



**Myth Busting - Suffolk Libraries response to [SCC's statement](#) regarding the future of libraries**

**“Suffolk’s 45 libraries to remain open and see new investment”**

*There has never been any question that under Suffolk Libraries stewardship, that any of the libraries would be closed, in addition the proposals set out by Suffolk Libraries also included new investment.*

**Investing in the mobile libraries, books and computers**

*This money had already been ring-fenced as part of the contract and we’d already started consultation on new mobiles, expecting that we’d be running the service. This is not new money.*

**“It follows an attempt to secure an external provider for a new six-year contract (with the option to extend for up to a further six years) which had to be abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.”**

*The procurement process was abandoned despite Suffolk Libraries initially being offered a provisional six-year contract subject to terms. When the provisional offer was made no questions were asked by SCC about the finances or opening hours proposed by Suffolk Libraries for the first six years of the new contract. The tender documentation clearly stated that the opening hours were to be decided by the new provider and no minimum hours were specified. Subsequently this offer was withdrawn, and two further offers were made by SCC as discussions continued between both parties. Suffolk Libraries was completely unaware of the decision to cease negotiations until 15 minutes ahead of the media briefing. There was plenty of scope to iron out any ‘difficulties’.*

**“Suffolk Libraries was unwilling to accept the terms of a contract extension and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.”**

*The new terms would have meant the organisation was not financially sustainable into the future (across the 12 years of the contract) and we were negotiating on what we felt was the best way to sustain the service in the longer term. We believe that the Conservative cabinet have taken libraries back in house to avoid any changes that might impact the mayoral chances of their candidates during the devolution elections. They know that the libraries may be split across unitary councils in the future, and this will mean the necessary changes fall to these bodies after the election. To suggest that Suffolk Libraries proposals were in breach of procurement law is totally inaccurate and potentially libellous.*

**Regarding the financial structure and viability of Suffolk Libraries.**

*This was only an issue because of years of under-funding the library service and a lack of indexation in the contract – eg a lack of additional funding to meet rising costs. It’s due to SCC’s lack of funding for the service and increased reliance on us successfully making efficiency savings and generating our own income year on year which has brought us to this situation. SCC conducted a detailed audit into our finances just over 2 years ago which found us to be extremely well run. This information can be requested through an FOI as the report was never shared with us. The service costs nearly £3 million less now than it did when it was in SCC in 2011 – the Bank of England inflation calculator shows that*

*the £9.5 million libraries cost when they were in the council is now the equivalent to £13.5 million – double what SCC currently pay.*

### **SL proposal to reduce opening hours by 30%**

*We made it clear back in August that reducing opening hours in libraries was the only viable and fair way to meet rising costs and to ensure the long-term future of the service. We had carefully planned a way of making these changes whilst maintaining the core service and keeping libraries open. Keeping the opening hours the same, and moving the service into SCC, will cost them more than it would have done to provide SL with the extra funding. We feel the current situation has been caused by SCC's unwillingness to grasp the financial issues we made clear to them at the start of this process.*

### **Cost of SL head office, including senior managers, “which equates to 33% of staffing costs”.**

*SL strongly refutes this. Like any large organisation there needs to be a management structure to support the operational day to day running. SL is a very efficient and lean organisation, and all the management costs are funded by external funding or money generated by Suffolk Libraries – so this is not a true or fair reflection of the reality. For the running of the charity - the figure is less than 5% so this point is particularly misleading. Only the Chief Executive earns more than £61K and only 5 employees earn more than £50K. The five senior managers described by SCC and the Chief Executive are responsible for generating well over £1 million in commercial income, grants and fundraised income every year. Suffolk Libraries annual turnover is £10 million every year and the SCC contract is worth £6.8 million – the remaining turnover will now be lost to the Suffolk economy. By comparison Suffolk County Council recently advertised an Assistant Manager role with one core function – assisting a manager – and this role was advertised at £40k-£46K.*

**SCC's PR suggests that bringing the service back in house is more efficient and is the best solution for staff and customers. However, there are many added value services and activities that Suffolk Libraries provides which will be lost or will be impossible to provide without the necessary support structure and staff. These include:**

- *Arts Council England - Suffolk Libraries has NPO status worth over £1m across a 4-year contract. This money and related activities will disappear if the service goes back to SCC, an enormous loss of activity for communities, particularly children and young people.*
- *Many of Suffolk Libraries health and wellbeing offers are run in partnership with other bodies and will not transfer to SCC. These include the Pride & Periods service, mental health support groups such as Open Space and cancer support groups. The county's libraries generated **£41m worth of social value**, translating to **£6 social value for every £1** invested and **saving NHS services in Suffolk a whopping £542K.***
- *There are many other smaller contracts which run arts, culture and wellbeing projects, which will have to end if the service goes back to SCC.*
- *Health and wellbeing contracts with Arts Council and the Department of Health and Social Care bring in £100k annually that will be lost.*
- *SL also has contracts with Ministry of Justice and People Plus to run 13 prison libraries and plans to run two more. This contract and the income it brings to Suffolk will be lost. These contracts subsidise well over £100K of core costs of the library service every year and also offset some central salaries.*
- *DiscoverReads and Wild Reads are literacy and literature projects run in partnership with other organisations, reliant on SL support staff.*

- *Annual fundraising brings in a further £400k of income.*

**SCC seems to be suggesting their approach will be more efficient than the current Suffolk Libraries model but this starts to unravel if you start to consider the numbers:**

*Staff moving back to a local govt pension scheme will cost the taxpayer money more as employer contributions will be far higher than SL's pension scheme (likely to be over 17% rather than 6%)*

*Staff pay scales will require a rebalance and likely an uplift which will cost the council a significant amount of money to bring the entire workforce in line with their pay structure.*

*SL currently gets approx. 80% rate relief on its buildings across Suffolk due to its status and this will be withdrawn. This currently equates to over £500k per annum.*

*SL currently pays all of the back-office costs which are around £1 million. These costs will now need to be covered by SCC.*

*SL's charity status means it is able to bid for additional funding from bodies not applicable to local authorities. For example, recent successful bids to Foyle's Foundation, money from East of England Co-op, Youth Music grant etc. SCC will not be able to fundraise or attract any of this additional money, placing an added burden on the taxpayer.*

*Friend's groups annually raise many tens of thousands of pounds – which is then invested back in the service such as library refits/upgrades. They hold several £100k in their bank accounts collectively which will not transfer to SCC and the benefit will be lost. Many volunteers have already indicated they are unwilling to continue under the new circumstances.*

*SL is able to attract sponsorship for key strategic initiatives such as Reading Quest.*

**We know how important library services are to residents, particularly those who rely on them for education, access to information, support and, of course, books.**

*This comment surely underpins a somewhat outdated view of the service that libraries offer. This is because SCC has no in-house library expertise currently. Today's library offering represents a much stronger focus on support and guidance; practical help for vulnerable members of the community; accessible activities and opportunities to develop new skills as well as a huge focus on community wellbeing.*

*Ultimately none of what is being proposed by taking libraries back in house aligns with SCC's mission statement of:*

- *Looking after our health and wellbeing*
- *Strengthening our local economy*
- *Providing value for money for our residents*