

Minutes of Pittenweem Library group public meeting:

Thursday 18th February, 7.00pm, New Town Hall

1. Present:

Respecting online privacy, only those present at the meeting as organisers or public officials are noted by name. However, as a public meeting, a full set of minutes listing those attending or speaking is available on request

Ginny Mackie (Chair), Lorna Foote (Minutes), Georgina Stutchfield (Pittenweem Community Trust), Janice Christianson (Pittenweem Library Group), Cllr John Docherty (Fife Councillor), plus:

Representatives from Pittenweem Community Council (x 3), Crail Community Council (x 2), Colinsburgh & Kilconquar Community Council (x 1), Freuchie Community Council (x 1), Pittenweem Community Trust (x 2), Pittenweem residents (x 16)

2. Apologies

7 Apologies were received

3. Objectives of meeting

GM opened the meeting by thanking all attendees and particularly thanking those from 3 other N.E. Fife groups for coming along to join us. She summarised the meeting objectives:

- Provide an update of the situation to date, including information from Fife Council, ourselves and other threatened libraries
- Consider the two options of continuing the fight against closure of all libraries, or planning for an alternative delivery model.
- Gather some market research and ideas to feed into the project plan.
- Form a core steering group to take plans forward
- Add to our list of potential volunteers

A key input to this meeting is the outcome of the Fife Council meeting which took place today. GM noted that Cllr JD had come straight from that session to attend the Pittenweem Library meeting to provide an update.

GM noted a key consideration for the meeting – that there are still two areas of focus for the group – the continued campaign to get Fife Council (FC) and Fife Cultural Trust (FCT) to reverse their decision on all library closures and to continue to provide the service AND to look at the alternative delivery option in the event that there is no success.

4. Outline of situation to date

Cllr JD provided an update from the meeting, key notes summarised below:

- Vote on the library report submission was split along party lines with Labour being supported by the independents, for closure
- There were a number of issues and questions noted about the submitted report, including
 - equality assessment (only one done instead of one per planned Library Closure.)
Equality characteristics missed from the assessment e.g. age demographics (specifically young people in Crail and older people in Pittenweem), faith group in Colinsburgh
 - meetings between councillors and FCT had been asked for but not arranged

- report was 480 pages – submission to meeting had been summarised to 4 pages
- FCT equality policy is inconsistent leading to lack of confidence in their equality assessment
- Vote therefore taken on a submission where accuracy is questionable
- The Freuchie representative asked if the competence of the assessment was questioned in the meeting. Cllr JD said that it has been questioned and was answered in the affirmative.

GS noted that for Pittenweem, the FC/FCT questionnaire has been the focus of activity with Pittenweem Community Trust (PiCT) taking the lead on leafleting the town, preparing a survey to gather public opinion and publishing details online. She also noted that getting any information or face-to-face engagement with FC/FCT has been difficult.

5. Feedback from other local groups

Crail –they had leafleted the entire village but that the response was underwhelming. A couple of retired teachers had volunteered to help but there had been little additional take up.

Colinsburgh and Kilconquhar –they had raised an early objection to the proposed closure. They had an existing user group from a much earlier threat and so they could mobilise that. They submitted a note of interest but additionally wrote to FCT to register their dissatisfaction with the questionnaire which seemed dictatorial. Given the decision of the FC meeting today they are likely to go with a plan for alternative delivery and would like to work with other local groups to create a wider organisation – although also noting the additional complexity that multiple groups will bring.

Cllr JD noted that there is another Cllr (George Kay – Kinghorn/Burntisland) who is supportive and would like to be involved. He also noted that we need to consider the state of the existing buildings – if FC/FCT hand them over to alternative delivery organisations then they should be fit for purpose – taking into account all of the appropriate equality characteristics.

It was noted that Lundin Links had submitted a note of interest but that seemed to have been ignored since it is one of the libraries to be closed this year.

Freuchie –they did not put in an expression of interest – their community would be too small to run the library and their stance is very much that the facility should be publicly and professionally run. The Freuchie representative read out a draft statement, which when finalised will be issued to the press. Key points:

- Shameful situation
- Calamitous consultation
- £40,000 savings across Fife – a very, very, small percentage of overall spend
- The impact to the affected communities of closure will be large and significant – especially in comparison to the overall cost
- The people who will be heaviest hit are the most disadvantaged – and the specific libraries singled out for closure are those communities most in need
- The £40k proposed savings by closing these libraries is approximately one third of the cost to FC of the chief executive
- The vote to close these libraries means that the battle has just begun

He said that we now need to question FC/FCT in detail on the issues associated with the report, submission and vote, specifically on the missing information from the submitted summary and the inaccuracies and inconsistency in the report. This questioning could lead to an approach to the appropriate ombudsman and may eventually lead to a legal challenge.

A Pittenweem resident questioned the very low costs of running the library. It was confirmed that they are that low. She suggested that we could look at raising funds to support FC/FCT to keep the libraries open.

Colinsburgh raised the question about FCT's management of the libraries for the past 5 years. It was noted that while they have generated funds for parks, theatres etc., they have not done the same for libraries.

A Pittenweem resident noted that FCT do not make any money from the libraries – although there are opportunities for doing so.

6. Scope for continuing opposition to closure

JC highlighted the Ambition and Opportunity publication (a copy was passed round the meeting) which can be downloaded and is also available in hard copy to order. This is the Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015 - 2020. This will be a particularly important publication in the event that we need to go for an alternative delivery option – but could also be important in the argument to FC/FCT to keep the libraries open. Available from <www.scottishlibraries.org>

A PICT director questioned the statement in the FC report that FC wants to close both Pittenweem town halls. GS said that she had asked FC about this but has been told that we can only talk about this when we have a meeting. Pittenweem Community Council representative has been assured that the New Town Hall is being kept open.

