

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

6th March 2017

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills – Councillor K Maton

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director for People

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Connecting Communities Phase 2 Proposals – Petitions (Libraries)

Is this a key decision?

No – Although the proposals affect all wards of the City, the Cabinet Member will hear the petitions and provide a verbal update of any recommendations in relation to the petitions at the Cabinet meeting on 7th March 2017. Final decisions on all proposals detailed in the “Connecting Communities Phase 2” report will be made by the Cabinet at that meeting.

Executive Summary:

Connecting Communities is an ambitious approach to redesigning services through collaboration with local communities. This is in the context of an estimated 55% grant reduction to Coventry City Council from Central Government between 2010/11 and 2020.

A public consultation took place from 12th September 2016 to 12th December 2016 on a set of proposals across Children’s Centres, nurseries, youth service and libraries with an associated Phase 2 savings target of £3.8m. This included proposals to develop sustainable, modern and comprehensive libraries as community hubs in three broad categories of core libraries, partnership libraries and community-led libraries.

This report identifies the petitions received and makes recommendations about their consideration. During the consultation, 1 e-petition and 5 written petitions were received in relation to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills’ portfolio.

In accordance with the City Council’s procedure for dealing with petitions, the petitions relating to the ‘Libraries’ proposal are submitted for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills at the meeting on 6th March 2017. Furthermore, 1 of the written petitions relates to Youth Services, Children’s Centres and Public Libraries. This petition will be considered by both the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on 6th March 2017 and also by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on 28th February 2017.

Final decisions on all of the proposals detailed in the “Connecting Communities Phase 2” report will be made by the Cabinet at their meeting on 7th March 2017.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills is requested to hear and consider the petitions submitted as part of the Connecting Communities consultation on the 'Libraries' proposal and provide a verbal update of any recommendations in relation to those petitions at the Cabinet meeting on 7th March 2017, for Cabinet to take into account when they consider the Connecting Communities report.

List of Appendices included:

None

Background papers

None

Other useful documents

Connecting Communities Phase 2 – Cabinet Report, 30th August 2016

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:

Connecting Communities Phase 2 Proposals – Petitions (Libraries)

1. Background

1.1 Connecting Communities is an ambitious approach to redesigning services through collaboration with local communities in the context of an estimated 55% grant reduction to Coventry City Council from Central Government between 2010/11 and 2020.

1.2 A public consultation took place from 12th September 2016 to 12th December 2016 on a set of proposals across Children’s Centres, nurseries, youth service and libraries with an associated Phase 2 savings target of £3.8m. This included proposals to develop sustainable, modern and comprehensive libraries as community hubs in three broad categories of core libraries, partnership libraries and community-led libraries.

1.3 The Council received a valid e-petition to ‘Save Coventry Libraries’ on 21st July 2016. This has 26 signatures as at 25th January 2017. The petition states:

“Coventry City Council has just revealed proposals that Caludon, Cheylesmore, Coundon, Finham and Earlsdon will shut if community groups do not take them on. Aldermoor, Canley, Hillfields, Jubilee Crescent and Allesley Park are also under threat as the Council want to make cuts of £1 million.

But this is just a proposal! Let’s make our voice heard by the Council and stop these changes.

Libraries are the centre of our local communities and they support vulnerable people. Protect our children’s education.”

1.4 A written petition ‘Save our Libraries’ was submitted to the Council on 6th September 2016. This has 2,666 signatures as at 25th January 2017. The petition states:

“We, the undersigned, protest at the cuts planned by Coventry City Council threatening libraries across the city. Libraries are an essential safe space, open new doors and horizons to enquiring minds, and are central to healthy, local communities. Libraries under threat in Coventry have been used for many years by families and especially by children, we need to keep proper libraries staffed by professionals. The Council says it has no choice but to get rid of dozens of library staff in order to implement a cut of £1m imposed by the Tories. But the Labour Council has doubled its reserves to £84m in the last 5 years. Use some of that to offset these cuts and work with the people of Coventry to mount a campaign to force the Tory Government to properly fund essential local services.”

