

Subject: Library Books – Deputation Referred from the Council meeting held on the 15 December 2016

Date of Meeting: 12 January 2017

Report of: Executive Lead for Strategy, Governance & Law

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Under the Council's Procedural Rules a deputation presented at a Council meeting will be referred to an appropriate Committee meeting for consideration.
- 1.2 A deputation concerning Library Books was presented at the Council meeting on 15 December 2016 by Christopher Hawtree as the lead spokesperson.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee either
 - (a) Notes the deputation; or
 - (b) Notes the deputation and calls for an officer report on the issues raised by the deputation.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 3.1 A copy of the deputation and response at Council is attached to the report as Appendix 1.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

- 4.1 The deputation was received at the Council meeting in accordance with the agreed protocol, which included 5 minutes for the Lead spokesperson to outline the reasons for the deputation and for Councillor Robins as the Chair of the Economic Development & Culture Committee to respond.
- 4.2 The Procedural Rules states that 'the lead spokesperson will receive written confirmation of the response given to the deputation and that the signatories to the deputation will be invited to attend the meeting and hear the Committee's decision. However, given that the deputation was presented at council, there are no further speaking rights and the response for the spokesperson.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Deputation concerning Library Books.

**Deputation Library Books
Spokesperson – Christopher Hawtree**

“As you suggested Mr Mayor, so this is Christmas but don't worry I shall not sing but it is another year over and what have we done? In Hove as you know it's been a horrible time for the Carnegie Library through a long winter and spring again but we have done something. Meanwhile Waterstones and City Books tell me business is splendid and people are clamouring for books. Shelves are full of tasty titles and people want to have them all but nobody can do that but in fact they can. Public libraries should be making these available and now during those 8 months many Carnegie readers and at the branch libraries remark that so often the books they want turn out to be in Brighton and have to be summoned at £1 a go. The Carnegie is no longer afford the status it once had but how simple it would be to introduce substantial shelves labelled new books – a real draw. Meanwhile though there is also dismay at the way in which the standard of Carnegie's fiction shelves have fallen. Browsers naturally have dropped as prospects for delivery faulted there. Moreover readers are now told to order or suggest new books online but if one makes a suggestion that way one is not altered when a book arrives. This happen to me with Fiona Stafford's great book 'On the Long, Long Life of Trees' and Alan Bennett's Diaries which contain much on libraries and he points out they should be local not an expedition. Indeed Fiona Stafford's book had not been bought back in March by the libraries. Book selection is now made by the wholesaler Bertrams. There is no longer local connection with book choice and this demoralised many of the staff so much so that they felt undervalued and took redundancy this year. They have been increasingly dismayed to open the boxes from Bertrams at the Carnegie and find the books allocated to it and they know readers do want books, these are always top of survey's and Carnegie's figures will increase if and I hope when the stock improves as it used to be. Another example Bertrams recently asserted that Gerard Reve's 'The Evenings' was not yet published but this great Dutch novel now translated after 70 years is indeed published and receiving much attention. So Bertrams told about this relied to say supermarkets get books first, not them. Well it would be a very different world if that Dutch novel were to appear in supermarkets here, we can but hope perhaps. There has also been the matter of missed catalogue books which have had to be redone and compensation sought from Bertram and similarly the surreal case to faded inoperable barcodes being applied by them and also needing to be redone. Now all this is happening amidst a budget which posits a 25% cut in the book fund something which mysteriously is now longer ring fenced as part of the PFI deal and so with all these considerations in mind we the deputation ask that a report be brought to the January committee to set out the way in which book selection has been allowed to slip from this authorities grasp and to consider bringing it back in house as a very real way of helping to meet budget targets. Crucially this would also improve librarian and reader moral and let us emphasise once again the great work done by librarians and lament what is being taken out of their hands. So Mister Mayor if good books do become regularly available at the Carnegie and the branch libraries we could meet another seasonal hope that of 'I wish it could be Christmas everyday' again Mister Mayor I shall not sing but I should like to say that in the next fortnight after all we have been put through this past year that we are forming a constituted friends of the Carnegie group during the coming holiday fortnight and although we were denigrated by this administration we've been inspired by Radio Sussex's

commendation in its recent community heroes awards and so Mister Mayor perhaps this friends group could prove to be the gift that keeps on giving. All I need to say now Mister Mayor and I'm sure that you'll agree that books should be and can be so easily be the vital beating heart of our libraries and like the heart they do their work for themselves they continue to work down the years."

RESPONSE FROM CLLR ROBINS

"There are approximately 400,000 items in our libraries in stock across Brighton and Hove City Libraries and 370,000 of these are books. This is above average for comparable groups in library authorities across all libraries 90% of the stock is book stock. In the 2014 to 2015 survey 78% of respondents at the Jubilee library and 77% of respondents at Hove Library and 84% of respondents at the community libraries said the book stock was good or very good. Latest comparative information with the nearest neighbors published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy just this week on 12 December found Brighton and Hove City Council Libraries spent above average on new books and other library materials £2281/thousand population compared with an average of £1437/thousand population. Spend above average on new books and other materials as a percentage of the gross expenditure; 10.6% compared with an average of 8.7%. Purchased 203 new items of new stock per thousand population compared with an average of 142 making us the 2nd highest in the survey. Has above average number of books in stock per thousand population 1457 compared with an average 1338 making us 6 out of 15 and an above average number of audio, visual and electrical items in stock; 45,362 compared with an average of 30, 993. Has above average issue of books per annum 982,869 compared with an average of 895, 810.

So although there is always room for improvement but according to these figures we don't do too badly at all."