

Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Agenda Item 4, Public Questions

The role of Business Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee is to scrutinise proposed decisions which have been called in by one or more Members of that Committee. Under the provisions of the Constitution, the Chairman of the Committee is required to give the responses to public questions. As the below questions relate to the Community Library Process, their answers, although delivered by the Chairman of the Committee, have been provided by the relevant Cabinet Member.

Ms Frances Briers	
<u>Question 1</u> How do you know you can get a buyer for Friern Barnet library? As I am fed up with boarded up building.	
<u>Question 2</u> Why close the library now? when you have the money back from iceland.	
Michael Lunn	
<u>Question 1</u> What is the current state of negotiations with the Arts Depot regarding the transfer of library services from Friern Barnet Library to the Depot, and when does the Council expect library services to be available in the Arts Depot?	
Sheri Darby	
<u>Question 1</u> I am fully aware that the difficult economic climate has forced you to sell our much cherished library. In order to help us understand this economic necessity could you tell us. What is the total amount that has been spent on the development and planning of the Landmark Library in artsdepot to date? (eg architects fees, consultants etc).	

<p><u>Question 2.</u> Has the planned Landmark Library in artsdepot now been fully costed and if so what are those costs?</p> <p><u>Question 3.</u> What are the proposed running costs of the new library at artsdepot ? (Including rent, staffing etc)</p> <p><u>Question 4.</u> How much money will be saved both in the short term and in the long term by the 'merger' of North Finchley and Friern barnet into artsdepot?.</p>	
<p>Fiona Cochrane</p>	
<p><u>Question 1</u> Will the Council acknowledge that they misled the community by suggesting that proposals would be considered for use of the current Friern Barnet Library building, when the intention was always to sell the building?</p> <p><u>Question 2</u> Will the Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that, in light of the serious flaws in the way councillors and council officers have conducted the community library process and the way they have misled the public, the community library process be extended to allow the Save FBL Group to investigate alternative sites for a community library in Friern Barnet? Will they recommend that Friern Barnet Library remain open while this search for a solution takes place? Will Cabinet assure the people of Friern Barnet that the stock of Friern Barnet Library, offered to the community as part of a library solution, will not be disposed of while the Save FBL Group seeks an alternative solution in the locality?</p>	

<p><u>Question 3</u> The Phase 1 implementation plan (Library Strategy Review) states "Develop and agree plans for new Landmark Library, including initial designs and costing (Autumn 2011)" Have architectural plans now been drawn up for the proposed Landmark Library in artsdepot and if so, have Cabinet approved these plans?</p> <p><u>Question 4</u> What exactly is the current position with regard to the development of the proposed Landmark Library in artsdepot and what is the proposed date for the opening of a fully functional library?</p>	
<p>Paul Merchant</p>	
<p><u>Question 1</u> Oddly, the provision of volunteer librarians doesn't appear to affect the Council's projected costs, should a library service continue to run from the current building in Friern Barnet (as per the proposal from the Save Friern Barnet Library Group). What is the estimated cost of establishing a 'landmark library' at the Artsdepot, & do the Council envisage that this will be at no cost or low cost, as they demand of alternatives that strive to recognise the importance of community development (ie the proposal from SFBLG)?</p>	
<p>Holly Howe Watson</p>	
<p><u>Question 1</u> Why are the people of Friern Barnet not being treated equally to other people in Barnet re the Library Strategy - for example, why was our community proposal not given the same consideration as the one presented by Hampstead Garden Suburb residents, and why is the</p>	

Cabinet insisting on closing Friern Barnet library on March 31st while North Finchley residents get to keep their library until the new landmark library opens at the ArtsDepot?	
Finlay Howe Watson	
<u>Question 1</u> Why are the poorer children in Friern Barnet losing their library while the much richer children in Hampstead Garden Suburb get to keep their library? It seems really unfair as lots of my friends parents don't speak English as a first language and when I go to their houses they don't have many books. I live in Friern Barnet not Hampstead Garden Suburb.	
Sarah Howe	
<u>Question 1</u> Barnet Council wants to sell the Friern Barnet library building and site - can the council guarantee that this historic and beautiful building won't then be demolished to make way for flats and a shop? Can Barnet Council guarantee that the green space next to it will be preserved for people to continue using it as they have done for generations? <u>Question 2</u> Robert Rams has been unable to give any dates for when the library services in the Arts Depot will be available for the people of Friern Barnet. Seeing as the 'landmark' library in the Arts Depot is the cornerstone of the Library Strategy and fundamental to it, will Cllr Rams please give firm details about when and where these services will be available?	
Joanne Fryer	

Question 1.

Assuming that the Council officers passed on the four letters from schools, submitted with our two proposals, begging the Council not to close Friern Barnet Library as they could not get their children safely to the Artsdepot, why did Barnet Council not respond to these Headmasters?

Question 2.

Children's Rhyme Time can take place in any building, not libraries alone. What PROPER library services will be up and running in the Artsdepot by April 1st as there currently are no rooms there either designated or being refitted for a library and the staff there does not appear to be aware of this new landmark service which is less than one month away?

Question 3.

Since the sale of Friern Barnet Library (£430,000) will generate less money than the sale of a house in the same neighbourhood and Barnet spends less than 1.5% of its library budget on Friern Barnet Library, yet the Council is often quoted that getting rid of Friern Barnet Library will improve library services all over Barnet, does this imply that so little is spent on libraries that a miniscule amount will make a very big difference (as in the cases of Third World countries)?

