

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Education and Skills held at
12.00 pm on Monday, 6 March 2017

Present:

Members: Councillor K Maton (Cabinet Member)
Councillor J Blundell (Substitute Shadow Cabinet Member for Councillor P Male)

Others Members Present: Councillor Abbott
Councillor Sawdon

Employees (by Directorate)

People: P Barnett, K Nelson, M McGinty

Place: S Bennett

Apologies: Councillor P Male

Public Business

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interest.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January, 2017 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

13. Connecting Communities Phase 2 Proposals - Petitions (Libraries)

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of People that responded to six petitions received following a public consultation exercise that took place between 12th September 2016 to 12th December, 2016 on a set of proposals relating to libraries associated with the implementation of Phase 2 of Connecting Communities, which is an ambitious approach to redesign services through collaboration. This is in the context of an estimated 55% grant reduction to the City Council from Central Government between 2010/2020.

The public consultation was on a set of proposals across Children's Centres, nurseries, youth service and libraries with an associated Phase 2 savings target of £3.8m. The proposals include the development of sustainable, modern and comprehensive libraries as community hubs in three broad categories of core libraries, partnership libraries and community-led libraries.

Final decisions on all of the proposals contained in the “Connecting Communities Phase 2” report would be made by the Cabinet at their meeting to be held on 7th March, 2017.

The Cabinet Member considered the following petitions:-

- 1) An e-petition headed to ‘Save Coventry Libraries’, bearing 26 signatures that stated:

“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.”

The petition organiser was unable to attend the meeting.

- 2) A written petition headed ‘Save our Libraries’ bearing 2,666 signatures that stated:

“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.”

The petition organiser, Sarah Smith, attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Sarah outlined concerns in relation to the loss of libraries, which she indicated provided safe environments for children. She raised concerns about the long term viability of community led libraries and asked why the Council couldn’t use reserves to save libraries.

- 3) A written petition headed ‘Save Coundon Library’ bearing 555 signatures that stated:

“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.”

The petition organiser, Dave Anderson, attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Dave referred to the many generations of families who have used the library in Coundon, which is the centre of the community, and referred to the high level of support in the area to keep the library open.

- 4) A written petition headed ‘Stop Caludon Library from closing’ bearing 43 signatures that stated:-

“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.”

The petition sponsor, Councillor Abbott, presented the petition on behalf of the petitioners and indicated that it had been drawn up by pupils from Caludon Castle School who felt very strongly about maintaining the library.

- 5) A written petition headed ‘Object to closure of Finham Library’ bearing 155 signatures that stated:

“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.”

The petition sponsor, Councillor Sawdon, together with the petition organiser, Barry Stelfox attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Barry referred to the fact that Finham library is the only non- school Council community buildings in the Ward and was one of the most visited libraries in the City. He also raised concerns about how closing libraries would impact on the City’s bid to become City of Culture.

Councillor Sawdon also referred to the fact the building was the last Council building in the Ward and drew comparisons with less well attended libraries, including Hillfields, which was also much nearer the City Centre library (which would become the nearest library for residents in Wainbody Ward if Finham library were to close). Councillor Sawdon also referred to the proposed housing development on Kings Hill, which have an impact on services.

6) A written petition headed 'Stop the Cuts' bearing 327 signatures that stated:

"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 was also considered by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on 28th February 2017.

The petition organiser, Dave Nellist, attended the meeting and spoke on behalf of the petitioners. Dave referred to the significant loss in central government funding and suggested that the Council's reserves could be used to support a further year of operation of services, allowing time for the Council to lobby the Government for more funding for essential services.

The Cabinet Member thanked the petition sponsors and organisers for their attendance.

The report indicated that 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.

There were 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.

Conversations with community groups and organisations had 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

A number of the petitions featured concerns regarding the potential closure of libraries in the city. Following the consultation, and in light of discussions with community groups, the City Council were not proposing to close any libraries at this stage. The City Council values the contribution that libraries make to local communities and was working to ensure that the impact on service users would be minimised through the development of community-led libraries and by working in partnership.

The City Council would explore the potential for volunteers to work in various library settings, both community-led and other and would maximise any opportunities for self-service and improved use of technology. Subject to the agreement of Cabinet on 7th March 2017, the Council would continue to develop sustainable, modern and comprehensive libraries as community hubs in the 3 broad categories proposed.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, having heard and considered the petitions submitted as part of the Connecting Communities consultation on the libraries proposals:-

- 1) Notes that Finham Library is the only community facility in Wainbody Ward and recognises the importance of maintaining community buildings in all areas of the City.**
- 2) Recommends that the Cabinet takes into account the issues raised through the petitions submitted as part of the Connecting Communities consultation on Library proposals when considering the Connecting Communities report at their meeting on 7 March, 2017.**
- 3) Recognising the high level of community support and interest in maintaining libraries, recommends that the Cabinet considers using that level of support to campaign for increased Government funding.**

14. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

15. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 1.30pm)