

P-04-617 Stop the Wholesale Hiving off Public Libraries – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Clerking Team, 17.02.15

Dear Kayleigh

Many thanks for your email from last week. I am very pleased to hear that my petition is to be considered. You asked for my comments in light of recent correspondence. They are as follows.

I am pleased to hear that the Culture Minister is to write to all local authorities, but slightly disappointed to hear that the requirement for costed options appears to be regarded as only an example of good practice, as opposed to a requirement, or as an example of best practice.

The Expert Review was, I believe, published in October 2014. The Culture Minister said in December that he was in agreement with the recommendations, one of which was that all consultation on significant changes to library provision should be done in light of the production of costed options. If the Minister was in agreement with that recommendation I do not see why he could not have written to public authorities three months or more ago, telling them that they should produce costed options. What really concerns me is that the Expert Review will not stem the flow of authorities looking to hive off library provision to the voluntary sector. Since the publication of the Expert Review we have had a number of other council consultations, including the Cardiff case where public opinion appears to have seen off Cardiff Council's ill thought out proposals, at least for the next 12 months. The point is that the Government should be playing a part in seeing off such proposals by requiring them to come up with costed options, not relying on public opinion to force the Councils' hands.

While the Government delays making it a requirement to produce costed options, where the Minister apparently agrees with such a recommendation, this is making it easier for Councils to take the lazy option and close libraries in the name of cost savings, knowing full well that research indicates that such libraries would never re-open. This is a time for the Government to be taking decisive action in support of local library services wherever it can. Telling local authorities that producing costed options is an example of good practice is not what I feel the Expert Review panel would have had in mind for this recommendation. Nor does it appear to implement the panel's recommendation that it be implemented with immediate effect.

Many thanks

Kind regards

Adam Riley