

Cabinet Member for Education

12th February 2016

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Education – Councillor D Kershaw

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director for People

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Library Services in Coventry - Petitions

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

On 24 November 2015, Cabinet approved a ‘Connecting Communities’ report which contained a recommendation to hold a period of public consultation from 7 December 2015 to 1 February 2016 on a set of ten proposals for changes to some services. These proposals would achieve savings of £1.2m for 2016/17 as required by the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) original City Centre First Programme (now Connecting Communities Phase 1). The report included proposals for changes to the Library Service.

A number of e-petitions and written petitions have been presented to the Council asking for the Council to reconsider various proposals regarding the Library Service. These include two petitions about a proposal to close the mobile library service along with a petition which relates to the proposal to close Arena Park Library. In accordance with the City Council’s procedure for dealing with petitions, those relating to library issues are heard by the Cabinet Member for Education.

Final decisions on all of the proposals detailed in the “Connecting Communities” report will be made by the Cabinet at their meeting on 23 February 2016.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Education is requested to hear and consider the petitions relating to Library Services in Coventry, submitted as part of the Connecting Communities consultation, and recommend that the Cabinet take into account the issues raised when considering the Connecting Communities report on 23rd February 2016.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Library Services in Coventry - Petitions

1. Background

- 1.1 An e-petition "Save the Mobile Library Service in Coventry" was presented to the Council on 3 December 2015. The e-petition organised by An Earlsdon Ward resident and sponsored by Councillor J Singh Birdi, gathered 16 signatures and has been subsequently added to by similarly worded hard copy petition which contained 193 signatures, giving a total of 209. The petition asked:-

"Coventry Council are consulting on changes to the library services in the City, with a proposal to scrap ALL mobile libraries across Coventry.

This petition requests the Council NOT to scrap the mobile library, but instead to explore the option of sharing this service with other Local Authorities (Similar to the service in Warwickshire and Solihull). This should enable the Council to make savings but also keep the mobile library running.

Cancelling the mobile library will mean that many people, especially in the rural parts of North-West Coventry, will be excluded from library services as the nearest ones will be in the city centre or other suburbs. On Wednesdays the only library proposed to be open will be the City Centre."

- 1.2 An e-petition was received by the City Council on 27 January entitled "Save Arena Park Library Community Hub" gathered 5 signatures. The wording is as follows:

"Arena Park Library is a more than just a library, it is a Community Hub valued by so many people.

The library, the third busiest in the city, also provides a home for many community groups such as Friendship Group, Book Club Group, Poetry Group, Knit and Natter Group, Rhyme Time Groups, Stay and Play Groups and is a Homework Help Hub, to name but a few. There are community groups meeting within the library most mornings and afternoons. It also provides free Community IT access for a great many people. The library is a part of the Arena Park Shopping Complex. This means that it is extremely well supported by the public transport network, has extensive adjacent parking and wonderful disabled access. The City Council is planning to close all of this and replace it with a small self-service facility. This alternative will have no staff and will not support the community in anyway. It is purely a cost cutting exercise. They have already drastically reduced the number of staff at the library.

I am a member of the Knit and Natter Group at Arena Park Library. We are a group of ladies from a variety of cultures and backgrounds who come together each week to support and encourage each other. Several members of the Group have mental health issues, two members of the Group have Special Educational Needs, some of the ladies use it as a way to improve their English language skills. These are people and issues that Coventry City Council claims to support. Yet they are willing to destroy all this with, I believe, no accurate picture of the effects that their actions will have on the lives of the people who are members of these Groups.

I want the Kirsten Nelson, Director of Education, Adult Education and Libraries to look again at the proposed "replacement" of Arena Park Library and to fully identify the impact of closing the city's THIRD BUSIEST library in the city. If it must be moved to save money (the company that owns the building is asking for the council to sign a five year lease

agreement costing £160,000 per year), then move it to a similar sized location and retain all of its current facilities and staff.

