, an increased risk of experiencing poverty. People who are digitally excluded also lack a voice and visibility in the modern world, as government services and democracy increasingly move online.

What's more, it's those already at a disadvantage – through age, education, income, disability, or unemployment – who are most likely to be missing out, further widening the social inequality gap.[vii]

At present the One Stop Shops are the only place customers can make council enquiries in person. Due to the channel shift towards online/telephone services numerous customers are unable to access online services making them digitally excluded. The Library and One Stop Shop helps to break down this barrier by offering a face to face service. It is vital that a full, consistent frontline service continues to be provided to ensure that nobody is excluded from engaging with the council and other services.

Barriers to digital inclusion include:

- Voice problems
- Mental health issues
- Learning difficulties
- Stammering
- Hearing impairment
- Neurological impairment
- Stroke
- Head injury
- Parkinson's disease
- Dementia
- Age
- Education
- Financial difficulties – unable to afford own mobile phone / internet connection

We often fill in forms online with people who struggle to do this themselves and provide assistance to build their confidence in being able to do this independently. Also the public network PCs and free WIFI facilities allow customers who cannot finance their own device/ internet connection to access online services.

4. Alternative Options

4.1. Alternative savings that can be made within the Library Service

We have based our arguments on demonstrating the broad benefits of the Libraries Service as the front face of the council, a valued public service that brings huge benefits and is a preventative service that relives pressure (including cost pressure) on other services. We believe the library service deserves to be fully funded and should be a priority for the council, as we are sure consultation will demonstrate it is a priority for the citizens of Denbighshire.

This said, we would like to see the remaining time we have within the year used for a period in which staff can work together with managers to try to find savings that are not so harmful to the service. Staff are the vital resource and trusted support for the public that enables the service to flourish as a community hub.

We are asking the staff and managers be allowed the time to complete further work on potential savings to avoid redundancies that in themselves may be costly including, review use of payment kiosks, review relief staff hours.

Finally, we believe libraries have evolved to be **the** essential community hub, delivering their core mission in line with their statutory mandate from Welsh Government, and bringing together a broad array of council, public agency and voluntary services. Libraries are already essential but there is scope to travel further down this road.

A review is needed to investigate what further services could be delivered through libraries including our departmental commitments and our grants and commissioned services. Utilising the space and staff resources we already have should be a consideration in service planning, procurement and commissioning.

5.1 Sources of revenue that could be accessed by the Library Service

5.1.1 Revenue from room hire can be substantially increased

There is great potential to generate an increase in the income libraries currently produce. Libraries need to embrace the business opportunities within their communities which will provide much needed income generation. There are several viable options which can achieve this:

Libraries have rooms that can be hired out to agencies, community groups, businesses or members of the public, However, the full potential has not yet been realised. Two elements need to be explored:

- Where services using the library are supported by grant funding, or other revenue external to the council then these services should be charged rent to utilise the library space.
- There is significant scope to advertise room space in libraries and enter into longer 'timeshare' style bookings rather than one off arrangements.

5.1.2 Libraries already work with many community groups who receive grants. Joint projects can bring in additional funds

UK government produces a web page entitled potential funding sources for libraries.[viii] The page details a range of funds that are available to support community groups that utilise libraries. We believe there is significant scope to develop joint proposals along with partners that can gain access to these funds for specific projects and which can relieve pressure which would otherwise rest on the libraries' budget.

5.1.3 Increase prices of printing and photocopying and offer a printing service to GPs and other support providers

Currently the revenue generated by printing and copying in libraries is relatively modest. However, there are two changes that should be considered. Firstly, a general increase in the rates is possible whilst still remaining below commercial rates.

Secondly, library staff frequently support individuals with completing paperwork from a huge range of support providers including GPs and many third sector organisations who support citizens. We believe these organisations could be offered a service that included the printing of their forms and supporting the citizens to film them out, for a fee.

[i] The Emotional and Psychological Effects of Redundancy | Counselling Practice Matters
[ii] Unison Cost Of living - YouTube
[iii] https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/001-library-facts/#:~:text=Libraries%20play%20a%20key%20role,read%20more'%20(18%25).

[iv] https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/001-library-facts/#:~:text=Libraries%20play%20a%20key%20role,read%20more'%20(18%25).
[v] https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/001-library-facts/#:~:text=Libraries%20play%20a%20key%20role,read%20more'%20(18%25).

[vi] https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Warm-Spaces-Croeso-Cynnes.aspx

[vii] The digital divide - Good Things Foundation
[viii] Potential funding sources for libraries - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)