1.5 A written petition ‘Save Coundon Library’ was submitted to the Council on 12th December 2016. This has 555 signatures as at 25th January 2017. The petition states:

“We, the undersigned protest at the cuts planned by Coventry City Council including closing virtually every library, children and family centre, adult education and community centre, making cuts in transport for the disabled and sacking all lollipop men and women, reducing street cleaning and road maintenance, and axing another 1000 jobs that will then never be available to the young people of our city.

We particularly object to the plan to close Coundon Library on Moseley Avenue which has been used for many years by families and especially children in our area. Libraries are an essential safe space, open new doors and horizons to enquiring minds and are central to healthy local communities.”

- 1.6 A written petition 'Stop Caludon Library from closing' was submitted to the Council on 2nd August 2016. This has 43 signatures as at 25th January 2017. The petition states:

"Caludon Library is important because people can take out books, go on computers, get help with homework and enter reading challenges.

Lots of people I know agree with me and have signed this petition to show that they don't want Caludon to close either."

- 1.7 A written petition 'Object to closure of Finham Library' was submitted to the Council on 24th January 2017. This has 155 signatures as at 25th January 2017. The petition states:

"We the undersigned object to the Coventry City Council proposals which could result in the closure of Finham Library. This is the only Council facility in Finham and its closure would mean the only Library available would be in the City Centre."

- 1.8 A written petition 'Stop the Cuts' was submitted to the Council on 12th December 2016. This has 327 signatures as at 25th January 2017. The petition states:

"We the undersigned, protest at the £3.8m cuts planned by Coventry City Council affecting public libraries, youth work and nursery provision, children's and youth centres. We believe those essential services should be provided by properly paid staff, not replaced by volunteers working for free.

We object to the Council's current 'consultation process', supposedly listening to people's views on whether these cuts should go ahead, when at the very same time the Council has set up a fund of over £1/2m to give grants to those who want to take over services under threat.

We believe the Council should use some of the £84m it has in reserves to stop these cuts, and buy time for a serious campaign in the city involving the Council, trade unions, and all those affected by these cuts to demand proper national funding from the Government of essential local services."

This petition will also be considered by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on 28th February 2017.

- 1.9 The City Council has a duty to provide "a comprehensive and efficient" library service to the people of Coventry. It is for the Council to determine what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient service, whilst having regard to the relevant legislation and guidance and the needs of the city.

- 1.10 There are currently 17 libraries located across the city. Total service usage figures for 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 are as follows: visitors: 1.59m; issues: 0.96m; computer sessions: 291k; registered users: 80k.

- 1.11 Conversations with community groups and organisations have enabled an improved understanding about the potential for community groups to take a lead in developing new models of community-led libraries in some areas and could potentially result in Coventry having:

- 5 core libraries
- 5 libraries being delivered in partnership with community organisations (in addition to 2 libraries from Phase 1 – Holbrooks (in partnership with Holbrooks Community Care Association) and Willenhall (in partnership with Willenhall Education, Employment and Training Centre – WEETC) which are already operating successfully
- 5 community-led libraries

- 1.12 A number of the petitions feature concerns regarding the potential closure of libraries in the city. Following the consultation, and in light of discussions with community groups, the City Council are not proposing to close any libraries at this stage. The City Council values the contribution that libraries make to local communities and is working to ensure that the impact on service users will be minimised through the development of community-led libraries and by working in partnership.
- 1.13 The City Council will explore the potential for volunteers to work in various library settings, both community-led and other and will maximise any opportunities for self-service and improved use of technology. Subject to the agreement of Cabinet on 7th March 2017, the Council will continue to develop sustainable, modern and comprehensive libraries as community hubs in the 3 broad categories proposed.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 A report is scheduled to be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 7th March 2017 at which the results of the recent consultation exercise on the proposals contained in the Connecting Communities report will be detailed. Cabinet will be asked to make a decision on the various revised proposals and the points made by the petitioners and the wider consultation will be taken into account at part of this decision-making process.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 A full public consultation has been undertaken from 12th September 2016 to 12th December 2016, the results of which are being carefully considered. They will be considered in full at the Cabinet meeting referred to above.

4. Comments from the Director of Finance and Corporate Services

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 for this report

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 for this report

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Not applicable for this report

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Not applicable for this report

6.4 Equalities / EIA

Not applicable for this report

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

Not applicable for this report

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Not applicable for this report

Report author:

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

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