- 1.3 The City Council currently operate a Library Service comprising Central Library plus 16 community libraries, a mobile service and an at home service. The City Council has recently set out a set of proposals called 'Connecting Communities' which included a number of proposals to reduce expenditure in the Library and Information Service as well as promoting new ways of working with communities.
- 1.4 Coventry's mobile library service currently operates a weekly service serving approximately 60 different stops across the City. The mobile library has a large collection of books, including fiction and non-fiction as well as large print books. A variety of talking books is also available. A small selection books in community languages is carried by the mobile library. There is also a variety of books for children and teenagers. Staff members are also available to provide information and signposting for library users.
- 1.5 The petitions relates to concerns from local residents regarding the implications of removing the mobile library service particularly for those residents in the more 'rural' North West of the City. The petitioners have suggested the alternative of commissioning a mobile library service from a neighbouring authority.
- 1.6 The recent review of library services has produced a balanced set of proposals which seeks to maximise the availability of library resources in local communities and meet the needs of Coventry residents within available financial resources. The decision to propose closure of the mobile library has been reluctantly but in the knowledge that library books and other resources will be available in a large number of places across the different communities of the City.
- 1.7 Given the financial constraints the City Council is working under difficult decisions have to be made regarding the way resources are allocated. The proposals recently out for consultation still envisage a broadly similar number of fixed buildings in which library resources will be accessed by Coventry residents (currently 17 libraries). Coventry is a compact City (38 square miles) and well connected by bus services into the City Centre.
- 1.8 In addition to this usage of the mobile library declined last year from 14,754 in 2013/14 to 13,503 visits during 2014/15 (a fall of 8.5%).
- 1.9 For members of the public who are housebound, the library service work in partnership with Age UK to deliver a Home Library Service. This service provides a delivery of bespoke library books by volunteers to user's homes on a monthly basis. The service currently has capacity to serve more residents and should Members approve the proposal to close the mobile library every effort will be made to ensure that users of the mobile library with mobility issues will be introduced to the Home Library Service. For other users every effort will be made to encourage them to utilise their nearest local library.
- 1.10 Officers have considered the various points made by petitioners regarding the rural North West of the City and have identified 2 mobile library stops which are further than 2 miles from one of the City's remaining libraries (Wall Hill Road and Oak Lane). For users of these stops officers have found that there is a bus service which runs three times per day into Coventry City Centre from Monday to Saturday. In addition bus services also exist for Meriden, Nuneaton and Coleshill.

- 1.11 One of the stops is close to a mobile home park for semi-retired residents aged over 55. Officers will investigate the possibility of locating a deposit collection of books which residents can access in any community facilities on the site.
- 1.12 With regards to Arena Park Library, the petitioners are correct to suggest that the library is popular and well used. In 2014/15 there were 159,208 visits to this library (4th highest) and 79,715 books or other items issues (3rd highest). In February 2015 an analysis of users was completed for Arena Park Library and it was found that of 4461 registered borrowers only 3537 or 79% of users were Coventry residents. Given the scale of financial challenges facing the City Council and the proximity of other libraries in the North of the City (particularly Bell Green and Foleshill) and the size of the annual rent for the premises (in excess of £155k) officers have reluctantly proposed that this library be closed.
- 1.13 The Council are currently in discussions with Holbrooks Community Care Association based in The Park, Holbrook Lane, Coventry (CV6 4DE) about the potential for an alternative library service being provided from that location. These discussions are on-going but the ambition is that a partnership approach can be developed that will ensure that residents in the Holbrooks retain access to library resources whilst at the same time City Council costs are significantly reduced.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Officers have considered the suggested alternative option of sourcing a mobile library service from a neighbouring local authority.
- 2.2 At present members of the local Library Service are able to borrow books from any of the various City libraries (including the mobile) and return them to a different one. If we invited another library service to provide a mobile service this would necessitate users joining the new providers library service and would then mean that they would only be able to return books to the mobile (or libraries in the neighbouring authority).
- 2.3 The financial cost of any arrangement with a neighbouring provider (estimated to be a significant 5 figure sum) would be disproportionate for the potential outcomes from the service given the limited and declining use of the current mobile library.
- 2.4 The Cabinet Member is reminded that a report is scheduled to be presented to the 23 February Cabinet meeting at which the results of the recent consultation exercise will be reported. At that meeting Cabinet will be asked to consider a decision on the various proposals and the various points made by the petitioners should be taken into account in this decision making process.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 A full public consultation has been undertaken from 7th December to 1st February 2016, the results of which are currently being carefully considered as this report is written. They will be considered in full at the Cabinet meeting referred to above.

4. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

- 4.1 Financial implications
There are no financial implications as a result of this report.
- 4.2 Legal implications
There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

5. Timetable for implementing this decision

Not applicable.

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

None

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None

6.4 Equalities / EIA

None

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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