

Chinnor Library Group

Summary of current response to Oxfordshire County Council Consultation Documents.

1 OCC have abandoned their original proposal to close 20 libraries, which would have represented a very serious cut in service to communities, in exchange for a different reduction in service, by proposing to withdraw funding for either one third of staff in some libraries and two thirds in others. Big libraries will not be affected. Chinnor would see a one third reduction. The documents do not show what the savings would be either across the County or in individual libraries. It is not clear that the savings have even been calculated but a spokesperson is reported as saying that the overall savings represent 10% instead of the original 20% proposed. The Leader of the Council Keith Mitchell is reported as saying that the public have opted to save libraries at the expense of other vital services. The public have done no such thing, the Council has. OCC claim that their proposal is supported by statistics and they have used tables and figures which are difficult for the layman to understand.

2 The Consultation gives no indication that OCC have searched for or will seek efficiency savings in the Library Service apart from suggesting spending money supplied by property developers. Many communities, including Chinnor, asked them to consider cutting opening hours across all branches to achieve savings. There is no indication that any consideration was given to this. Chinnor Library Group believe that there is considerable scope for financial savings in this as well as in other ways. Our Group will carry out its own user survey to find out what our users want from the library, what other services they would like and when they want it to be open. There is no evidence that OCC has carried out a user survey as part of the consultation.

3 OCC propose that the staff reductions be balanced by communities providing volunteers. The documents make no mention of Criminal Records Bureau checks on volunteers, selection, training, attendance scheduling and management. One action group recently sought a meeting with the Chief Librarian who suggested that checks would have to be paid for by communities. These aspects do not seem to have been addressed in preparing the documents.

4 Our Group had hoped to see OCC addressing operating costs in detail. For example electricity costs over £4,000 a year at Chinnor which is 28% of the total library service electricity bill for the South East Group* of libraries. Our Group has identified several causes for this high cost and it will press OCC to carry out its own investigations. We can and will point to other costs which need examining.

5 OCC have missed a golden opportunity to carry out a root and branch reform of the library service so as to provide a good and efficient service to the public. Their proposal is merely a reduction in professional service to the public.

6 Our Group is concerned that money received from developers of land in Chinnor and specifically required from them for library infrastructure in Chinnor will not be used by OCC directly for that purpose. The Group has not been reassured by remarks made by Council officers. OCC have not co-operated with our Group by allowing us to examine the developer agreements. We will continue to press for access to the documents.

7 For those with computers the documents can be seen at
<http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/portal/publicsite/councilservices/libraryserviceconsultation>

8 We encourage the public to examine the consultation documents (and not just to rely on the Group's comments) and to give us their own views to Maxine Pickard c/o the Parish Council Office or maxinepickard@talktalk.net

14 June 2011

* South East Group = Benson, Chinnor, Goring, Henley, Sonning Common, Thame, Wallingford, Watlington, Wheatley, Woodcote.