Save our Libraries

What we can do to try to prevent the closure of 22 libraries in North Yorkshire.

Introduction:
It has been repeatedly emphasised that the most effective way to try to influence the views of officers and councillors is to write a letter directly to them. What follows may be useful material to help people put such a letter together. It is based on an enquiry held into the proposals by another council to cut library services in 2009. That council's proposals were found to be unlawful.

Background: In 2009 a report was produced into the planned closures by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council of 11 of its 24 libraries. The leader of the enquiry, Sue Charteris, found the Council to be in breach of its statutory duties. The Council later suspended the implementation of its plans. While not identical, there are close similarities between some of the Wirral proposals and those of NYCC. Consequently, the report of the Wirral enquiry provides many valuable starting points for those who are considering making some sort of formal objection to the library closures.

Notes on the Report of the Wirral Enquiry:
(1) The public enquiry "... Found the Council's decision ... to be in breach of its statutory duties", as specified in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 "to provide comprehensive and efficient public library services for all persons desirous to make use of thereof."
(2) The primary reason for this breach is that the Council "... failed to make an assessment of local needs (so) cannot reasonably meet (them)."
(3) Much correspondence and "... A specific complaint from the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)" caused the Secretary of State to conclude that a local enquiry was required.
(4) The enquiry considered two questions -
   (a) "did the Council make a reasonable assessment of local needs in respect of library services and, in any event, what are those needs?"
   (b) "on assessment of local needs, did the Council act reasonably in meeting such needs through their proposals in the context of available resources and their statutory obligations?"
(5) The leader of the Enquiry was also "... asked to recommend, in the event that Wirral MBC is found to be in breach of its statutory duties, the practical steps the Council would be ordered to take in order to address this failure."
(6) The Council "... decided to suspend the implementation of its plans pending the outcome of the Enquiry."
(7) Among the points made by the Leader of the Enquiry were that the specific needs of some adults had not been addressed, including "... The specific requirements for older people, disabled people, unemployed people and those living in deprived areas" (to which it is appropriate to add, in North Yorkshire,
"those living in remote areas").

(8) Similarly, the Council was unable to demonstrate that it had "... due regard for the general requirements of children." (Carey Chidwick, the head of Easingwold School has some concerns about this.)

(9) The Council's approach to revisioning the service was fundamentally flawed, because their approach focused specifically on the issue of asset management and cost savings. (As the first four sentences of NYCC's Public Consultation document also seem to do).

**Why the enquiry was initiated:**
Moves towards an enquiry began when the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport received a large volume of correspondence, mainly from members of the public, but also from professional bodies.

**What people and professional agencies can do in North Yorkshire:**
If members of the public and professional bodies in North Yorkshire decide to write to complain to NYCC they will find the Wirral report an immensely useful resource. They will be able to consider whether NYCC seems to be similarly in breach of its statututory duties, and emphasise areas both where NYCC demonstrates failures similar to those highlighted by the Wirral enquiry, and also other failures (eg regarding remote communities) peculiar to North Yorkshire. Chapter 4 of the report "evidence received from other stakeholders" is particularly useful in that regard.

**So - what next?**
Whether or not people have already sent the Council's survey back to Northallerton, the best way to give NYCC cause to reconsider their proposals is to write a letter either to the Chief Executive or to Derek Law, Corporate Director for Adult & Community Services, County Hall, Northallerton, DL7 8DD. Those who decide to write may feel it appropriate to send a copy of their complaint to Cllr. John Weighell, the Leader of the Council, at County Hall.

**Resources:**
To help with the identification of many of the points NY residents may wish to make, they may find the Wirral report particularly helpful. To access it [click here](#).

When the page appears click on the MS Word version of: "Report - A Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council".

**Other useful resources include:**

(a) The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 - ([Click here](#)).
(b) The Education Act (2006), especially section 507B - ([Click here](#)).
(c) The Equality Act 2010 - ([Click here](#)).
indirect discrimination of the elderly and those with disabilities.)
(d) The NYCC Public Consultation document - (Click here) which we can all read carefully to decide whether their proposals will meet their statutory duties.

**Last thoughts:**
In respect of the three Acts listed, it may also a good idea to 'google' them in order to read explanations, interpretations and case studies. Such background reading will almost certainly help people to understand how NYCC's proposals may be unlawful.

In their letter to Derek Law, it is important for those who are writing to explain that they do not believe that a proper assessment of local needs has been made by NYCC to emphasise this concern, with examples. It is also important to stress, again with examples, that the proposed closures are neither comprehensive nor efficient.

If, despite everyone's best efforts, County Councillors vote to implement the cuts, then the next essential step is for people to write a letter, similar to the one they wrote to County Hall, to the Secretary of State. In it they should again stress their belief that the cuts are unlawful because the Council has failed to make an assessment of local needs, and they should give examples (children, people with disabilities, the elderly, people living in remote areas, etc.). Such letters could be copied to the MLA. If enough such letters are written, the MLA may be moved to make a specific complaint, and the Secretary of State may similarly conclude that a local enquiry is required.

**Useful addresses:**
The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, Grosvenor House, 14 Bennets Hill, Birmingham, BS2 5RS.
The Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, 2 - 4 Cockspur Street, London, SW1Y 5DH
The department indicates that it would prefer an initial contact to be made via its website: Click here

So there we are. Everyone who reads this is most sincerely urged to 'have a go' and write in to County Hall. The proposals for library closures are dreadful. We all, but especially our children, deserve better.