Question 4.

Cllr Rams has stated that the sale of Friern Barnet Library means that Barnet will be able to buy "better books". Does this mean that Barnet's chief librarian was not buying very good books before or that Cllr Rams will speak to authors and publishers and encourage them to make their productions better? Please define.

Question 5.

Why does Barnet Council maintain that it wants to negotiate with people from the Community and then set up meetings only with

<p>Council Officers who say they have no power to negotiate?</p> <p><u>Question 6.</u></p> <p>Why is Barnet Council willing to spend money on a library service in South Friern Library, which is more heavily used by people in Haringey, but then refuse to spend money on a library for the people in Friern Barnet who pay council tax to Barnet?</p>	
<p>Tamar Andrusier</p>	
<p><u>Question1.</u></p> <p>Why did the Officers provide the Save FBL Group with an entirely different set of figures on which to base our proposal to those then quoted to cabinet? Is this fair?</p> <p><u>Question2</u></p> <p>Why did councillors and council officers not respond to the Save FBL Group proposal by engaging with the community as promised? If any aspect of our proposal seemed unclear or unacceptable, why were we not contacted for clarification, discussion or negotiation? Was it fair to the community for council officers to make wildly incorrect assumptions on aspects of the SFBLG proposal without seeking clarification, then to reject the proposal outright based on these assumptions?</p> <p><u>Question3.</u></p> <p>The offers of help described by Robert Rams at last week's cabinet meeting were in fact all related to Friary House and running a stand-alone, volunteer-run library. When the Save FBL Group requested assistance from council officers, for example in seeking help investigating cross-budgetary funding for council services to be brought into the library as part of our proposal (such as health clinics and schools' workshops), they received no assistance whatsoever. Does the Scrutiny Committee accept that Robert Rams' description of offers of help to the community was greatly exaggerated and that these offers of help in fact only related to the proposal he desired the community to</p>	

make (a stand-alone community library in Friary House)?	
<p><u>Question 4.</u></p> <p>On the day of last week's Cabinet meeting, Robert Rams tweeted "To the many residents emailing me today, we are NOT taking the decision to close Friern Library 2nite. That decision was taken last summer." Has the Cabinet member revealed that there was a pre-determined outcome to the community library process?</p>	
Brian Watson	
<p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>Does the Scrutiny Committee believe that at last July's cabinet meeting it was made clear to the community that, when inviting proposals from the community for community use of the Friern Barnet Library building, this meant proposals to BUY the building (according to Robert Rams, recently quoted in the local press)?</p> <p><u>Question 2</u></p> <p>Now that the Icelandic millions are to be returned to the council's coffers and no contractual commitments have been undertaken with the library strategy would this not be a good time roll back and take another look at the entire plan in a more collaborative manner?</p>	
Tim Redmond	
<p><u>Question 1.</u></p> <p>Why, in February 2012, did council officers say that no proposal that involved use of the Friern Barnet library building would be passed on for consideration by the cabinet when the 'Expression of Interest' document specifically refers to rent of and use of the very same building?</p> <p><u>Question 2.</u></p>	

<p>Has due process been followed when the wording of council documents has entirely misled the community into creating a proposal linked to Friern Barnet Library building, which was then rejected outright without any discussion?</p> <p><u>Question 3.</u> Does the Scrutiny Committee accept that the community was misled into creating a proposal linked to community use for the building? The cabinet decision last July was to proceed with the library strategy 'subject to the consideration of the feasibility of any community initiatives that come forward from residents'. (Robert Rams also repeatedly used the phrases 'community use of the building' and 'community hub' in statements to the local press dating from last summer onwards)?</p>	
<p>Martin Russo</p>	
<p><u>Question 1.</u> If the intention was always to sell the building, why did the expression of interest document include a section about rent, and both this document and a letter from the Officers clearly state that the use of the building was a possibility?</p> <p><u>Question 2.</u> I understood that any community proposal would be considered if it was shown to be at low or no cost to the council. Our proposal offered the opportunity to reduce costs not increase costs, so I ask the committee to consider our proposal's objectives in principle and reconsider the benefit to our community and request that it be put back to Cabinet for a vote to keep our library open?</p> <p><u>Question 3.</u> The news of the Icelandic money being refunded back and confirmed by the Cabinet and later reported in the local press to Barnet has meant that additional funding to compensate for it's initial</p>	

<p>loss was held in reserve, as part of a contingency plan, but now is available for redistribution within Barnet's budget. I ask the committee to request the surplus funding and contingency fund be used to resource our library in Friern Barnet?</p> <p><u>Question 4.</u> In respect of question 3, Barnet would be in receipt of additional revenue and could use the interest from this money to fund our library in Friern Barnet? So I ask again the committee to refer it back to the Cabinet so they can use the interest from the millions saved to fund our library service in Friern Barnet?</p> <p><u>Question 5.</u> Given the time frame of no substantive services being transferred to the Artsdepot, I ask the committee to keep our library open until such a positive alternative solution has been achieved as with the closure of Friern Barnet Library, risks compromising the legal framework for public library services, meeting the obligation of the Equality's act deliverance of a local public library services. Please suspend the decision to close Friern Barnet Library?</p>	
<p>Julie Lacey</p>	
<p><u>Question 1</u> I understand that the council received other offers to run the library at low or no cost apart from the bid by the Save Friern Barnet Library Group. Please can you provide details of all offers/bids/proposals to run the library in Friern Barnet, detailing when they were received and why they were rejected?</p>	