A Pittenweem resident asked about the role of mobile libraries in the context of local library closure. Cllr JD noted that the mobile libraries are not completely accessible. The Freuchie representative noted that FC/FCT have said they intend having an additional 30 stops for their mobile libraries and that these will take local library closure into account. However they currently have 3 mobile units reducing to 2 units – so their ability to make the extra stops is questionable. Cllr JD noted that the stops in each place are planned to be 30-60 minutes. GM said it used to be here all day on 2 sites.

The Crail representative noted that Crail CC has details of the cost per book/loan issue in local libraries vs. mobile libraries and that mobile costs are much greater. Freuchie agreed that the costs are based on many additional steps in the process (stocking vans, travel between sites, etc.)

JC noted that we need to get details of the costs of decommissioning and take these into account when looking at the overall costs to FC/FCT.

LF noted that the current costs to FC/FCT, while unexpectedly low, will not be the same costs if an alternative delivery was put in place. Small organisations with services decoupled from the larger ones will have to start again and will not get the same benefits as the large organisations. Freuchie and others raised the additional points of the cost of books – bulk buying and copyright associated with lending rather than single use purchase.

GM noted that following a meeting with Stephen Gethins (local MP) he has offered advice and support. But the local community also need to lobby other local councillors and other local and national authorities. A call to action for all attending>:

Send letters or emails to Fife councillors – there is an online petition – Keep Fife Libraries Open (<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/keep-fife-s-libraries-open>) and a facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/KeepFifeLibrariesOpen/info/?tab=page_info).

A PICT representative suggested that we should consider getting articles into the local press. GM agreed and said that we should take a photograph of the group before we leave tonight to include in a press release.

A Pittenweem resident asked what role is being taken by the Pittenweem Community Council. Representatives from the Community Council said that they are supportive of the work of the group but that at a meeting in November there was a decision that the CC would not be active in the campaign.

GS asked all to get in touch with GM/GS if they had any personal stories about the importance of the library to people in the community – these personal stories can support and drive the campaign to retain the current service.

The Freuchie representative suggested that the next steps should be:

- Have the FC decision making process properly scrutinised
- Look at why early recommendations were not included in the report
- What impact there might have been on the voting if the noted issues had been represented in the summary report
- Had the councillors been misled by the summarisation of the report
- Contact the Chief Executive of FC
- Look at all possible routes of appeal including the local authorities and appropriate ombudsman
- Legal action to be considered – but as a last resort

He noted that a friendly (anonymous) lawyer had looked into this and agreed that there is probably a case to be made.

He believes that while it is good and right to continue with the human interest stories, they need to be backed up with hard facts and evidence.

GM asked if it might be good for all group together to prepare and send a single legal notice of intent to councillors to say that we are proceeding. The Freuchie representative agreed that we could do that but we need to be careful to do it when the time is right. We need first to ensure that we have solid grounds for appeal – was the process followed, was the report to the council accurate, will any alternatively delivered service be fit for purpose – meeting legal obligations and required level of service.

A consideration raised by Freuchie and Cllr JD – the cost to the families and individuals in the community of going to alternative facilities. Examples given were Freuchie to nearest library for parent and 2 kids – more than £8.00 by bus. Crail to Leven for one person by bus £7.40 (before impending bus price rise).

Cllr JD made an offer of help to carry out the Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) and explained their importance in this context. They assess the impact of change in relation to specific characteristics, namely age, gender, disability, transgender, race, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, faith and belief. These are required by law to be carried out. It is believed that these were not carried out properly or completely, and it may have been done using old, not current legislation. FCT are responsible for carrying these out – and there are questions about who did them and their training for do it.

JC noted that there has been poor involvement from FCT to the current staff employed in the library – provision of books and information has been poor. She also noted that there is no doubt that libraries are best when run by professionally trained staff.

7. Moving forward for Pittenweem: Planning an alternative delivery model

GS noted that following FC's vote today we now have some breathing space, that we recognise that a voluntarily run alternative delivery model would not be as good as a professionally run library, and that we need to carry out market research in Pittenweem to determine the will within the town to maintain the library. Plan is to leaflet throughout the town – with a paper and online option for response.

Pittenweem Community Council asked if the earlier CC survey could provide useful input. GS said that it could provide input but that we need some very specific answers for the FC/FCT questionnaire response.

A Pittenweem Resident suggested that it would be a good idea to involve existing groups such as Coffee Morning and church groups – seeking opportunities to engage people in conversations about the libraries and encourage their feedback for the surveys.

It was noted that any volunteers involved in running a public service need to be Criminal Records Bureau checked and will also need training in Health & Safety as well as the management of a public library service.

A Pittenweem Resident noted that we need to be clear about what any alternative delivery model would offer – in the event that the service offering might be diminished then would people still want to use it. This should be reflected in the market research.

8. Who will help?

GS noted that we need:

- Volunteers – supporters who can help us as we move forward
- Core group – working/steering group – perhaps 4 to 6 people

Anyone interested in helping should contact Ginny/Georgina.

PiCT noted that we need ideas on how we can (if needed) make the library a sustainable business.

Cllr JD noted that the Fife Council web site has advice on available funding for community projects.

9. AOCB

GS noted that - completely outside of the context of the library closure – there will be a Ceilidh on Friday 26th at 7.30 in the Pittenweem Church Hall. Tickets available from the Pharmacy.

JC offered her heartfelt thanks to all who attended and especially to guests from other local groups and to Cllr JD.

GM closed the meeting with thanks to all for attending and giving their time and asked that anyone who has any stories relating to the use of the library could write them down and send them in – and before leaving could we have a group photograph of the supporters of Pittenween Library.