

Family Library Statement

Family Library not due to receive any Government Financial Assistance

Following a question about the viability of Library Services placed before Tynwald by Chris Thomas MHK, the Family Library finds itself grateful that the Chief Minister acknowledged the value of our services and that there was a “gratefulness” that the services had been preserved for the future at a time when Government finances were in a grave position.

However, we are equally dismayed that immediate assistance was not forthcoming for our current financial situation that comes to a head in August this year, despite the Government review of Libraries in general starting back in 2017. **Therefore, as things stand, we see no reason to change the view that the most likely outcome of our current review remains that we will close all services, in a phased manner, by the end of this year.**

There is an often-used phrase that the Government “kicks things into the long grass”. From our perspective we have been sitting in that long grass for more than four years, so are now more than prepared to bring the situation back out for public scrutiny. We believe it is unfair and one sided that £125k per annum funding was awarded to the Family Library by Tynwald in 2018 for two years, **on the basis** that this lined up with the delivery of a strategy for Libraries by Government at the end of 2019. The failure to produce this review in 2019 meant that the Family Library sustaining co-funding by Government expired before this strategy had been completed. If the intent of the Tynwald resolution for funding of the Family Library was to make sure that it continued to exist as part of the potential solutions that were to be drawn up, then it failed in that purpose last year when funding was not extended, despite requests even before Covid hit, to do so. We had a one-year reprieve due to our benefactor extending additional funds but are at the same position one year later. It is simply the reinstatement by extension of this £125k per year sustaining co-funding that we seek.

We would strongly refute the implication that there is more value in the mobile services than the Children’s Library. The Family Library is a unified enterprise consisting of 5 services, each of which are unique to the island (Children’s Library, Schools Service, Mobile Library, Housebound Delivery Service and Bibliotherapy). The efficiencies that we create are based on this unified approach where all sorts of resources, including people, are shared. To be absolutely clear, we have never sought 100% funding from Government (only half of our annual costs) - a figure of £125,000 per year which the Government did provide to us in 2018 and 2019 but ceased in 2020. The Mobile Library teams (which we call Outreach Services) cost around 60-65% of our total budget. So even if the Government mistakenly does not see the value of the Children’s Library, they have every right to require that funds that they contribute are put to a particular purpose. Even if that funding purpose was defined as the Mobile Library, for which support has been voiced in Tynwald on many occasions, the £125,000 contribution would not meet the full cost of that, but it would seem to us that the Chief Minister has made the case in his recent Tynwald statements for such segmented contribution to that service.

We also feel compelled to refute the implication that our services can be split up and spread and this will result in a more efficient and cost-effective solution. It is a fact that our services are much broader than some equivalent services in public hands, yet some of those equivalent services already operate at multiple values of our current costs. It should not be forgotten that the Family Library was originally a public service and when taken out of Government it was handed over with its projected operating budget inside government of £250k per year. We took that budget projection that we were given, and it has remained the same to this day, even though we have added two new

services and employ more staff. So, we have held a budget static for 9 years with no reduction in staff or services – is there any part of Government that could make this claim?

It is also worth considering the substantial amount of money that we have raised to maintain this custodial position, over £2m of private funding over 9 years. It is only in the last three years that there has been a direct financial contribution by the Government, and this has amounted to £350k in total. Over the years we pay on average £30k per year in ITIP/NI through our employees, so over the nine years we have paid approximately £270k into Treasury. More pertinent, however, there is no guarantee that this degree of private funding we have enjoyed would follow a move or dispersal of services back into public hands, so with that, and the fact you would not have the ITIP/NI paid from outside, it could cost government significantly more to provide the same services themselves.

We absolutely welcome the statement made by the Chief Minister that we should seek the opinion of the "great Manx public" but we feel that has been done many times before (including by Government prior to the Tynwald resolution of financial support in 2018) and we are encouraging all our supporters to lobby to illustrate this again. We are confident of the support by the public of the services that the Family Library provides and their value for money, but the review of Library Services has a much wider remit than just the Family Library and there is no way to gauge the public or other third-party reaction to the much wider topic of all Library provision across the Island.

Therefore, for the time being, while this wider issue is reviewed, we feel it necessary to ask for separation of the issues. Centralisation of services across all delivery methods that are owned and funded by different parties is a long and drawn out process and clearly needs more in depth study (possibly by an external expert body as has been the case with many other issues in the current administration) as to what the services actually are and not basing assumptions on pre-conceived ideas of what a Library is and what it does.

The ultimate consultation of the Manx Public is an election and hence, for the current members to "put their cards on the table" regarding this issue we see a recorded vote as a way of making each members position clear to the electorate. We do not expect a long-term solution without further study, but we respectfully request that Tynwald makes the Family Library a firmer commitment whilst it is arriving at that conclusion which has already been 4 years in the making. We would like this to take the form of a resolution of Tynwald in the final sitting of this administration in July, which confirms the statement that sustainable support for, at the very least, the Mobile Services is found within the context of whatever review is deemed necessary by the next administration. However, in line with the intent of the original resolution for funding made in 2018, that the Government continues to provide £125k co-support that paid at the start of the Family Library financial year on 1st August until new proposals for Libraries are complete and agreed.

It may appear that we are taking a small item in the scheme of things and making this into a disproportionately large issue. However, we feel that this runs to the heart of an erosion of caring and sharing that we feel the Isle of Man should represent. Our service covers Children and the Elderly, exactly the priorities that should be foremost in our community support - protect the vulnerable, encourage the education of the young. We also need to understand how external businesses, and the third sector, interact with Government as trusted partners. If we are not able to do this in a situation that is clearly mutually beneficial and benevolent then it would appear we are moving into a changing world whilst highly unprepared to deal with what that implies.