

Leighton Buzzard Library Theatre – information from Cllr S Owen 18 June 2022

I unexpectedly (thanks to Cllr Harvey) found myself taking part in an on-line meeting on 9 June with representatives of the LB Drama Group, the Leighton Buzzard Library Manager, and Cllr Ian Dalgarno, the CBC Portfolio-Holder for Library services. The meeting was to discuss the Drama Group's high anxiety regarding the recent CBC unilateral decision to cancel the Drama Group's current production due to "staffing difficulties".

Cllr Dalgarno led off with a repeat of information he has given to a CBC O&S meeting regarding the staffing problems. I noted the following:

1. This was the first opportunity LB Drama Group had had to air their concerns direct with Cllr D, nor had they been consulted by CBC officers prior to the cancellation decision.
2. The cancellation decision had apparently been made by CBC officers without the knowledge of Cllr D.
3. The cause of the whole problem was the non-existent CBC contingency and resilience planning for the Library Theatre staffing.
4. Cllr D was now intent on rectifying matters via a lifeboat arrangement with Stevenage Leisure who provide Theatre staffing elsewhere and have a bigger specialist staffing pool = resilience. However this was not a guaranteed antidote and I did not hear a Plan B from Cllr D.

All this was news to the Drama Group.

Using the Drama Group offer of volunteers was then discussed - initially reservations were expressed by CBC representatives. At this stage the Drama Group were not hearing any optimistic statements about being able to confidently advertise future productions from definite dates.

I eventually chipped in with three suggestions to Cllr D:

- a) that he turn the bad news he was currently presiding over into good news by planning a public statement to be issued jointly by him and the Drama Group announcing the certainty of the Drama Group's September production,
- b) that CBC plan for a training and induction-lite approach to achieving the Plan B use of Drama Group volunteers if the Stevenage Leisure Plan A failed,
- c) that he create an intensive discussion between DW and the Drama Group to make that joint statement possible.

Cllr D appeared to like these suggestions and asked the Library Manager to activate them (I believe those intensive discussions are taking place now).

After the meeting I met with CA and MW and suggested that they write to Cllr D to record those outcomes, and also suggested they write to Andrew Selous MP to request his active support voiced to Cllr D. Cllr Harvey was able to join this second meeting later on.

I think that is where matters stand on 17 June. Apologies to L-L CBC colleagues for finding myself attending a meeting they might have wished to have some input in themselves.