**Report for Friends of Cockermouth Library: Purpose of Report**

This report, prepared for the Friends of Cockermouth Library, summarises the Town Council’s undated business case application for the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of Cockermouth Library. The conclusions in the report are based on the facts that are contained in the CAT application and the information circulated by the Town Clerk following discussions with Anna Chambers.

Potentially, this report could be used to inform structured conversations through the consultation process with the Town Council.

**Background**

Cockermouth Town Council’s application form for a CAT of Cockermouth Library to Cumbria County Council is undated and unsigned. The application (Business Case) states that the Town Council made the decision to apply for CAT at its meeting on 22 September 2016.

Pages 1-10 of the application form contain guidance notes and information about the legal and financial standing of the organisation making the application. Page 10 onwards contains the meat of the application. It describes the Town Council’s aims and objectives and outlines how it will meet the County Council’s priorities, community strategy outcomes and requirements for sustainability.

Cumbria County Council’s Policy on disposals and Community Asset Transfer was reviewed and updated in June 2016. On 21 July 2016, Cabinet approved the updated policy.

The policy states that the organisation taking ownership of the asset will be responsible for all issues associated with use and operation of the property including repairs and maintenance, running costs and compliance with legal and statutory requirements.

**Cockermouth Town Council’s Business Case**

This part of the report summarises pages 10-14 of the Town Council’s application.

The Town Council’s aim is to ensure the long term provision of a library service in the town while consolidating public services within one building, if it is supported by the County Council through professional support.

The Town Council’s service offer is:

* The County Council to install and maintain two self-service terminals to assist the smooth running of the library and train staff to use these.
* To stop lending DVDs increasing space on the ground floor
* To make adult talking books a collection only service
* Modernise the library space by removing the huge desk
* Remove all Public PCs as these are part of Cumbria County Council network
* Source new public PCs (no guarantees)
* Retain Wi-Fi, printing, faxing, laminating etc.
* To increase opening hours from 30.5 hours currently to 34hrs
* To standardise opening hours 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday; and 10am to 2pm Saturday. NB the Town Clerk ha confirmed that opening hours have not yet been finalised.
* No proposals to reinstate the stair lift and ensure that wheelchair users can access services in the building
* To relocate Tourist Information staff to the library and deliver a combined service, with savings to the Town Council on premises costs at Kings Arms Lane.
* To explore the potential for co-location of services delivered by Allerdale BC in Sainsbury’s car park to the library, potentially generating increased income to the Town Council (not guaranteed) and delivering enhanced public service
* To explore the potential for increased income through additional lettings of office space on the first floor ( not guaranteed)
* Estimated running costs for the library per year are £14,616
* The costs of running the service do not include provision for day to day repairs, portable electrical appliance testing, IT costs, building insurance and back office costs associated with staffing, e.g. payroll, training and development and Human Resources.
* The costs of running the service do not include capital provision for inspections, planned maintenance and refurbishment.

**Comments/Questions**

* What prompted the Town Council to submit a CAT application, given that there does not appear to be a threat to long term provision of a library in Cockermouth?
* How many other Town/ Parish Councils operate library services? What contact has the Town Council made with other Town/Parish Council providers to get their take on the benefits and risks of such a transfer?
* What alternative options exist for the continued delivery of sustainable library services in Cockermouth?
* If the CAT goes ahead, what are the steps and the timetable for transfer?
* What does the Town Council mean by professional support and have the County Council agreed to this, and if so for how long?. What mechanisms are in place through CAT to secure the professional support that the Town Council requires?
* Has the County Council agreed to install and maintain the self- service terminals and train staff in their usage? And will this be written in to the transfer agreement?
* How much library space will be lost as a result of co-locating Tourist Information? And, what does the modernised reception area look like? Is there a drawing available that shows the self-service desks and the space for tourist information?
* How will the Town Council ensure continued access to the County Council’s library management systems? And will there be a charge for access?
* Is the funding guaranteed for the public computers? And what systems will the public computers access?
* Is there a risk that responsibility for IT will be fragmented; with the Town Council responsible for public PCs and the WIFI connection and with the County Council responsible for the library management system?
* What information is available from the County Council about day to day repair costs, over e.g. a five year period.
* What information is available from the County Council about the cost of building insurance (assuming this is available) in a flood risk area, the cost of flood reinstatement work not covered by insurance and expenditure on planned maintenance/ refurbishment.
* What services does Allerdale BC currently deliver from Sainsbury’s car park? And what is Allerdale BCs view of the proposal to relocate services to the library.

**Conclusions**

We recognise that the Town Council wants to do its best for people living, working or visiting Cockermouth. The CAT application and subsequent discussions with the Town Clerk show that the Town Council positively recognises the value of the library to Cockermouth’s growing community. The Town Council have also recognised our concerns about the potential reduction in book space, as a result of the proposed co-location of Tourist Information, and the loss of skilled staff.

As it stands, a CAT will transfer Cumbria County Council’s responsibility and liabilities for day to day repairs and planned maintenance (including any alterations required to comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments) to the Town Council.

While welcoming, the Town Clerk’s positive response to our requests for information, proposed changes to the opening hours, coupled with continued lack of wheelchair access, uncertainty in the availability of public computers and a reduction in the availability of the talking book service to collection only, will have an adverse impact on people with disabilities, children and young people and people engaged in seeking work.

M Miller

1 December 2016