

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Education held at 2.00 pm on
Friday 12 February 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor D Kershaw (Cabinet Member)

Other Members: Councillor A Andrews (Substitute for Councillor Blundell)
Councillor J Birdi (for the matter in minute 22 below)

Employees (by Directorate):

People P Barnett, A Coles, M McGinty, K Nelson

Resources C Bradford, M Salmon

Apologies: Councillor J Blundell (Shadow Cabinet Member)
Councillor S Thomas (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Public Business

20. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared.

21. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th January 2016 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

22. Library Services in Coventry - Petitions

The Cabinet Member for Education considered a report of the Executive Director of People that presented petitions that had been received relating to the Library Services in Coventry and responded to the issues raised.

An e-petition titled 'Save the Mobile Library Service in Coventry', requesting that the Council reconsidered the proposal to close the service, was presented to the Council on 3 December 2015. The e-petition, bearing 16 signatures, organised by an Earlsdon Ward resident and sponsored by Councillor J Birdi, had been subsequently added to by a similarly worded hard copy petition which contained 193 signatures, giving a combined total of 209 signatures. Councillor Birdi along with the petition organiser, Mr G Williams, attended the meeting and spoke in support of the petition.

An e-petition titled 'Save Arena Park Library Community Hub', bearing 5 signatures, requested that the City Council looked again at the proposed "replacement" of Arena Park Library, fully identifies the impact of closing the facility and ensures that any proposed replacement was of a similar size location

and retains all of its current facilities and staff. The petition was received by the City Council on 27 January 2016. The petition organiser was unable to attend the meeting.

On 24 November 2016 Cabinet approved a 'Connecting Communities' report that contained a recommendation to hold a period of consultation from 7 December 2015 to 1 February 2016 on a set of ten proposals for changes to some services. These ten proposals would deliver the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) target of £1 million proposed in the original City Centre First Programme (now Connecting Communities) for 2016/17 and exceed this target for a full year effect by an additional £0.2 million. Proposals to achieve a further £3.8 million savings needed for 2017/18 would be developed following engagement and further consultation. The ten proposals which would deliver the saving required for 2016/17 included various proposals for changes to library services in Coventry.

In accordance with the City Council's procedure for dealing with petitions, those relating to library issues were heard by the Cabinet Member for Education.

The Cabinet Member indicated that he had recently spoken at a Council meeting on the review of library services as part of the Council's proposals to make savings. He had confirmed that phase 1 was to carry out a review and at that stage there were no proposals to close any library services. He further confirmed that the Council would be exploring all options for future service provision that would require the Authority to 'do things differently'.

Speaking in support of the mobile library service, Mr Williams requested that the Council did not scrap the mobile library, but instead explore the option of sharing this service with other Local Authorities, similar to the service in Warwickshire and Solihull. This would enable the Council to make savings but also keep the mobile library running. He indicated that cancelling the mobile library would mean that many people, especially in the rural parts of North-West Coventry, would be excluded from library services as the nearest ones would be in the city centre or other suburbs which were an unreasonable distance from their homes to travel to. He suggested that the mobile library travel routes and stops required review to enable further take-up of the service and that the Council explore the mobile library having a presence at city events such as those held in the Broadgate Square and the Godiva Festival at the Memorial Park. Mr Williams was concerned that on Wednesdays the only library proposed to be open would be the City Centre. Councillor Birdi supported the comments made by the petition organiser and requested that if the mobile library did close, the Authority implement a phasing out of the service and users were advised of the alternative provisions available to them.

The report indicated that officers had considered the suggested alternative option of sourcing a mobile library service from a neighbouring local authority. At present members of the local Library Service were able to borrow books from any of the City libraries, including the mobile library, and return them to a different one. If another library service were invited to provide a mobile service this would necessitate users joining the new providers library service and would mean they would only be able to return books to the mobile library or libraries in the neighbouring authority. The financial cost of any arrangement with a neighbouring provider would be disproportionate for the potential outcomes from the service

given the limited and declining use of the current mobile library. The decision to propose closure of the mobile library had been reluctantly, but in the knowledge that library books and other resources would be available in a large number of places across the different communities of the City. There were 2 mobile library stops which were further than 2 miles from one of the City's remaining libraries for residents in the rural North West of the City, those at Wall Hill Road and Oak Lane. For users of these stops there was a bus service three times per day into Coventry City Centre from Monday to Saturday and in addition, bus services were also in operation for Meriden, Nuneaton and Coleshill. Age UK would continue to deliver a Home Library Service which had capacity to serve more residents if required.

The recent review of library services had produced a balanced set of proposals which sought to maximise the availability of library resources in local communities and meet the needs of Coventry residents within available financial resources. The proposals envisaged a broadly similar number of fixed buildings in which library resources would be accessed by Coventry residents, currently 17 libraries. Coventry was a compact City and well connected by bus services into the City Centre.

The Cabinet member welcomed the public's participation in the consultation and thanked them for their responses and suggestions on future library service provision.

RESOLVED that after due consideration of the report, the matters raised at the meeting, and the petitions that had been submitted as part of the Connecting Communities Consultation, the Cabinet Member for Education recommends that the Cabinet take into account the issues raised through the petitions when considering the Connecting Communities report.

23. **Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues.

24. **Any Other Items of Public Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 3.00 pm)