

How much do you value your LIBRARY SERVICE?

Shropshire Council Outline Proposal to pass on Library Costs

In line with their Libraries Strategy, Shropshire Council have outlined a plan to hand over funding for Cleobury Library to Cleobury tax payers, via the local precept, phased over the next 5 years starting December 2019.

The full costs of this would start out as £4,800 for 2020/21 rising to £24,000 by 2024/25.

This proposal, if accepted, would represent a £21 p.a. increase for an average Band D property, or a 20% increase in local Council tax by 2024/25.

Please note, the school libraries are unaffected by these changes.

What happens Next?

As a Town Council we are seeking further clarification of the proposal and when it will be formally notified and with what notice period.

We will be clarifying the position over the 25 year contractual lease between Cleobury Country and Shropshire Council.

We will be seeking clarification on any cost contributions that may be made by Parishes outside Cleobury using the service or whether this will be covered by Shropshire Council going forward on a contractual basis. Both are highly unlikely in our view.

How do I have my say about what happens next?

Once we have formal confirmation of the proposals then we will go out to consultation with residents on all viable proposals that have been validated with Shropshire Council and Cleobury Country. This could be via a residents survey delivered electronically and available in hard copy at information points and other collection points in the parish. The results will be published and communicated back to residents before we finalise our decision.

Why has this proposal been put to the Town Council?

Shropshire Council is facing a huge funding challenge and is therefore looking to offload some costs and services. One way to do this, avoiding wholesale closure, is to push costs directly onto Town and Parish Councils so they will be funded locally by residents if they want them.

In the area of Libraries, an emotive issue nationally, Shropshire Council have developed a Libraries Strategy for phased withdrawal of support to statutory funding only over the next 5 years.

Cleobury would warrant a statutory library van with regular visits if an alternative is not found to fund the current library under contract to Cleobury Country.

What are the costs involved if we want to keep the Library?

Costs are in two parts, the lease to Cleobury Country for the space and the shared labour cost of running the library. The labour costs are kept very low because they are a shared cost whilst the staff do other tasks on behalf of Cleobury Country during the day as well as running the library.

The cost for the space is under a 25 Year lease between Cleobury Country and Shropshire Library Services but it looks as if Shropshire Council are trying to pass the costs on to Cleobury Mortimer Town Council.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Library Management fee	£9,000	£9,000	£9,000	£9,000	£9,000
Lease cost	£14,358	£14,358	£14,358	£15,076	£15,076
Total cost of Library service provision	£23,358	£23,358	£23,358	£24,076	£24,076
Potential Town Council contribution	£4,800	£9,600	£14,400	£19,200	£24,000

Accurate information shows that only 68% of users are Cleobury residents, but the other local parishes have shown no interest in sharing the costs. If Shropshire Council were to pick up their other parishes costs, this would reduce our costs but seems illogical and grossly unfair to Cleobury residents who would still have to pay.

What usage does the library get and what are the forward trends?

	Visits	Active Users	Total Loans	Event Attendance	Item Requests	Enquiries
2017/18	23,501	578	9,455	810	222	858
2018/19	21,647	532	9,389	906	283	981
% change	-7.9%	-8%	-0.7%	+11.5%	+27.5%	+14.4%
2017/18 – 2018/19 % change for all Libraries	+2%	-3%	+1%	+9%	-3%	+3%
Quarter 1 2018/19	5,420	546	2,308	232	56	246
Quarter 1 2019/20	4,836	518	2,220	264	70	237
% change	-10.8%	-5.1%	-3.8%	+13.8%	+25%	-3.7%

What value for money does the library represent?

	2020/21 Visitors	2020/21 Active Users	2024/25 Visitors	2024/25 Active users
Cost per Cleobury resident	£1.60	£1.60	£8.00	£8.00
Cost per Cleobury visitor/user	£0.36	£14.72	£2.33	£90.56
Cost per band D household Cleobury	+£7	+£7	+£21	+£21

Assumptions:

1. Visitors forecast for next year are 19,536 (5% decline pa from 2018/19) and 15,116 in 2024/25
2. Active users forecast for next year are 480 (5% decline pa from 2018/19) and 391 in 2024/25
3. Residents make up 68% of total visitors (13,384 in 2020/21 and 10,278 in 2020/24) Resident Active users in 2020/21 of 326 and in 2024/25 it would be 265.
4. Although there has been a 5-8% decline in usage during a period of small population growth, we have assumed a 5% per annum decline in visitors and active users until 2024/25
5. Cleobury Parish population used is 3,000 and households figure for tax purposes 1,154.
6. No contribution is made by other parishes to the library cost as has been indicated in earlier discussions.

We are increasingly concerned about the growing inequality between smaller Town Councils precept (£100/Band D) and surrounding parish councils (£30 Band D) whose residents access our services and Shrewsbury (£45 Band D) who have more residents to share the burden and many more services funded by Shropshire Council.

How much do we think residents value the library?

The Big Cleobury Survey of 2018, as part of the Neighbourhood Plan, included questions about facilities in the town, their perceived usage and the priorities residents have for preserving those services including the library. The survey overall, was completed by 510 households – 28% of households representing 840 people, a very large and robust response rate that was representative for age and social groups.

Library Summary of Survey results

- How often do you use the library?

Daily	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Rarely	Never	Total
3	33	96	129	133	394
0.76%	8.38%	24.37%	32.74%	33.76%	100%

- What is your priority for protecting the library?

First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Total
9%	16%	24%	22%	29%	100%

- The library came third most popular to protect in total for wanting to protect, behind The Post Office and the Bank

Please note that residents think they use the library more than they do according to actual usage.

What options are there for the Council?

1. We could accept the draft proposal and increase our local taxes (the precept)
2. Reject the proposal and accept a statutory Library van visit to Cleobury on a regular basis at no cost to local tax.
3. Seek to oppose the imposition of the contractual rent costs imposed on us via Shropshire Council (£14-£15,000 pa who have a contract with Cleobury Country and just take on the shared labour costs (£9-10,000 pa over the plan period).
4. Seek to reduce costs from option 3 by some additional volunteering, saving £4-£5,000 a year after costs of training, recruitment and management of volunteers, provided Cleobury Country agree to this arrangement.